

Labour was braced for bad news - but not this: SNP surge that could redraw Scotland

Ashcroft poll deals blow to hopes of majority

Miliband ally and Lib Dem minister in the line of fire

Patrick Wintour
Political editor

Labour's chances of securing an overall majority at Westminster have been dealt a blow by an exhaustive seat-by-seat poll that suggests the party will be annihilated in Scotland and is on course to lose 35 of its 41 seats.

Even if Labour manages to claw back 15 of these seats, it was widely acknowledged that the party is unlikely to make enough gains in England and Wales to secure an overall majority.

Jim Murphy, the new Scottish Labour leader, is now in a race against time to convince former Labour voters that a vote for the SNP will ensure David Cameron stays in power at Westminster. He warned yesterday that "the only people that can benefit from these polls are David Cameron and the Tories".

Murphy will intensify his campaign to offer Labour as the party of change in Scotland committed to social justice.

Scottish Labour had been braced for bad news in the long-trailed poll conducted by the former Conservative deputy chairman Lord Ashcroft in 16 constituencies, but the 21% swing from Labour to SNP was a shock. If the results were replicated across Scotland on 7 May, Labour would lose 35 of its 41 seats. In the only crumb of comfort the SNP lead was 10% or less in 7 of the 16 seats.

High-profile casualties would be Labour's campaign chairman, Douglas Alexander, the shadow Scottish Secretary, Margaret Curran, and the Liberal Democrats' economics spokesman, Danny Alexander. In the Labour-held constituencies, the overall swing to the SNP was 25.4%. This ranged from 21% in Airdrie & Shotts to 27% in Dundee West and Motherwell & Wishaw.

Ashcroft said he did not expect the swing away from Labour overall to be that large since his polling had focused on areas with strong support for a yes in the independence referendum in September.

Among the seven Glasgow seats polled, Labour is likely to hold on to only one - the once rock-solid Labour seat of Glasgow North East.

Douglas Alexander, Labour's campaign manager and the shadow foreign secretary, would lose his Paisley and Renfrewshire South seat with a swing to the SNP of 25%, Ashcroft writes on his website. He is behind by 48% to 40%.

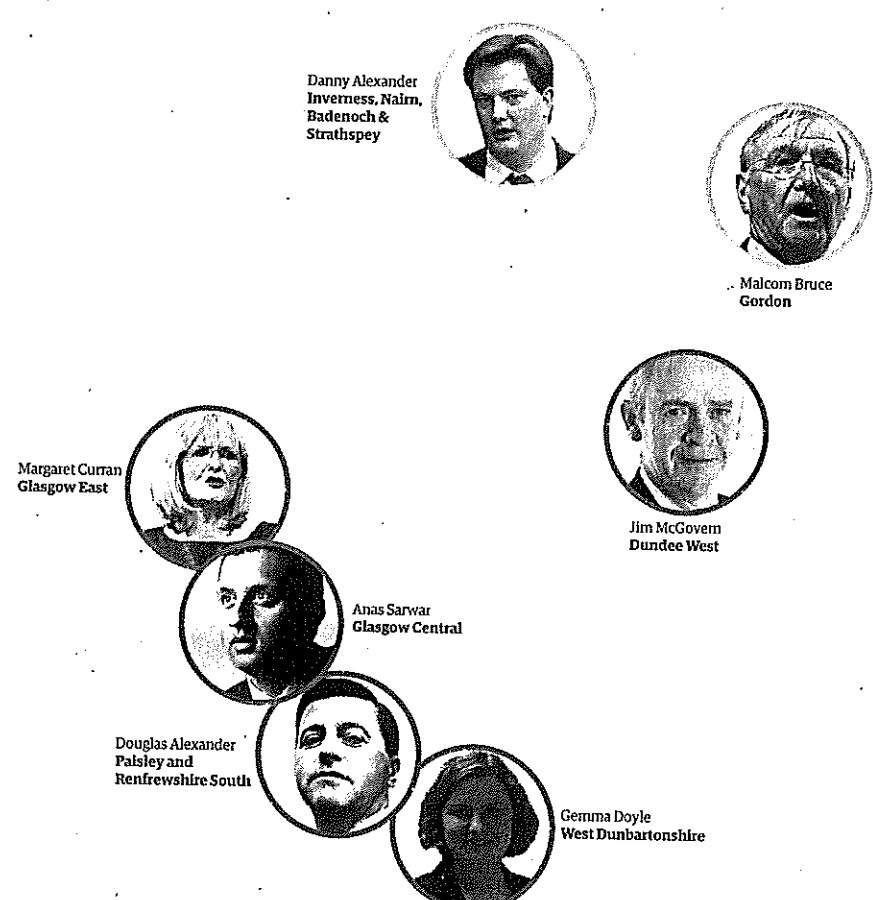
In Gordon, a Liberal Democrat seat held by Malcolm Bruce, who is standing down, the previous Scottish first minister, Alex Salmond, is due to win the seat by a 43% to 26% majority.

Chief secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander, would lose by 29 points; the poll has him trailing by 50% to 21%.

His office insisted he could still win, saying voters will back a man with 10 years service to the Highlands over a man that wishes to use the constituency as a stepping stone to independence.

In the Labour-held seats, only 60% of those who voted for the party in 2010 said

Voting intentions in Scotland



Danny Alexander
Inverness, Nairn,
Badenoch &
Strathspey

Margaret Curran
Glasgow East

Anas Sarwar
Glasgow Central

Douglas Alexander
Paisley and
Renfrewshire South

Gemma Doyle
West Dunbartonshire

Malcom Bruce
Gordon

Jim McGovern
Dundee West

Constituency	MP	Voting intention (%)			
		SNP	LAB	LD	CON
Airdrie and Shotts	Pamela Nash (Labour)	47	39	1	7
Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill	Tom Clarke (Labour)	46	43	1	6
Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkcaldy East	Gregg McClymont (Labour)	52	34	2	6
Dundee West	Jim McGovern (Labour)	59	25	3	6
Glasgow Central	Anas Sarwar (Labour)	45	35	3	5
Glasgow East	Margaret Curran (Labour)	51	37	1	4
Glasgow North	Ann McKelchin (Labour)	45	33	4	5
Glasgow North East	William Bain (Labour)	39	43	1	4
Glasgow North West	John Robertson (Labour)	44	38	3	7
Glasgow South	Tom Harris (Labour)	48	33	2	9
Glasgow South West	Ian Davidson (Labour)	45	42	2	4
Gordon	Malcom Bruce (Lib Dems)	43	14	26	11
Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey	Danny Alexander (Lib Dems)	50	13	21	10
Motherwell and Wishaw	Frank Roy (Labour)	50	39	1	5
Paisley and Renfrewshire South	Douglas Alexander (Labour)	48	40	2	6
West Dunbartonshire	Gemma Doyle (Labour)	47	38	1	6

On the streets

'I think it will be a landslide'

Waiting for fares by the new Malmison hotel, on Dundee's sparkling £1bn waterfront redevelopment, Jan Higgins, a taxi driver, has no doubt about the outcome of May's general election.

"I think it will be an SNP landslide and it will maybe wake up the politicians down in London," he says. The 62-year-old voted for the first time in last autumn's referendum and plumped for independence, along with 57.3% of his fellow Dundonians.

Higgins intends to vote again in May, unsurprisingly, for the SNP.

What is surprising is how difficult it is to find anyone in Dundee West - one of the nationalists' key target seats, currently held by Labour's Jim McGovern with a majority of just over 7,000 - who is intending to vote Labour again.

Scottish Labour's new leader, Jim Murphy, has been campaigning relentlessly, with new policy announcements - often framed to appeal to yes-leaning Labour supporters.

Lochee, to the west of the city centre, was once home to the largest jute mill in the world. It was staunchly Labour, explains Margaret Duncan.

"But not any more," says Duncan, who has recently rejoined SNP. "I don't even know what my MP looks like."

Libby Brooks
Scotland reporter

they would do so this year; more than one-third (35%) said they would support the SNP. While the Conservative vote (such as it was) has held up in these seats well, the Lib Dems have collapsed; only 12% of the party's 2010 supporters said they would vote Lib Dem again; nearly half (47%) said they would switch to the SNP.

In a glimmer of hope for Labour, Ashcroft writes that some of the SNP leads are not so vast as to be irrecoverable.

He writes: "The Labour majorities in some of these seats are such that even a swing of this magnitude has not put the SNP far ahead - for example, just three points in Glasgow South West and Coatbridge, Chryston & Bellshill, and six points in Glasgow North West. With a vigorous Labour campaign there remains room for movement before May."

The poll interviewed 16,007 adults by telephone from 5 to 30 January 2015.

The SNP's general election campaign director, Angus Robertson, welcomed the "excellent" results, but stressed that the party would be taking nothing for granted in the runup to May's vote.

Scotland's leading polling analyst and professor of politics at the university of Strathclyde, John Curtice, said: "What is striking is how even the movement is. The SNP vote is up by almost exactly the same across the piece. It simply demonstrates to people that, yes indeed, this is happening in every constituency. Hey guys, wake up and smell the coffee."

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