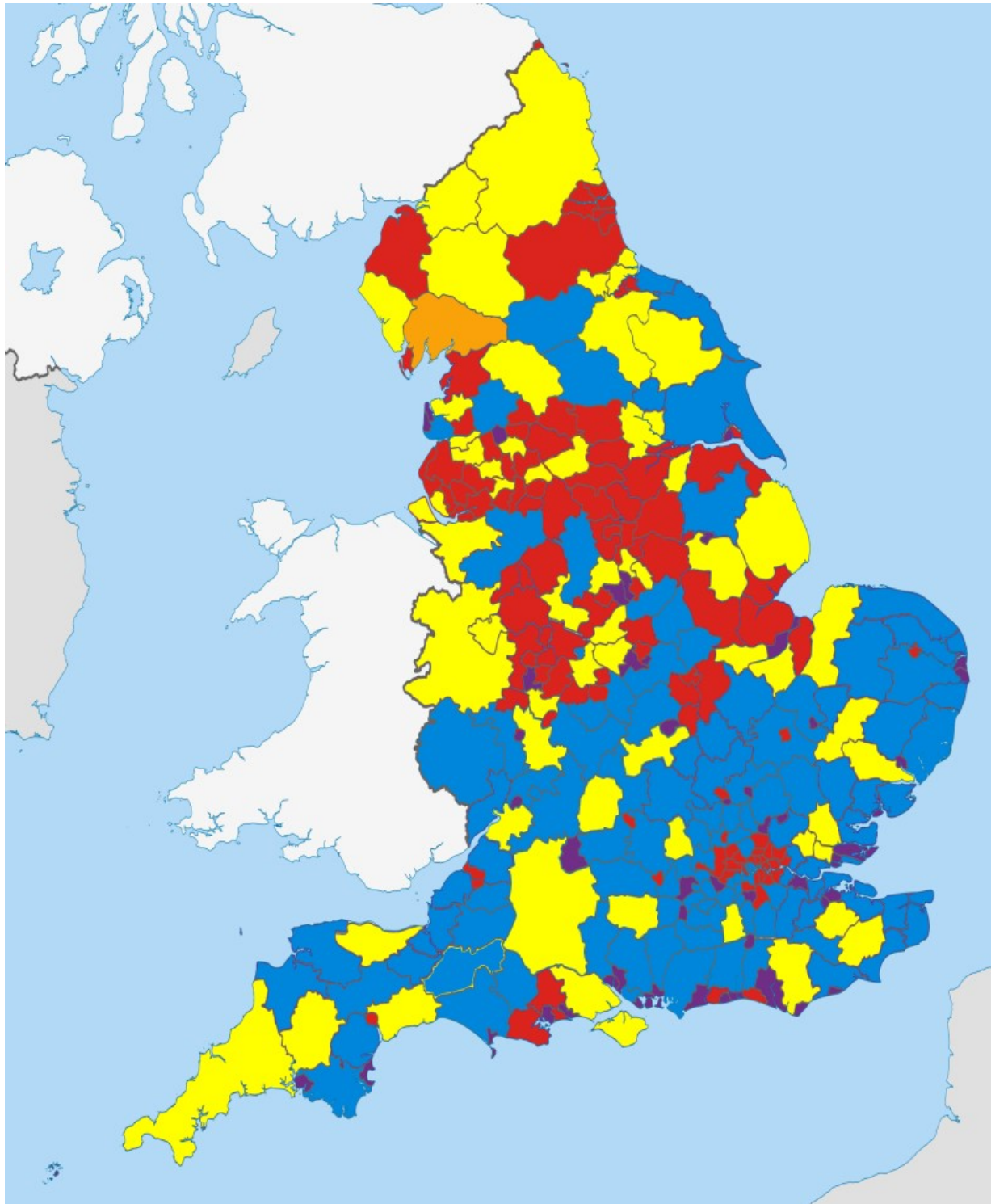


By **Avril Folle**, our Westminster Correspondent



A new poll by Lord Ashcroft has suggested that the Scottish Nationalist Party would become the third biggest party in England if they were to contest English constituencies.

The poll asked over one thousand voters in England how they would vote if each of the parties contesting the general election were standing in their own constituency, and included Sinn Féin, the Ulster Unionists and the SNP.

The Nationalists came third on 24%, after Labour on 28% and the Conservatives on 32%. UKIP were fourth on 9% and the Liberal Democrats trailed in sixth place on 3% behind the Greens on 4%.

Pulling the results through Electoral Calculus suggests that the SNP would pick up 57 seats if they stood candidates in England, making them the third largest party in that country. If polls in Scotland are correct, this could net the SNP over 100 seats in total, ensuring that they held the balance of power in the Westminster parliament.

A spokesperson for First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: "While this is very flattering and shows the appetite for our progressive policies in England, we have no plans to contest English seats. We prefer to build a progressive alliance with like-minded parties and individuals from across the United Kingdom."

We asked Scottish Labour leader Jim Murphy if he thought the SNP should be fielding candidates in English seats, and he replied: "Everyone knows that it's the largest party that gets to form the government. That's what has happened in every UK General Election since 1924, after all.

"Let me explain by analogy. Last year, for 100 days in a row, I had Irn-Bru for breakfast every morning – except for one day when I had eggs. Everyone knows that means I must continue to have Irn-Bru for breakfast every day for the rest of my life, even after it leads to diabetes."

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