

Might Labour be losing Scotland?

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As is readily apparent, everywhere, Labour is in turmoil and chronic electoral decline. Its general election win last July might, I suspect, prove to be its final swansong before the party moves towards electoral oblivion.

Given that the Tories are also in total electoral meltdown, not helped by the fact that they elected Kemi Badenoch as their leader, and she has proved to be utterly incompetent not just at the Despatch Box but also with the country at large and even amongst its members, the comparison that is usually being made now is between the electoral fortunes of Labour and Reform, who are seen as the up-and-coming threat to Labour.

In England, this may be true.

There is no evidence, as yet, that this is really the case in Wales, where Reform has, so far, won a single council seat.

It is, however, in Scotland the most interesting electoral development might be happening. This is the revival of the SNP at cost to Labour.

As [The National newspaper](#) reported yesterday (and I make my usual disclosure, which is that I am a columnist for this paper), the SNP won two former Labour council seats on Thursday, and both in pro-Labour areas:

[Thursday's] [by-election result in Glasgow's North East ward](#) is a rarity by recent standards, because the SNP were comfortably ahead on first preference votes in spite of the fact that Labour had topped the poll in the ward at the local elections in 2022.

Note the first interesting fact here, which is that in Scotland local authority elections, and even by elections, take place on a proportional representation system.

They then added:

To put that in perspective, in 2022 the [SNP](#) were still the ascendant force in Scottish

politics, and had a national lead over Labour of more than 12 percentage points. Without doubt, then, the SNP have just captured territory that is unusually favourable for Labour.

If the pro-SNP swing in the by-election were to be replicated across Scotland, the SNP would be a whopping 20 points clear of Labour – a bigger national lead than even the opinion polls have been suggesting.

The result is also a useful benchmark in another way, because it can be compared with a previous by-election that was held in the ward as recently as last November, at a time when Labour's decline was already well underway.

Not only has there been a hefty 4% swing to the SNP since then, but the SNP's own vote share has recovered by two percentage points.

Of course, gross extrapolation is always unwise from such results: by-elections can produce odd results, but these are hefty swings. I will, then, restrict myself to one overall comment, and that is, might Labour be losing Scotland? If so, it's another nail in its already rapidly closing coffin, if you can withstand the metaphor.