# Populist surge disrupts Labour dominance in Hamilton by-election amid SNP stronghold



The recent by-election in Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse has sparked a fierce political battle following the death of long-serving MSP Christina McKelvie. This constituency, long seen as a Labour bastion, is now facing a significant challenge from a burgeoning populist movement seeking to address the concerns of disenchanted voters across Scotland. The recent success in local elections in England underscores this momentum, suggesting a recalibration of traditional political allegiances that could elevate the profile of reform-focused alternatives.

Amidst this backdrop, a recent Survation poll indicates that if current trends persist, this populist movement could develop into a powerful force in the next Holyrood elections, potentially claiming up to 21 seats as the SNP continues to hold the largest share with 58. While Labour may see this as an opportunity to regain influence, leveraging support from unionist parties to oppose the SNP, the potential complacency of such a strategy reveals a dangerous underestimation of the shifting tides.

Scotland in Union, a group staunchly opposed to any form of independence, has expressed grave concern about the rise of these populist sentiments. They have noted that a vote for this alternative could inadvertently strengthen the very nationalist agenda they seek to oppose. A warning was issued by Alastair Cameron, chair of Scotland in Union, highlighting that using the by-election as a tool for protesting against the UK Government may inadvertently boost nationalist positions.

Tensions intensified further with Labour's aggressive responses to controversial advertisements from this emerging party, which they labelled “race-baiting.” Yet, it’s evident that the criticism reflects underlying fears about losing the narrative to a movement that resonates with voters increasingly fed up with the status quo. Labour leader Sarwar's vocal denouncement of these ads as “poisonous” and his characterization of the movement’s leader as out of touch signals a defensive posture, one that seems more concerned with maintaining traditional power than addressing the real issues facing constituents.

The growing support for this political alternative has become evident as its membership skyrocketed to over 7,000, outpacing that of the Scottish Conservatives. This surge reflects a broader dissatisfaction with mainstream parties and a desire for a re-examination of policies, particularly around economic strategies and energy solutions that have historically failed to address the needs of the populace. The party's strong critique of the Scottish Government’s climate strategies is resonating amidst an electorate tired of ineffective approaches.

Moreover, speculation surrounding potential financial backing from global figures raises pressing ethical questions about the implications of foreign financing in domestic political arenas. Critics argue that such substantial donations could corrupt the integrity of political processes, a situation that demands immediate attention to safeguard the future of UK democracy.

With the former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak issuing stark warnings about the dangers of splitting the centre-right vote, the stakes for Labour have never been higher. As the political landscape shifts, this rise offers a pivotal moment for those dissatisfied with current governance to reconsider their allegiance.

As the Hamilton by-election approaches, the rhetoric of the campaign offers a vivid illustration of Scotland’s intricate political reality, one that fuses local issues with national narratives and the aspirations of parties eager to redefine their place in the unfolding story of Scottish politics. The energy generated by this contest will inevitably shape the future power dynamics, challenging traditional incumbencies and setting the stage for a reimagined political framework in the country.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25197106.farage-cant-trusted-oppose-snp-says-scotland-union/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/bb41b97a-aaf5-47c3-be0b-993b3f34dfbc> - Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, has gained significant traction in Scotland, with membership reaching 7,000, surpassing the Scottish Conservatives. The party criticises policies like the net zero greenhouse gas emissions target and advocates for increased oil and gas exploration. A Survation poll suggests Reform could secure 11% of seats in the 2026 Holyrood election, aiming to attract discontented voters from Labour, the SNP, and the Conservatives. Reform emphasises economic concerns, linking job losses in the oil and gas sector to government policies on renewable energy, and challenges mainstream views on race and gender.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/6eb3ea7806b31275a52d71919d6fc35f> - Elon Musk is reportedly considering donating up to $100 million to Nigel Farage's Reform UK party, potentially the largest donation in British political history. This has sparked calls to tighten political donation rules. Reform UK, a right-wing party founded in 2021, seeks to capitalise on social media's power to appeal to disaffected voters. Critics warn Musk's involvement could influence UK politics, highlighting loopholes that enable foreign intervention via corporate donations. The UK's Electoral Commission urges legal reforms to safeguard political financing integrity.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-pm-sunak-warns-vote-farage-gifts-labour-election-2024-06-14/> - British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has warned that voting for Nigel Farage's Reform UK party could hand the election victory to the Labour Party. A YouGov poll shows Reform UK ahead of Sunak's Conservatives (19% vs. 18%), with Labour at 37%. Farage, known for his role in the UK's exit from the European Union, could divide centre-right voters, damaging Sunak's re-election prospects. Farage claims his party has started the campaign strongly and could surpass 6 million votes, but the UK's 'first-past-the-post' system may limit Reform UK's seat count.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/dfd6ec56-cbc2-4920-ae79-4ea4d50936a5> - Since John Swinney succeeded Humza Yousaf as Scotland's First Minister, he has revitalised the Scottish National Party (SNP) by steering it towards the political centre. Swinney distanced his administration from the Scottish Greens and scaled back progressive initiatives to focus on core issues like economic growth, healthcare, and climate action. His Programme for Government, criticised for its modest ambition, notably reinstated an earlier scrapped policy of abolishing peak rail fares. Emphasising NHS improvements, Swinney pledged 100,000 extra GP appointments and maintained a commitment to combating child poverty through redistributive policies like the Scottish child payment.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uks-sunak-says-only-his-conservatives-can-form-strong-opposition-labour-2024-07-01/> - British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will urge voters to back the Conservative Party to form a strong opposition against a likely Labour-led government, emphasising that a vote for Nigel Farage's Reform UK would undermine this effort. Facing probable defeat in the upcoming election after 14 years in office, the Conservatives are troubled by Britain's various crises post-Brexit and the recent cost of living issues. Opinion polls indicate a substantial lead for Keir Starmer's Labour Party. Sunak warns that Reform UK, led by Farage—a divisive figure known for his anti-establishment stance—will not win enough seats to effectively challenge Labour. Meanwhile, support for Reform UK has surged, though its actual parliamentary impact may be limited. Polls indicate many voters remain undecided, and Sunak aims to consolidate right-wing votes to counterbalance Labour's anticipated majority.
7. <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2025/03/20/farages-reform-party-soars-to-record-level-of-support-in-scotland/> - Nigel Farage’s Reform UK party has surged to its highest-ever support level recorded in Scotland as the upstart party continues to gain traction throughout the United Kingdom. A Survation poll for Quantum Communications has found that Reform UK is now the third-strongest party in Scotland, jumping to 17 per cent support, the strongest ever result for the Farage-led party. The governing leftist-separatist Scottish National Party (SNP) remains in the lead with 34 per cent. However, it had sharply declined from the last local 2021 elections when the party won 48 per cent of the vote. Meanwhile, the left-wing Labour Party is in second place at 23 per cent, and the neo-liberal Conservatives stand in fourth at 12 per cent, followed by the Lib Dems at 8 per cent and the Greens at 4 per cent. Were a national election held today, Reform would pick up an estimated 14 seats in Westminster from Scotland.