# Hamilton by-election signals critical test as SNP faces decline and Labour surge



The upcoming by-election in Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse is poised to be a critical juncture for the Scottish National Party (SNP), signalling a potential decline that has been brewing over the past decade. Former SNP deputy leader Jim Sillars has emphasised the importance of this vote, suggesting it could serve as compelling evidence of disillusionment among traditional working-class voters with the party. He argues that the SNP's myriad failures have created a political void that new parties, notably Nigel Farage's Reform UK, are now exploiting.

This perspective comes in tandem with the observation from leading pollster Mark Diffley, who believes that an increase in support for Reform may unexpectedly assist the SNP in not just the by-election but also in the upcoming Scottish Parliament elections. Notably, Diffley pointed out that while the SNP’s support has notably dipped—from 48% in 2021 to around 36%—the fragmentation of the Unionist vote might allow them to retain a significant number of constituencies. As a result, traditional party dynamics may be shifting in Ukraine due to the emergence of new political entities like Reform UK, which has reported a notable increase in voter support across various local elections in Scotland.

Labour, buoyed by these developments, is keenly targeting pro-Union voters in hopes of converting disenfranchised SNP supporters. Recent poll results underscore Labour's strategy, reflecting a stark shift in public sentiment; in the recent Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, Labour’s Michael Shanks won with 58.6% of the vote to the SNP's Katy Loudon's 27.6%. This significant 24.1% swing in favour of Labour marks the party's first by-election victory in Scotland in twelve years, raising speculations about a momentum shift in Scottish politics.

Labour deputy leader Jackie Baillie has been explicit in framing the situation as a choice between Labour and the SNP, asserting that their platform offers a viable alternative to the apparent disillusionment many voters feel towards the SNP's governance. She cited prominent concerns, including NHS waiting times and educational shortcomings, as indicative of SNP failures. The sentiment echoes wider criticisms regarding the party's recent performance and overall direction under the leadership of Humza Yousaf, particularly following some notable setbacks, such as MP Lisa Cameron's defection to the Conservative Party.

Despite these struggles, SNP officials remain resolute. Deputy First Minister John Swinney has positioned the upcoming vote as a direct contest against Farage's Reform, urging voters to reject what he described as “ugly, divisive politics.” Yet, the implications of recent events reveal deeper tensions within the party, forcing many to rethink its future amidst emerging competition.

As the political landscape evolves, the Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse by-election stands not just as a litmus test for the SNP, but potentially as a defining moment for Scottish Labour and Reform UK. With the stakes so high and voter sentiments shifting, the outcome could reshape the future of Scottish politics in unforeseen ways.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14766261/By-election-seminal-88-win-SNPs-decline-says-partys-former-deputy-leader.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.thenational.scot/news/24711997.five-by-elections-show-reform-rise-scotland/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.apnews.com/article/e929a8a80a3cfbd1eedf2e1e9fc67739), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Rutherglen_and_Hamilton_West_by-election), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/10/13/how-snp-self-destructed-salmond-sturgeon-yousaf-scotland/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1935683/humiliation-snp-by-election-reform-uk-scottish-politics), [[7]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/10/06/rutherglen-hamilton-west-by-election-results-labour-snp/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14766261/By-election-seminal-88-win-SNPs-decline-says-partys-former-deputy-leader.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.apnews.com/article/e929a8a80a3cfbd1eedf2e1e9fc67739> - In October 2023, the UK's opposition Labour Party secured a significant victory in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, a seat previously held by the Scottish National Party (SNP). Labour candidate Michael Shanks received 17,845 votes, more than doubling the 8,399 votes garnered by SNP's Katy Loudon. This outcome is viewed as a boost for Labour ahead of the national elections scheduled for the following year. The by-election was necessitated by the recall of former MP Margaret Ferrier, who was ousted for breaching COVID-19 restrictions in 2020. The SNP's defeat underscores a decline in its popularity and raises questions about its future electoral prospects. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/e929a8a80a3cfbd1eedf2e1e9fc67739?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Rutherglen_and_Hamilton_West_by-election> - The 2023 Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, held on 5 October 2023, was triggered by the recall of incumbent MP Margaret Ferrier. Ferrier, initially elected as an SNP member, was suspended from the House of Commons for 30 days in June 2023 for breaching COVID-19 regulations in 2020. The by-election saw Labour's Michael Shanks win with 58.6% of the vote, a 24.1% swing from the SNP, which secured 27.6%. This marked Labour's first parliamentary by-election win in Scotland in 12 years and the first time it had taken a seat off the SNP in a Westminster by-election. ([en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Rutherglen_and_Hamilton_West_by-election?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/24711997.five-by-elections-show-reform-rise-scotland/> - An analysis of five local by-elections in Scotland revealed a notable rise in support for Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage. In these elections, Reform UK's vote share ranged from 8% in Inverclyde to 26% in Fraserburgh and District. This surge indicates that Reform UK is drawing support from both Conservative and Labour voters, potentially influencing the balance of power in future Scottish Parliament elections. The increasing popularity of Reform UK suggests a shift in the Scottish political landscape, with implications for traditional party dynamics. ([thenational.scot](https://www.thenational.scot/news/24711997.five-by-elections-show-reform-rise-scotland/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/10/13/how-snp-self-destructed-salmond-sturgeon-yousaf-scotland/> - The SNP is facing a crisis following significant by-election defeats and the defection of an MP to the Conservatives. The Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election resulted in a 20% swing from the SNP to Labour, marking a substantial loss for the party. Additionally, East Kilbride SNP MP Lisa Cameron's defection to the Conservatives has further undermined the SNP's position. These events highlight challenges within the party and raise questions about its future direction under leader Humza Yousaf. ([telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/10/13/how-snp-self-destructed-salmond-sturgeon-yousaf-scotland/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1935683/humiliation-snp-by-election-reform-uk-scottish-politics> - The SNP faced a setback in the Arran by-election, where it failed to field a candidate, allowing Reform UK and the Scottish Greens to contest the seat. This absence highlights the SNP's challenges in maintaining its political presence in certain areas. The by-election was prompted by the resignation of Conservative councillor Timothy Billings, and the SNP's decision not to participate may impact its standing in the region. ([express.co.uk](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1935683/humiliation-snp-by-election-reform-uk-scottish-politics?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/10/06/rutherglen-hamilton-west-by-election-results-labour-snp/> - Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer described the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election victory as a 'big step in the right direction' towards becoming prime minister. The 20.4-point swing from the SNP to Labour in this seat is seen as a significant indicator of Labour's potential resurgence in Scotland. The by-election was triggered by the recall of former MP Margaret Ferrier, who was ousted for breaching COVID-19 restrictions. ([telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/10/06/rutherglen-hamilton-west-by-election-results-labour-snp/?utm_source=openai))