

Scottish National Party heads for victory, amid continued Labour collapse, rise of Reform UK and Greens

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The May 7 elections to Scotland’s Parliament will likely return the Scottish National Party (SNP) to power, with a reduced majority.

The elections point to a fundamental crisis of leadership facing the working class. Mass opposition to the SNP’s program of austerity and war has been denied any political voice by the nominal “left”, with the result that far-right Reform UK is polling second behind the SNP.

Latest polling by YouGov has the SNP on 62 seats, Reform UK on 19, Labour on 17, the Greens on 16, the Liberal Democrats on 8, and the Tories on 7. Polling by Ipsos Mori last month projected the Greens could win 15–18 MSPs, potentially becoming the second-largest party in Holyrood. Labour is preparing for its worst election result since devolution. It could drop to just 13–15 MSPs (down from 22 in 2021) and may fail to win a single constituency seat, relying entirely on the regional list, according to YouGov.

The febrile character of the election and the present political vacuum are indicated by Ipsos Mori’s findings, published on the eve of the poll, that 1 in 4 voters remains undecided. It found the Greens had moved into third position, just one point behind Reform.

Should it retain office, it will be the SNP’s fifth consecutive victory since 2007, when it swept to power under then-leader Alex Salmond. Since then, its image as a socially progressive party has been shredded as the party has presided over worsening austerity and social distress for millions.

Income inequality has reached its highest level since 1994, according to Oxfam Scotland, with 1 in 10 people in “very deep poverty” (defined as incomes 40 percent below the median). Child poverty has risen from 21 percent in 2013 to 24 percent, or one in four children. Death rates have risen among the most deprived communities since 2012, widening the life expectancy gap between the richest and poorest areas. Roughly 1 in 5 Scots—over 1 million people—live in poverty. Scotland’s drug-related death rate is the highest in Europe.

In the aftermath of the Scottish election in 2021, amid an inflationary crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and NATO’s war against Russia, the SNP experienced one crisis after another. A bitter and lurid feud erupted between SNP HQ and former leader and First Minister Alex Salmond, followed by the resignation and arrest of his successor, Nicola Sturgeon, over

allegations of financial corruption. Support for the party haemorrhaged as the SNP worked with its Green coalition partners to enforce austerity policies demanded by Westminster.

Sturgeon was succeeded by Humza Yousaf, who resigned in April 2024 after falling out with the Greens over his reversal of climate initiatives. He was succeeded by the current incumbent and former Deputy First Minister, John Swinney. Swinney has focused on making the economy more globally competitive. He met US President Donald Trump in the Oval Office and then at Windsor Castle to argue for reduced tariffs on Scotch whisky.

Last week, Trump announced the removal of “Tariffs and Restrictions on Whisky”. Whisky accounts for 74 percent of Scottish food exports and the industry is worth £7.1 billion in profits to the UK, £5.3 billion of which is extracted in Scotland.

The SNP’s election manifesto promises to create a “high growth” investment platform, proposes diverting pension funds to investment, pledges new prisons, more police, a clampdown on shoplifters, more energy powers for Holyrood, and support for the NATO war against Russia. Swinney has repeatedly called for more spending on warships to counter the “Russian threat in the North Atlantic”, which would mean warship orders for arms giants BAE and Babcock, currently building frigates in Glasgow and Rosyth. The SNP offers minimal economic respite, such as caps on food prices and a minimum income for artists.

The SNP is pledging to hold another referendum on Scottish independence as soon as possible, to facilitate continuing support for the SNP from the Greens and the pro-separatist pseudo-left.

It is a testament to the ongoing collapse of Labour’s support in Scotland that a corrupt, pro-business, flag-waving party of state like the SNP can retain any political authority. During the 2017 British general election, triggered by an historic crisis following the Brexit vote, there was a surge of support for Labour in Scotland, buoyed by illusions in Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership. But this support fell to historic lows by 2019, as Corbyn made clear he would not challenge the Blairites’ control of the party.

In response to the 2022-23 UK-wide strike wave, support for Labour in Scotland grew once more. In April 2024, Labour had overtaken the SNP in Scotland for the first time since the 2014 independence referendum. But the policies of the incoming government of Keir Starmer, its support for genocide in Gaza, attacks on democratic rights and austerity targeting children and

the elderly, saw Labour's lead in Scotland collapse.

Labour in Scotland has also been impacted by its cover-up of relations between Peter Mandelson and billionaire child sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. Last year, Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar hailed Mandelson as an "old friend", celebrating his appointment by Starmer as US ambassador. His later call for Starmer's resignation convinced no one.

Labour's Scottish manifesto includes attacks on National Health Service boards, skilled-only migration, more police, cuts in social security spending and more technical colleges geared to the needs of the arms industry. While opposing an independence referendum, Labour is offering the local capitalist elite a Scottish Treasury, an energy transition board in the North East of Scotland and a start to the fabled rail link to Glasgow airport, first proposed in the 1950s.

The sharpest political shift since Scotland's last poll is the growth of Reform UK. As in England, Nigel Farage's far-right, billionaire-funded organisation has recruited several leading Tories. Its leader in Scotland is Malcolm Offord (Baron Offord of Garvel), a former Conservative MP granted a lifetime peerage by Boris Johnson in 2021. A multimillionaire financier, he was appointed leader in January this year, boasting last month in a televised debate: "Today, I own six houses, five cars and six boats".

Reform has won support among some of the poorest sections of the working class, those alienated from Labour and the SNP, exploiting social concerns to scapegoat immigrants and other vulnerable groups. Support for Reform UK in Scotland has risen from 7 percent during the British general elections in 2024, to 18-20 percent today. It is most heavily represented among older voters, those aged 50 and above, with less than 10 percent support among those aged 30 and under.

Roughly one-third to 40 percent of those who backed the Tories in 2021 plan to vote for Reform. About 21-22 percent of 2024 Labour voters in Scotland have switched allegiance to Reform, while 10-13 percent of former SNP supporters have moved to Reform, citing "competence" issues, the cost of living and immigration.

Reform is preparing a vicious assault on the working class. Offord has called for a "bonfire of the quangos" to slash public spending and civil service jobs. His manifesto demands the scrapping of "ideological" climate initiatives, the reduction of business tax rates, and outlines sweeping attacks on social security claimants and migrants, forcing the latter to "adopt Scottish values". The party wants more police, all to be armed with tasers.

Under these conditions, support for the Scottish Greens (based on regional list voting intention) has risen to 18 percent, their strongest ever performance.

Roughly 84 percent of Greens supporters are under 40, and they are especially popular among the 18-24-year-olds. But the Greens are a capitalist party. They propose minor social concessions, such as free bus travel, automatic benefit payments, wealth taxes and an end to dental charges. Like the SNP, their social pledges are linked to the promotion of Scottish separatism.

Posturing as opponents of US militarism, the Greens have called for US military flights to be banned from Prestwick airport and

supported Scottish parliament's decision to ban public funding to companies complicit in Israel's genocide in Gaza.

The Greens advance a pro-imperialist orientation to the European Union (EU). The party backs NATO's proxy war against Russia, now being led by Germany, the UK and France. Party co-leader Ross Greer recently backed an appeal from the SNP Ukraine Solidarity Caucus calling for stronger sanctions on Russia aimed at crippling its oil and LNG trade and endorsing the seizure of Russian "shadow fleet" oil tankers. Greer's appeal made no mention of NATO expansionism, which provoked the Russian government's reactionary war and whitewashed the far-right character of Zelensky's regime in Kiev.

The growing support among youth for the Greens and for the SNP is an indictment of the role played by prominent pseudo-left organisations in Scotland. Over the past three decades, groups such as the Scottish Socialist Party, then Alba, followed by Your Party and now the Alliance to Liberate Scotland have corralled workers searching for a left-wing alternative to Labour into support for separatism.

Underscoring the SSP's role as a left extension of the SNP, its leader Colin Fox wrote a grovelling appeal to SNP voters last month, begging for their second vote in the regional lists. He wrote in the pro-independence *National*, "For all their achievements and history, the SNP cannot secure independence on their own. They need allies in the struggle..."

None of the parties standing candidates in these elections represents the interests of the working class. Workers and young people in Scotland seeking a unified struggle of workers in Britain and internationally against capitalist austerity, war and the destruction of democratic rights should attend the Socialist Equality Party's public meetings in Glasgow and Inverness this month on the centenary of the British General Strike. The critical task in the period ahead is the building of the Socialist Equality Party, the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, to prepare for the immense class struggles ahead.



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