# Nigel Farage’s Reform Party gains traction in Scotland amid shifting voter attitudes



On May 16, 2013, Nigel Farage, then leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), aimed to hold a press conference at the Canon’s Gait pub on Edinburgh's Royal Mile to launch his party's campaign in the Holyrood constituency of Aberdeen Donside. However, the event quickly devolved into chaos as a group of protestors vocally opposed his presence, forcing the pub manager to end the press conference prematurely. As he attempted to leave, he encountered further difficulties with two taxi drivers reluctant to take him, prompting police to step in and escort him back inside the pub. After a brief stay where he could enjoy a pint, Farage was ultimately evacuated in a police riot van, an incident that highlighted the tensions surrounding his political persona at the time.

Fast forward twelve years, and recent local election results suggest that Farage's political influence is not only enduring but also evolving. Currently, he leads the Reform Party, which has recorded notable success in England, gaining a fifth MP and several regional mayoralties. In Scotland, a recent poll by Survation shows his party placed third in voting intentions, trailing behind the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Labour, indicating a potential shift in the political landscape.

Farage’s strategies, often characterised by populist rhetoric, have drawn comparisons to the tactics employed by former SNP leader Alex Salmond. Critics argue that both leaders effectively use fears and dissatisfaction within the electorate as a means to justify their political positions. John Swinney, the current First Minister of Scotland, has recently convened a meeting to address and denounce the right-wing populism exemplified by Farage’s methods, although observers have noted that such meetings have often resulted in little more than statements promoting kindness and inclusivity.

Despite these denunciations, analysts suggest that Farage’s approach reflects a changing narrative in Scottish politics. Not only has the SNP established itself as a dominant force, but the political dissatisfaction that drove English voters towards UKIP could similarly resonate with Scottish electors, particularly among those who feel disconnected from traditional party lines. The idea that Farage could garner substantial support in Scotland is not entirely unfounded, particularly in light of shifting voter attitudes, especially among younger demographics.

Recent research by the John Smith Centre at Glasgow University has revealed that a significant portion of younger voters—almost two-thirds of those aged 16 to 29—are open to supporting independent candidates, demonstrating a generational trend away from established political affiliations. Eddie Barnes, the director of the Centre, remarked on this emerging landscape, noting that while Labour may still capture a notable share of young voters, alternative parties like the Green Party and Reform are gaining traction.

The SNP's approach to addressing issues like immigration could also alienate potential voters who find resonance in some of Farage’s views. A veteran SNP strategist emphasised the need for the party to tread carefully, advocating for a balanced view that does not dismiss the concerns of voters who may share some common ground with Farage’s rhetoric.

As the 2026 Holyrood elections approach, the SNP and Labour face new challenges in navigating the political ramifications of Farage's rising visibility, particularly as he remains a significant figure in the broader UK political arena. While Farage will not be standing for election himself, the sentiments he evokes and the issues raised by his party will likely loom large over forthcoming debates and strategies.

The evolving dynamics of Scottish politics suggest that figures like Farage, once dismissed as inconsequential, may indeed hold greater sway than many are prepared to acknowledge, challenging both traditional allegiances as well as the perceptions of what is deemed acceptable in the current political discourse.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/may/16/nigel-farage-edinburgh-protesters-van> - This article details the May 16, 2013, incident where Nigel Farage, then leader of UKIP, was forced to flee a press conference at the Canon’s Gait pub in Edinburgh due to protests, leading to his evacuation in a police riot van.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/02a06002-d769-478f-8ac9-6c2fb0dd4640> - This source discusses the significant erosion of the traditional two-party dominance in UK politics, highlighting Reform UK's gains, including winning its first mayoral seat and controlling two councils, signaling public discontent with both Labour and Conservative parties.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/dd6dff7d-c2c4-49ec-a11e-eb9e2130ccbb> - This article examines the rise of right-wing populism in Britain, marked by the electoral success of Nigel Farage's Reform UK in the 2025 local elections, challenging both Labour and Conservative strongholds.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/81e8be1d-67f8-40d8-a586-01eb582fcf81> - This piece analyzes the implications of Reform UK's rise, emphasizing the need for Labour to address immigration seriously to retain support, as public frustration over illegal migration and perceived judicial leniency grows.
* <https://www.apnews.com/article/7a5b9304bf368a8edd56da74eff8ae1e> - This article discusses Nigel Farage's efforts to reshape British politics by propelling his Reform UK party to challenge the traditional dominance of the Conservatives and Labour, with a platform including strict immigration policies.
* <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/new-look-populist-reform-party-could-reshape-uk-political-landscape-2025-04-29/> - This source details the transformation of Reform UK under Nigel Farage's leadership, highlighting its emergence as a significant force in British politics and its potential to reshape the political landscape.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14673229/EUAN-MCCOLM-Hounded-2013-shadow-Farage-loom-large-Holyrood.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data