# Nigel Farage’s Reform UK challenges SNP and Labour in high-stakes Scotland by-election



Voters in Scotland are preparing to head to the polls on June 5, following the recent death of SNP MSP Christina McKelvie, marking a crucial by-election that has sparked intense rivalry among parties. This contest is perceived as a closely contested race primarily between the SNP and Reform UK, while Labour lags behind in third place. Nigel Farage, leader of Reform UK, has expressed buoyant confidence in his party's chances, declaring that they are poised to succeed in Holyrood. His assertions have, however, been met with scepticism from his opponents, who are keen to dissuade voters from supporting Reform UK.

Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar has not shied away from confrontational rhetoric, recently characterising Farage's campaign efforts as little more than a "circus." Speaking to The Herald, Sarwar remarked, “The clown is coming to the circus,” implying that while Farage may attract attention, the issues confronting local communities require substantial, actionable change rather than populist spectacle. Sarwar's sentiments highlight a growing frustration within Labour about the potential impact of Reform UK's messaging, which some see as pandering to discontent without offering genuine solutions.

The back-and-forth between Sarwar and Farage is emblematic of a deeper struggle within Scottish politics, with Labour's by-election candidate, Davy Russell, asserting that many voters are more focused on genuine representation than on the provocative tactics employed by Reform. He maintained that while disillusionment is palpable, most constituents are disinclined toward the quick fixes articulated by Farage and his party, rejecting narratives laden with divisive undertones.

Adding to the charged atmosphere, Reform's candidate Ross Lambie has faced backlash over a video featuring Sarwar, which critics have denounced as racially provocative. The video, which manipulated Sarwar's words to suggest an undue prioritisation of the Pakistani community, prompted denunciations from both Labour and the SNP as racially insensitive. Such actions raise questions about the integrity of campaigning tactics in an already divisive political landscape.

Concerns regarding economic policy have also come to the fore, particularly in relation to Farage’s stance on energy jobs in Scotland. Stephen Flynn, SNP's leader in Westminster, argued that Farage's disregard for climate-oriented initiatives, such as the North East Acorn project, poses severe risks to the employment landscape in the North East. Flynn labelled Farage's claims of cost-savings from abandoning environmentally sustainable strategies as speculative and harmful, warning that such policies could jeopardise jobs in both the present and future energy sectors. Flynn stressed the necessity of developing skills and investments that would secure Scotland's economy for years to come while maintaining critical energy jobs.

In a bid to counter Sarwar's claims and to reposition Reform UK, a spokesperson from the party suggested that the SNP’s policies have obstructed economic growth in Scotland, illustrating their belief that proper approaches to oil and gas exploration could contribute positively to job creation. The spokesperson's comments reflect a contentious debate over energy policies, where both parties vie for the trust of an electorate keen on securing employment while grappling with pressing environmental commitments.

As the by-election looms closer, the dynamics of this electoral battle reveal a backdrop of contrasting visions for Scotland’s future. The increasing visibility of Reform UK, although still limited compared to its success in England—with only about 7% of votes in Scotland during previous elections—indicates a burgeoning, albeit contentious, presence in Scottish politics. The party's performance and Farage's tactics going forward will likely influence not just the by-election outcome but set the tone for the 2026 Holyrood elections as well.

With so much at stake, the outcome of the by-election could serve as a litmus test for wider political sentiments in Scotland, revealing whether discontent with the current government is leading voters toward Reform UK or if traditional parties will maintain their stronghold in Scottish politics.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25206126.nigel-farage-campaign-scotland-by-election-visit/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/06/30/politics-election-latest-news-sunak-farage-bbc/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25206126.nigel-farage-campaign-scotland-by-election-visit/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/06/15/general-election-updates-latest-live/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25206126.nigel-farage-campaign-scotland-by-election-visit/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.thenational.scot/news/24433794.nigel-farages-reform-perform-scotland/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/scotland-nigel-farage-first-minister-glasgow-snp-b1226369.html), [[6]](https://www.inverness-courier.co.uk/news/national/scotland-will-be-seeing-me-says-farage-117083/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25206126.nigel-farage-campaign-scotland-by-election-visit/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.inverness-courier.co.uk/news/national/scotland-will-be-seeing-me-says-farage-117083/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25206126.nigel-farage-campaign-scotland-by-election-visit/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.thenational.scot/news/24433794.nigel-farages-reform-perform-scotland/), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/06/15/general-election-updates-latest-live/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25206126.nigel-farage-campaign-scotland-by-election-visit/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/06/30/politics-election-latest-news-sunak-farage-bbc/> - In June 2024, a Reform UK candidate defected to the Conservative Party amid a racism row. The article discusses the political implications of this defection and the broader context of the by-election results, highlighting the challenges faced by the Labour Party and the rise of Reform UK in certain constituencies. It also touches upon the reactions from various political figures and the potential impact on future elections.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/scotland-nigel-farage-first-minister-glasgow-snp-b1226369.html> - Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar stated that Scots face a clear choice in the 2026 Holyrood election: him or John Swinney. He accused First Minister John Swinney of attempting to 'defraud' the people of Scotland and using Nigel Farage as a distraction from his government's shortcomings. Sarwar emphasised his commitment to delivering change and improving public services, contrasting his vision with the SNP's record.
4. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/24433794.nigel-farages-reform-perform-scotland/> - Nigel Farage's Reform UK party secured four seats in England during the general election, but its impact in Scotland was less significant. The party won approximately 7% of the vote in Scotland, with its highest percentage in Dumfries and Galloway at 9.4%. The article analyses the party's performance across various constituencies and discusses the challenges Reform UK faces in gaining traction in Scotland compared to England.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/06/15/general-election-updates-latest-live/> - Anas Sarwar dismissed SNP claims that a Labour government would impose austerity as 'scaremongering'. He assured reporters that there would be no austerity under a Labour government and criticised both the SNP and Conservatives for failing to deliver on their promises. Sarwar highlighted Labour's focus on economic growth and improving public services, contrasting it with the SNP's record.
6. <https://www.inverness-courier.co.uk/news/national/scotland-will-be-seeing-me-says-farage-117083/> - Nigel Farage announced his intention to campaign in Scotland ahead of the 2026 Holyrood election. He expressed confidence in Reform UK's growing support in Scotland, citing a recent poll placing the party at 9% in the constituency vote, just behind the Scottish Conservatives. Farage emphasised the importance of oil and gas policies in building support and criticised the Scottish Conservatives for lacking clear direction.
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/anas-sarwar-leaves-door-open-to-working-with-nigel-farages-reform-on-case-by-case-basis-4974591> - Anas Sarwar, leader of the Scottish Labour Party, indicated openness to working with Nigel Farage's Reform UK on a case-by-case basis if the party wins MSPs in the next Holyrood election. While ruling out formal coalitions or agreements, Sarwar stated he would not dismiss good ideas from any opposition MSP, regardless of party affiliation, highlighting a pragmatic approach to governance.