# Labour faces high stakes and SNP challenge in pivotal Hamilton by-election



In a tightly contested by-election campaign within the Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse constituency, the political stakes have escalated dramatically ahead of the forthcoming Holyrood elections. As the race unfolds, it showcases a microcosm of Scotland's shifting political landscape, dominated by Labour's push under the leadership of Anas Sarwar and the increasing confidence of the SNP, now represented by local councillor Katy Loudon.

By-elections typically focus on local issues, occasionally appearing inscrutable to those outside the fray. However, the Hamilton contest has garnered significant attention, not just for its local implications but for its potential wider ramifications across Scotland. As the Record noted, the outcome on June 5 is anticipated to shed light on party performances ahead of next year's Scottish Parliament elections, signalling a possible critical juncture for Labour, which has been vying to reclaim influence after years of SNP dominance.

Davy Russell, Labour's candidate, has established himself within the community, claiming he feels a deep-rooted support during his campaign walks. However, Labour's decision to restrict his media appearances has attracted criticism, allowing opponents to suggest he is evading scrutiny. The absence of Russell from key debates marks a notable strategic gamble for Labour, whose resurgence hopes hinge on demonstrating local engagement and leadership credibility.

The SNP has emerged as a formidable contender, with Loudon's experience as a local councillor bolstering her campaign. Her readiness to engage with media contrasts with Russell's constrained visibility, positioning her party as a willing participant in the public discourse. John Swinney, Scotland’s First Minister, acknowledged the challenging realities of campaigning in the wake of the recent passing of former MSP Christina McKelvie, marking this by-election as a pivotal moment for both Labour and the SNP.

A particularly charged element in this campaign has been the emergence of Reform UK, spearheaded by Nigel Farage. Notably, an £8,000 Facebook advertisement made controversial claims regarding Sarwar's comments on prioritising Scots from South Asian backgrounds, which both Labour and the SNP denounced as racially charged. Farage's refusal to retract his statement has amplified tensions in an already bitter campaign. Swinney has made a direct appeal to Labour voters, suggesting only the SNP can prevent a Reform UK win, reflecting the unpredictable dynamics at play.

With the political landscape in flux, Labour remains hopeful that Russell's local connections will earn him grassroots support. However, doubts linger about whether his campaign is robust enough to counteract the rising influence of the SNP and the unexpected challenge posed by Reform UK. As the elections approach, all eyes will be on Hamilton, where a shift in voter allegiance could herald a significant realignment in Scottish politics.

As the clock ticks toward the results, half the nation holds its breath, aware that the outcome could echo beyond Hamilton, potentially reshaping Scotland’s political future. The feeling of uncertainty persists, yet it is this very unpredictability that keeps political analysts, party leaders, and voters alike questioning what may unfold in the early hours following the election.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/hamilton-election-result-could-set-35313382), [[2]](https://www.strathspey-herald.co.uk/news/national/hamilton-by-election-opportunity-to-give-labour-wake-up-call-says-swinney-131759/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/hamilton-election-result-could-set-35313382), [[3]](https://www.cityam.com/starmer-hails-seismic-scotland-by-election-win-as-pressure-mounts-on-snp/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/news/national/snp-not-necessarily-the-favourite-to-win-holyrood-by-election-admits-swinney-131694/), [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-ferrier-snp-holyrood-scotland-mhairi-black-b1104966.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/hamilton-election-result-could-set-35313382), [[6]](https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2023/10/06/resounding-byelection-win-for-labour-over-snp-in-scotland/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.cityam.com/starmer-hails-seismic-scotland-by-election-win-as-pressure-mounts-on-snp/), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/oct/06/scotland-byelection-win-opens-up-possible-route-to-no-10-for-keir-starmer-rutherglen-hamilton-west)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/hamilton-election-result-could-set-35313382> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.strathspey-herald.co.uk/news/national/hamilton-by-election-opportunity-to-give-labour-wake-up-call-says-swinney-131759/> - In April 2025, Scottish First Minister John Swinney described the upcoming Hamilton by-election as a 'wake-up call' for Labour. He emphasised the importance of the contest following the death of Christina McKelvie, the previous MSP for Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse. Swinney highlighted the significance of the by-election for the SNP and expressed confidence in their candidate, Katy Loudon, a South Lanarkshire councillor. He acknowledged the challenges of campaigning in the constituency, reflecting on the loss of McKelvie and the emotional impact on the party.
3. <https://www.cityam.com/starmer-hails-seismic-scotland-by-election-win-as-pressure-mounts-on-snp/> - In October 2023, Sir Keir Starmer hailed Labour's victory in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election as a 'seismic result.' Labour candidate Michael Shanks secured more than twice the votes of his SNP rival, Katy Loudon. The win intensified pressure on SNP leader and Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf, especially amid ongoing police investigations into SNP finances. The by-election was triggered by a recall petition against Margaret Ferrier, who had previously held the seat for the SNP.
4. <https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/news/national/snp-not-necessarily-the-favourite-to-win-holyrood-by-election-admits-swinney-131694/> - In April 2025, Scottish First Minister John Swinney acknowledged that the SNP might not be the favourite to retain the Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse seat in the upcoming Holyrood by-election. The seat became vacant following the death of Christina McKelvie. Swinney noted the potential for a Reform UK surge and described the political landscape as uncertain. He praised the SNP's candidate, Katy Loudon, and emphasised the party's commitment to winning the by-election.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-ferrier-snp-holyrood-scotland-mhairi-black-b1104966.html> - In September 2023, Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar discussed the significance of the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, scheduled for October 5. He highlighted the prolonged period without adequate representation for the constituency following the suspension of former SNP MP Margaret Ferrier. Sarwar expressed optimism about Labour's prospects in the by-election, viewing it as an opportunity to gain momentum ahead of the 2026 Holyrood elections.
6. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2023/10/06/resounding-byelection-win-for-labour-over-snp-in-scotland/> - In October 2023, the Labour Party celebrated a significant victory in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, securing nearly 59% of the vote. The result, a 20-point swing from the SNP, was hailed by Sir Keir Starmer as a 'big step in the right direction' towards becoming prime minister. The win was seen as a potential indicator of Labour's prospects in the upcoming general election, with analysts suggesting the party could win dozens of seats in Scotland.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/oct/06/scotland-byelection-win-opens-up-possible-route-to-no-10-for-keir-starmer-rutherglen-hamilton-west> - In October 2023, the Guardian reported on Labour's victory in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, highlighting its potential implications for UK politics. The 20-point swing from the SNP was seen as a significant shift in Scottish political alignments, posing challenges for SNP leader Humza Yousaf. The result was interpreted as a sign of Labour's resurgence in Scotland and a possible route to power for Keir Starmer.