

Lord Ashcroft Polls

Scottish Political Research

April 2021

2,017 adults in Scotland were interviewed online between 7 and 19 April 2021. Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in Scotland. Full data tables are available at LordAshcroftPolls.com

Eight online focus groups of voters in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Ayr with a range of political views were held between 14 and 22 April 2021.

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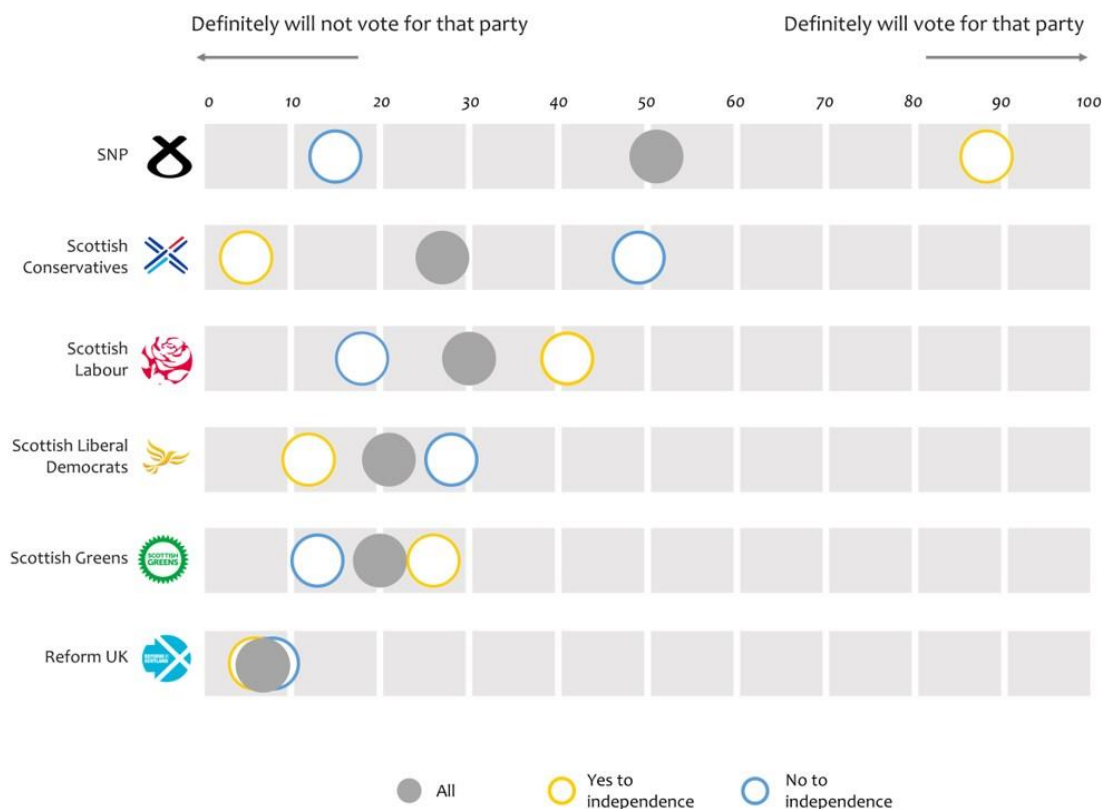
The Holyrood elections

We asked our poll respondents to rate how likely they were to use their first/constituency vote for each of the main political parties fighting the Holyrood election on a scale of 0-100. The SNP proved the most popular first vote choice among 49% of those who rated the likelihood of voting for at least one party at more than 50 out of 100. The Scottish Conservatives were the most popular choice of 21%, Scottish Labour the choice of 17%, Scottish Liberal Democrats the choice of 8% and the Scottish Greens the choice of 4%. The SNP also had the most intense support. The average likelihood to vote SNP among those leaning towards the party in the first vote was 93/100 compared with 90/100 for those leaning towards the Scottish Tories, 88/100 for Scottish Labour, 85/100 for the Scottish Liberal Democrats and 85/100 for the Scottish Greens.

When it came to the second/list vote, the SNP were the most popular first vote choice for 42% of those who rated the likelihood of voting for at least one party at more than 50 out of 100. The Conservatives were the first choice for 22%, Labour 16%, the Greens 9%, the Lib Dems 7%, Alba and Reform UK each 2%. SNP support was less intense than in the first vote.

Thinking about the upcoming elections to the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood, on a 100-point scale, how likely do you think it is that you will vote for each of the following parties using your CONSTITUENCY/FIRST VOTE where 0 means you definitely will not vote for that party and 100 means you definitely will vote for that party.

[NB Mean scores]



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Election issues




Which of the following are the most important issues facing Scotland in the run up to the elections to the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood?
NB, % naming issue in their top three

Issues facing Scotland

All

	Healthcare and the NHS	43%
	Covid-19	42%
	The economy	33%

YES Yes to Scottish independence

	Covid-19	42%
	Healthcare and the NHS	41%
	Getting another Scottish independence referendum	36%

No to Scottish independence

	Healthcare and the NHS	43%
	Covid-19	42%
	The economy	38%

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In our poll we offered respondents a choice of 25 issues facing Scotland and asked which issues they saw as the most important.

Across the board Scottish voters listed healthcare and the NHS (43%) as well as Covid-19 (42%) as the most important issues facing Scotland, closely followed by the economy (33%).

Focus groups often commented that the pandemic had dominated politics for the last year, with the Alex Salmond case and its aftermath being one of the few issues to break through.

"The last thing to break through the covid noise was the Sturgeon/Salmond stuff. Covid has drowned out a lot of what would normally be pretty prevalent."




Which of the following are the most important issues facing Scotland in the run up to the elections to the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood?
NB, % naming issue in their top three

Issues facing Scotland

All

	Healthcare and the NHS	43%
	Covid-19	42%
	The economy	33%




SNP

	Covid-19	43%
	Healthcare and the NHS	42%
	Getting another Scottish independence referendum	34%

Scottish Conservatives

	The economy	47%
	Healthcare and the NHS	42%
	Preventing another Scottish independence referendum	42%

Scottish Labour

	Covid-19	50%
	Healthcare and the NHS	43%
	The economy	31%

Scottish Liberal Democrats

	Covid-19	46%
	Healthcare and the NHS	43%
	The economy	34%

Scottish Greens

	Healthcare and the NHS	37%
	Covid-19	33%
	Climate and environment	31%

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However, the debate over independence remained the backdrop to Scottish political debate. A new referendum on Scottish independence was the one key issue that managed to stand out during the pandemic for voters. A third of SNP supporters – those who said they were likely to place their first vote for SNP in the 2021 Holyrood elections – said that getting another referendum on Scottish independence was among the three most important issues (34%). On the other hand, two fifths of Scottish Conservatives supporters – those who said they were likely to place their First Vote for the Scottish Conservatives in the 2021 Holyrood elections – named preventing another Scottish independence referendum among their top three (42%).

Focus group participants often said they regretted that the independence debate crowded out issues like health, education and poverty, which they felt were in urgent need of attention – though some mentioned other SNP policies that they liked, including childcare, free prescriptions, and transport infrastructure.

“All of our elections are generally around independence. We don't look as much at the social issues or things that need change or even the things that SNP aren't doing quite as well. It's such an important thing to everybody up here, no matter what side that you're on for it. Other things just tend to get drowned out. So, it just tends to be SNP for independence or someone else if you're against it.”

“The fixation on independence has been at the cost of almost everything else – education, bin collections, potholes in the roads. We're starting to resemble a third-world country in some parts of Scotland. Everything else has suffered because of this single-minded fixation on independence.”

“I like what they've done with education in terms of free childcare places and free school meals. I've got two kids so that's a huge impact for me.”

Each party's position on independence was the most important issue when it came to deciding how to vote in the Holyrood elections. Over a third of Scottish Conservatives supporters said it was the most important issue for them (36%), and just below a fifth of SNP supporters said the same (23%). Scottish voters also stated that the overall competence of the party (20%) and the vision for Scotland's future (16%) were key factors in deciding which party to vote for.

“The timing of trying to push for another independence referendum. Mentioning that she's going to be going for that again is taking a bit of focus away from the Holyrood elections. It's become divisive – it's no longer voting for what you want for Scotland or how it's run, you're either voting for independence again right now or you're voting against it.”

“I want to be influenced in other ways. I would happily be convinced by the Labour party and I've voted Green in the past as well. I don't want to hear the same arguments about independence. I'm going to make an informed choice regarding that. There's a bigger picture to me.”

“I'll do what I need to get independence, but I think that after that I would have to sit down and look at it again and say, 'who is it I actually want to run the country?' So, for me at the moment, it's tactical in terms of 'let's get independence done and then who's going to offer the best option for us going forward if that happens?'”

“In an ideal world it should be decided on education, the economy and so on. But unfortunately, we're in a situation in Scotland where every election is constitutional and until that changes, I don't think we'll ever move forward. Everything is dwarfed by the Yes-No question.”

“I feel like the SNP are the only party that will keep Scotland free of the Tories. They're a good buffer. You almost want an antagonistic government in Scotland, otherwise the Tories will just do whatever they can get away with.”

When it comes to deciding which party to vote for, which three of the following attributes are most important to you?

NB, by current voting intention, % naming issue in their top three

All

Position on Scottish independence	24%
Overall competence	20%
Vision for Scotland's future	16%

SNP

Position on Scottish independence	23%
Vision for Scotland's future	22%
Overall competence	19%

Scottish Labour

Position on Scottish independence	23%
Overall competence	21%
Handling of the COVID-19 pandemic	16%

Scottish Conservatives

Position on Scottish independence	36%
Overall competence	18%
Policies on the economy	14%

Scottish Greens

Position on Scottish independence	22%
Overall competence	21%
Vision for Scotland's future	17%

Scottish Liberal Democrats

Position on Scottish independence	23%
Overall competence	22%
Handling of the COVID-19 pandemic	17%

YES Yes to Scottish independence

Position on Scottish independence	25%
Vision for Scotland's future	23%
Overall competence	19%

No to Scottish independence

Position on Scottish independence	28%
Overall competence	20%
Handling of the COVID-19 pandemic	14%

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The pandemic

Well over half of voters also believed the Scottish Government (60%), the SNP (54%) and Nicola Sturgeon (64%) herself had handled the covid pandemic well. Voters across the board – SNP, Scottish Greens, Scottish Labour, Scottish Liberal Democrats and even a third (32%) of Scottish Conservatives supporters – felt Nicola Sturgeon had done a good job as First Minister during the crisis.

Over half of Scottish voters thought the UK Government and the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, had responded to the pandemic poorly, compared to just below a fifth believing that they had responded well.

This was reflected in our focus groups, where participants often contrasted Sturgeon's approach to that of Johnson and the Westminster government, which they often thought vague or chaotic. This was true of voters on all sides, who often mentioned the clarity of Sturgeon's daily briefings. Some felt she was prevented from taking further steps by London, especially on international travel and the border with England.

However, some felt Sturgeon's daily TV appearances had turned into an exercise in party politics or self-promotion. They also noted that her decision to lift some restrictions early coincided with the Holyrood election campaign.

"I think we've done a better job dealing with it. To be fair, everybody was blindfolded so it was probably trial and error. But I feel Nicola Sturgeon has been more structured in how she dealt with the situation and never made false promises or skirted around things. I think she was quite firm in how she put across this is what will be happening, this is when you will get told. And so I actually admired her in the pandemic I've got to say."

"I felt like I felt like she showed up every day. She showed up and gave her speech. And you know one of her speeches, I think it was when was it she just showed a personal side – there was a Scottish word she used, and it was hilarious. 'I'm scunnered, I'm gutted we cannot go out this weekend. I think it was a bank holiday weekend. And I think she was so personal. But it was just I think she just showed up every single day.'"

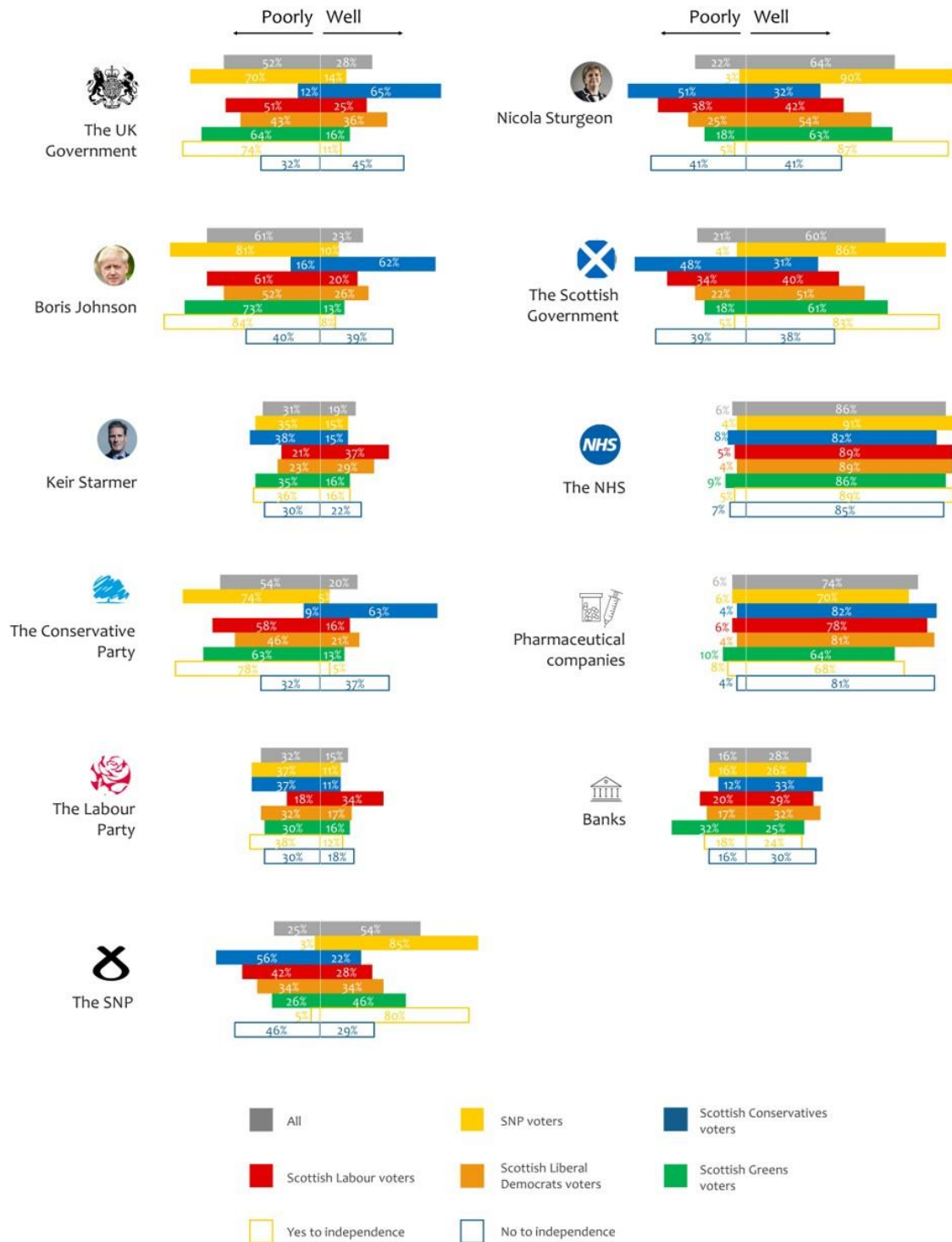
"The fact that she was so visible, she was on television giving daily briefings, giving figures, talking about the next steps. That went a long way for me. She's always been frontline and transparent and saying she would love to lock down Scotland and not allow anybody in from other countries, but that's Westminster."

"She seemed to take action on her MPs who strayed. She didn't have a Dominic Cummings moment, she decided to punish people who broke the rules."

"She's committed to being on TV every day. In the early stages of the pandemic the daily broadcast was very informative. But I do believe that latterly she used it as a political tool, and it turned into a free party-political broadcast for the SNP every day that was denied to the rest of the parties in Scotland. And the media in England certainly give Boris a far harder time than Nicola gets in Scotland."

"She's been so careful all the way along, and all of a sudden it's 'we're opening things up again!' I just think it's far too coincidental that it's just before the May elections."

How well or poorly do you think the following are doing in their response to coronavirus?



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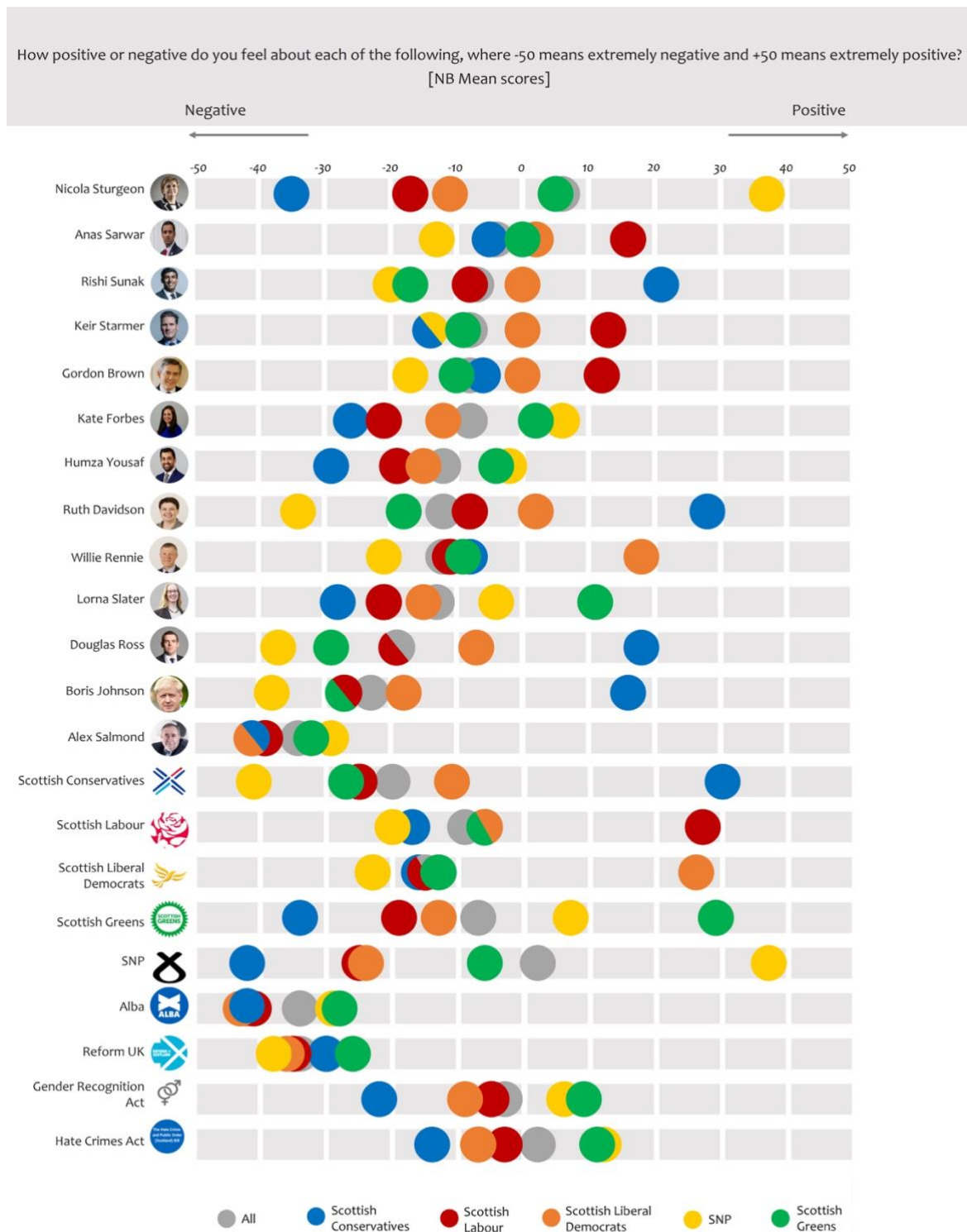
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However, although respondents tended to believe that the Scottish Government had performed better than the UK Government during the past year, around a half thought both the Scottish economy and the UK economy would be facing hardship over the year to come.

When asked how they thought the British economy would fare over the next year, 54% of respondents said they thought the UK as a whole would fare poorly and just below half said the same for Scotland. Respondents were, however, more optimistic about themselves and their family, with only around a quarter saying they and their family would fare poorly.



Parties and leaders



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Asked to rate how positive or negative they felt towards various parties and party leaders on a scale of extremely negative (-50) to extremely positive (+50), Scottish voters gave Nicola Sturgeon an average of +6, Boris Johnson an average of -23 and Keir Starmer a score of -8.

Unsurprisingly, Nicola Sturgeon was rated highest by SNP supporters with an average of +37 and by Scottish Greens supporters with an average of +6. Scottish Liberal Democrats and Scottish Labour supporters gave Sturgeon average scores of -11 and -17, whilst Scottish Conservatives supporters were the most likely to feel negative towards her (average score of -35). Asked about other Scottish party leaders, Douglas Ross received an average of -19 from the respondents, Lorna Slater an average of -13, Willie Rennie an average of -12, and Anas Sarwar received an average of -5.

The political parties themselves received similar ratings to that of their leaders. Overall, Scottish voters gave the SNP party an average rating of +2, with SNP supporters again feeling the most positive towards the party followed by the Scottish Greens supporters. The Scottish Conservatives received an average of -20, the Scottish Greens an average of -8, the Scottish Liberal Democrats an average of -15 and Scottish Labour an average score of -9.

These scores were generous compared to the average score given by voters to both Alex Salmond and his new Alba Party, with an average of -34. Across the board voters rated Salmond negatively, with Scottish Greens supporters, Scottish Conservatives supporters, Scottish Liberal Democrat supporters and Scottish Labour supporters all rating him below an average of -30. He was scarcely more popular among SNP supporters who rated him -29.



We also asked whether people's opinion of various leaders had become more positive or negative over the last year. Alex Salmond came off worst from this exercise, with nearly two thirds of Scottish voters, including nearly 7 in 10 SNP supporters, saying their view of him had become more negative.

Compared with this time last year would you say your view of the following has become much more positive, somewhat more positive, somewhat more negative, much more negative or not really changed?



Nicola Sturgeon's reputation had improved, however, with half of Scots saying their view of her had grown more positive over the last year and 30% saying it had become more negative. However, two thirds of Conservatives and just under half of Labour voters said their opinion had become more negative.

Compared with this time last year would you say your view of the following has become much more positive, somewhat more positive, somewhat more negative, much more negative or not really changed?



Views of Boris Johnson had grown more negative, with more than half of all Scots – including 40% of those who oppose independence – saying their view of him had got worse over the last year.

People were also more likely overall to say their view of Keir Starmer had deteriorated (31%) than to say it had improved (21%).

Describing the party leaders

Nicola Sturgeon

In our poll, people were offered a selection of words and phrases and asked which they most associated with the various party leaders. For Nicola Sturgeon, over half of Scottish voters said she “stands up for Scotland”. Other popular choices for Sturgeon included words such as “determined” and “competent”.

Below are some words and phrases that people have used to describe political leaders. From the following list of words and phrases please select the 3 that most closely describe your view of...?

Nicola Sturgeon



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This view was reflected in our focus groups, where even some opponents of the SNP said they respected her performance, especially on covid.

"You can tell she's passionate about what she believes in. And I think she has principles which she is fairly consistent on. The party is promising a second referendum, I think she's done everything in her power to try and deliver that. So overall, I say she's been very good."

“She’s done a good job of keeping everybody informed, despite me not liking her personally or her politics. I think she’s done a good job for Scotland.”

“I think she’s the best politician, at least currently in a premiership position. She’s the only politician who seems capable of saying sorry, which is really refreshing. There was that time she got caught without a mask on, it was a really silly thing. Whereas some politicians down south never admit anything ever.”

“In terms of policies, there is definitely space for improvement. But as an individual, as a person, as a woman, as a really articulate leader, I think she’s done really well on a personal level.”

Some felt she got off rather lightly after the Salmond case and its aftermath. More often, though, voters felt she had acquitted herself well over a scandal which was not of her making.

"It was brushed under the carpet. She's got away with it. There weren't that many challenges, and the media didn't give her a hard time. It could have been a lot worse for her."

“She came across so well, so smart and precise. I think she came out of it stronger, to be honest. And she’s being blamed for the actions of a man, and she’s taken ownership of it and come out stronger. She’s opened herself up to a lot of scrutiny and handled it well.”

Alex Salmond

In order to reveal more about how people saw the leaders' characters and personalities, we asked which animal they thought each one was most like. The choices for Sturgeon tended to reflect qualities of bravery and shrewdness.

"Nicola is a lion. I've sort of got that image in my head of the Lion King, you know, standing on top of the rock and surveying her kingdom and offering leadership."

"A wise owl. A wise young owl."

"A fox. She seems to have a plan but she's a bit sly."

"A panther. Something cunning but with a bit of integrity."

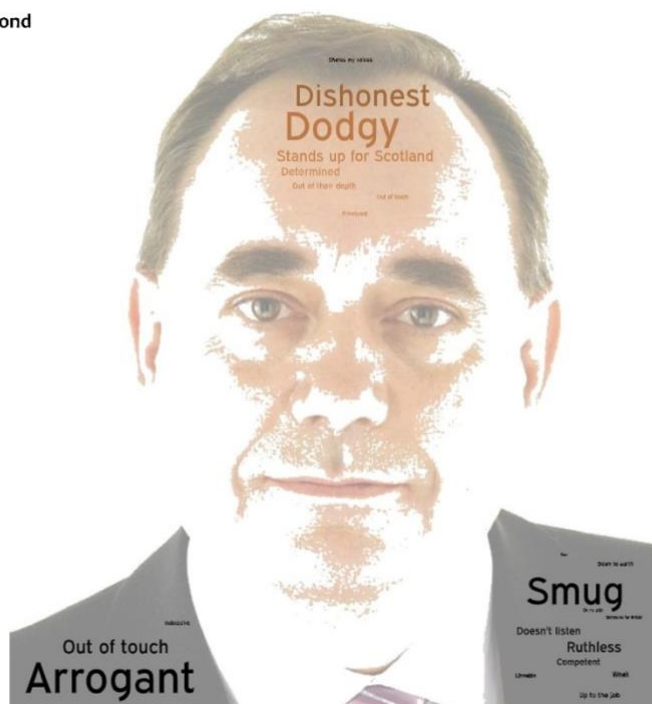
"A meerkat. She looks quite alert when you speak with her, she kind of pays attention. And she kind of looks harmless – meerkats are quite harmless in general but, you know, look like they are moving about with a bit of purpose."

"A wee Scottie dog. She's quite blunt and ruthless. And because she looks a bit like one."

"A hyena. There's something I don't trust about her. She's too self-assured, I think."

Below are some words and phrases that people have used to describe political leaders. From the following list of words and phrases please select the 3 that most closely describe your view....?

Alex Salmond



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The words most often chosen to describe Alex Salmond were "arrogant," "smug," "dodgy" and "dishonest." Despite being cleared of sexual assault charges in court, most felt his reputation would not recover.

"His defence in court wasn't that he'd been a completely upstanding guy. I think it was that he'd done some really creepy things that were unacceptable but not against the law. So he's not been found guilty, but his reputation is completely down the drain."

The choices of animals to represent Salmond were accordingly unflattering.

"A warthog. Dirty, you can see him rolling around in the mud. Pretty rash and abrupt creatures that charge about the place."

"A snake."

"A toad. Toad of Toad Hall."

This feeling towards Alex Salmond was also reflected the widespread scepticism towards his motives in launching the Alba Party. While four in ten thought part of the reason had been to make a new independence referendum more likely, nearly twice as many saw it as an attempt to relaunch his own political career and three quarters thought he was seeking to undermine Nicola Sturgeon.



This view was reflected in our focus groups, even among supporters of Scottish independence.

“Personally, I would think this [Alba] is a non-starter. It's a joke and he's not liked by anyone.”

“I think he just can't leave politics because it's in his blood and he can't think of anything else to do.”

“It's not doing any favours for the country. If he believed in independence, then he wouldn't be splitting the vote to get it. I don't really understand why he's doing this.”

“The man always had the biggest ego in Scotland to begin with, and if he's got a chance to have a bit of a bite back at the SNP and Sturgeon as well, this is a perfect opportunity to cause as much disruption as he could.”

Boris Johnson

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Boris Johnson



The most often chosen words for Boris Johnson included “dishonest”, “arrogant”, “out of their depth” and “out of touch”. In our groups of past SNP voters, Johnson was the embodiment of everything they most disliked about Westminster Tory rule. Past Tory voters were more positive but usually far from effusive.

“I just can’t understand how so many English people can vote for Boris Johnson.”

“He’s the SNP’s greatest recruiting tool.”

“I wouldn’t trust him to run a bath. He openly lies. He’s lost three jobs from not telling the truth. Just because his hair sticks up and he gives you a wink doesn’t make it all right.”

Focus groups associated him with animals considered annoying, unkempt or dangerous.

“A mosquito – seems a bit harmless and annoying because of his clown persona but actually probably is going to give you malaria.”

“Panda. They laze around, don’t do much.”.

“He’s baboon-ish to me. A bit confused at times.”

“Maybe a pigeon. He’s just kind of always there. A lot of folk don’t like him but that doesn’t stop there being pigeons everywhere.”

“An orangutang. That hair. He combs his hair with a balloon. And orangutans are smart creatures. They don’t look it, but they’re smart.”

“A bull. I think about the Peppa Pig episode about a bull in a china shop.”

Keir Starmer

Keir Starmer received mixed reviews from the respondents, with top words including “competent”, but also “weak” and “indecisive”. Focus group respondents were generally, but not universally, underwhelmed, though most considered him a considerable improvement on Jeremy Corbyn.

“I think he’s trying to be the working-class thing, but it’s not coming across right for some reason. I don’t think he’s got the people thing, the connection.”

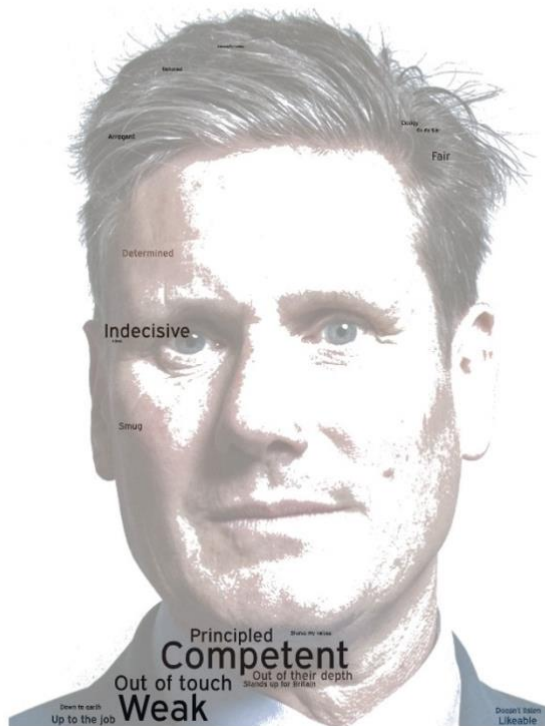
“He’s great. I’ve always liked him. Coming after Jeremy Corbyn, it’s like it’s an easy transition to somebody that it’s a bit more of a leader, I would say. But yeah, I think he’s doing quite well.”

“They’re not a force anymore. They just they don’t have any teeth. He was trying to work together during covid, but the Tories have been so egregious, you needed someone to be like, ‘stop doing that. Here’s what we would do differently’. He’s never has. He’s just always been like, ‘that’s fine’.”

“I just see him as a Conservative with a red tie.”

Below are some words and phrases that people have used to describe political leaders. From the following list of words and phrases please select the 3 that most closely describe your view of...

Keir Starmer



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The groups associated Starmer with animals that like to keep a low profile.

“A mole. He’s been hidden underground the whole time he’s been there.”

“A Labrador. Nothing wrong with him but a bit bland.”

“A sloth. Slow to react. Amazing opportunities to react to things but by the time he kind of raises his head and looks up, you know, the Tories have dodged another bullet.”

“Starmer is a meerkat – insignificant, under the radar. Just every now and again comes up to see what’s happening.”

Other than Sturgeon and Salmond, the other Scottish party leaders had not made a huge impression on our focus group participants. **Douglas Ross** had yet to emerge from the shadow of the popular Ruth Davidson, and was criticised for seeming even more preoccupied with independence than the SNP.

“My concern about the Conservatives is that they’re saying ‘we are the only ones that are going to stop independence’ when there are so many other things they could be holding Nicola Sturgeon’s feet to the fire for. It just doesn’t seem to be happening.”

“He’s a nice guy, but we need someone like Ruth Davidson who has some balls and is prepared to speak up at Holyrood and tell Nicola Sturgeon to sit in her seat and be quiet.”

“He was asked ‘what would you do if you were Prime Minister for a day?’ and he said, ‘have a harder line on gypsies.’ I just think he gets everything completely wrong.”

New Scottish Labour leader **Anas Sarwar** had yet to make a big breakthrough, but was largely seen as inoffensive.

“He seems like a nice guy, but a bit dull.”

“I think he’s quite clear and quite good. He’s asking the right questions. He’s got potential.”

“He comes across as quite calm and level-headed. The Labour party went a bit extreme in the last few years, so someone like that is a calming influence.”

“I’ve noticed he’s changing tack to a certain extent. He’s probably trying to woo back ex-Labour supporters. He’s shying away from just attacking independence at every opportunity, which is what the Tories are doing.”

Patrick Harvey of the Scottish Greens was mostly positively regarded among those with a view, though there was some confusion about his party’s policies beyond support for independence.

“I’d like to know specifically what they’re trying to put forward because you can get a real mixture of characters within the Green party. And I don’t think he’s maybe produced what they stand for as well as they could at times. But as a character he seems like a nice guy.”

“If you ask him a question you usually get a straight answer, which is very unlike most politicians.”

“He has a co-leader as well, a woman called Lorna Slater, but I don’t really know how that works. If they were to be elected, I don’t know who would be First Minister.”

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader **Willie Rennie** had also made little impact despite his long service in the job. Many voters continued to think of the coalition government at the mention of his party.

“He’s very good for a photo op. He’ll do anything. He’ll stroke a badger; he’ll sit on anything. But there’s nothing there, a blank space.”

“I think they sold their souls with the coalition, with the Tories and tuition fees. The taste is left in your mouth that you don’t know what you’re voting for with the Lib Dems, that they don’t really stand for anything.”

“Nothing comes across that you can latch onto or believe in.”

Independence

How would you vote today?

When asked which way they would vote if there were a second independence referendum tomorrow, 44% said that they would vote in favour of independence, whilst 45% said they would opt to remain part of the UK; 11% said they didn't know, wouldn't vote or preferred not to say. This gave a small margin of 51% to 49% against independence among those declaring a voting intention.

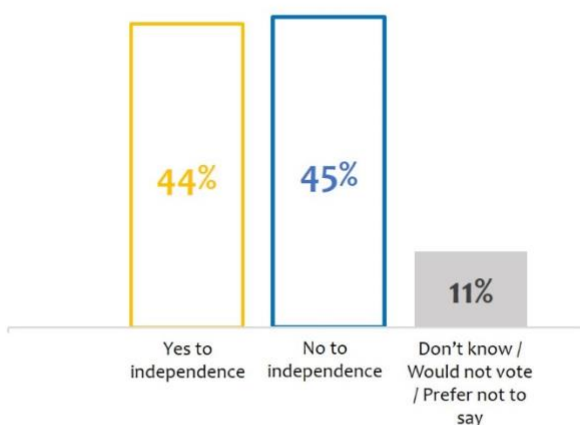
Of those likely to vote SNP with their first vote, the vast majority (84%) were in favour of independence. By contrast, those likely to vote for the Scottish Conservatives were overwhelmingly against Scotland becoming an independent country, with 95% anti-independence. Among Scottish Labour, and Scottish Liberal Democrats supporters 75% and 79% respectively opposed separation from the UK.

The picture was more mixed for Scottish Greens supporters with 43% pro-independence and 46% against.

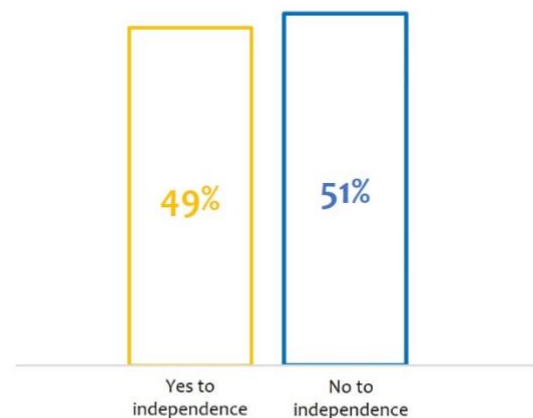
Of those who voted Yes to independence in 2014, 82% said they would do so again in a new referendum, while 11% would now vote No. Among those who voted No in 2014, 79% would do so again, 15% would now back independence.

If there was another Independence Referendum in Scotland held tomorrow, how would you vote on the following question:
'Should Scotland be an independent country?'

All voters

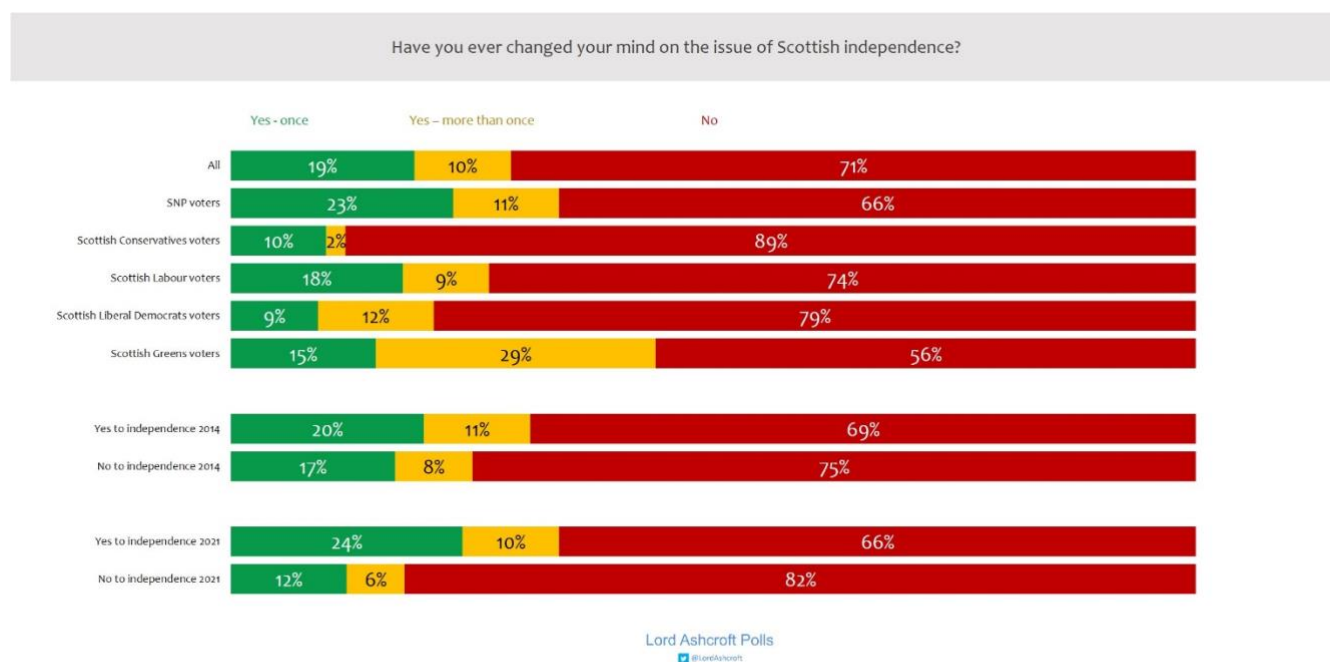


Excluding Don't know / Would not vote / Prefer not to say



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When asked whether they had ever changed their mind on independence, over two thirds (71%) said that their opinion had been unchanged. This percentage increased to 89% among Scottish Conservatives supporters. Among the 29% that said they had changed their mind, 19% said they had done so only once, while one in ten Scots said their opinion had shifted more than once. Scottish Greens supporters were most volatile in their opinion of independence, with 44% saying that they had changed their opinion at least once on the matter. Notably, over a third of SNP supporters said that they had also changed their mind on independence at least once.



While some argued that Brexit itself justified a new referendum, some had become more nervous about the prospects for an independent Scotland. Brexit, covid and falling oil revenues gave rise to doubts about the strength of an independent Scottish economy, and many wondered whether vaccination, furlough and business support programmes could have been sustained outside the UK. There were also doubts about the likelihood of being able to join the EU, and the implications for Scotland's border with England.

“Boris Johnson said that if Scotland were on its own, we would not have had the amount of vaccines available as in the other parts of the UK. Whether that’s true or not, hard to say. But it does put a lot of thoughts in your head. How much of a world force are we when this kind of thing happens?”

“I wonder if the Scottish government would have been able to do as well without UK support. That’s been at the back of my mind during the pandemic. We’ve seen a lot of funding to help unemployed people, and I’m not sure that would have been the case if we were solely reliant on the Scottish government.”

“There are other small independent countries. We would have done OK.”

“I was thinking about the borders and whether we’d have our own currency. I just think, after the pandemic, I don’t think we should be thinking about it at this time. The priority is to stabilize.”

“Brexit has highlighted a lot of the issues and false promises – there was going to be this happy, rosy life. Issues like rejoining the EU would need to be set in stone before they could think about another referendum.”

“We’ve just lost one of our biggest trading partners, so to potentially lose the other one without a guarantee of Europe as well, you’re going alone then. And that’s a pretty bleak, dark world. It’s just too much to be isolated as the small nation that we are without any pals.”

Some were also put off by the idea of reopening such a divisive question, and there were worries about the idea of holding a referendum that had not been sanctioned by the UK parliament. A few were willing to take this risk,

“As much as I was fiercely for it at the time, it was made clear that it was a once in a generation-type thing [...] you can’t just keep battering the door down. It’s becoming too divisive, it’s constantly the same argument in this country.”

“I don’t think it should be allowed anyway. We had a democratic referendum in 2014. It’s becoming like a fascist country – you keep on having referendums until the SNP get the result they want.”

“Scotland became such a ghastly place during the referendum, it was awful.”

“[An unauthorised referendum] would cause a huge amount of dissent. The nightmare scenario would be if Westminster says no, they run one anyway, it goes in favour of Yes. Where does that leave you? I’m not saying you’d end up with a situation like Ireland in the 70s but you maybe could. It wouldn’t be good for anyone.”

“Isn’t that how independence comes about, if you look across the globe? It doesn’t come without any upside-downness, so why not just go for it? Can’t legislation be re-written, can’t rules be broken, can’t a revolution start from somewhere?”

For those who wanted to go ahead with a referendum, the strongest argument was often that they did not believe Scotland was represented by the UK government. The fact that England continued to elect Conservative governments and had taken the country out of the EU made them feel this more strongly.

“I think the reason why people are supporters of independence is because they don’t feel represented in Westminster. Certainly, it doesn’t represent me. I think the majority of Scotland they don’t represent either. What’s more important to me with regards to independence is being governed by some somebody that reflects my morals and that’s more important to me.”

“Even if the Tories lost next time there is still the risk they could come back into power four years down the line, because we know how different people are south of the border than we are up here.”

“A vote to stay in the UK last time was a vote to stay in the EU. It’s completely changed the landscape. Brexit has strengthened my opinion towards independence. I think we need to get the hell out and build a stronger economy as an independent nation.”

Participants were very sceptical about any promise of further devolution giving more powers to the Scottish parliament.

“It’s a question of trust, because we had something called The Vow after the last independence vote and where is that now? It doesn’t exist. So my own opinion is I wouldn’t trust whatever Westminster said unless it was written into some sort of a constitution.”

The independence debate

We gave our poll participants a selection of pairs of opposing statements to further explore their view of Scotland's political landscape.

There was broad consensus around the idea that 'Scotland's best days lie ahead', with a majority (64%) agreeing. Agreement was highest among SNP (84%) and Green voters (75%), whilst disagreement was mostly concentrated among Scottish Conservatives supporters, of whom 48% said that Scotland's best days were in fact behind them.

Though our respondents were practically evenly split on the question of independence, a small majority (59%) agreed that there were some areas where it made good sense and benefitted Scotland to be part of the UK. Similarly, we also saw a level of agreement (62%) that more powers devolved to Scotland would make the Scottish parliament more effective.

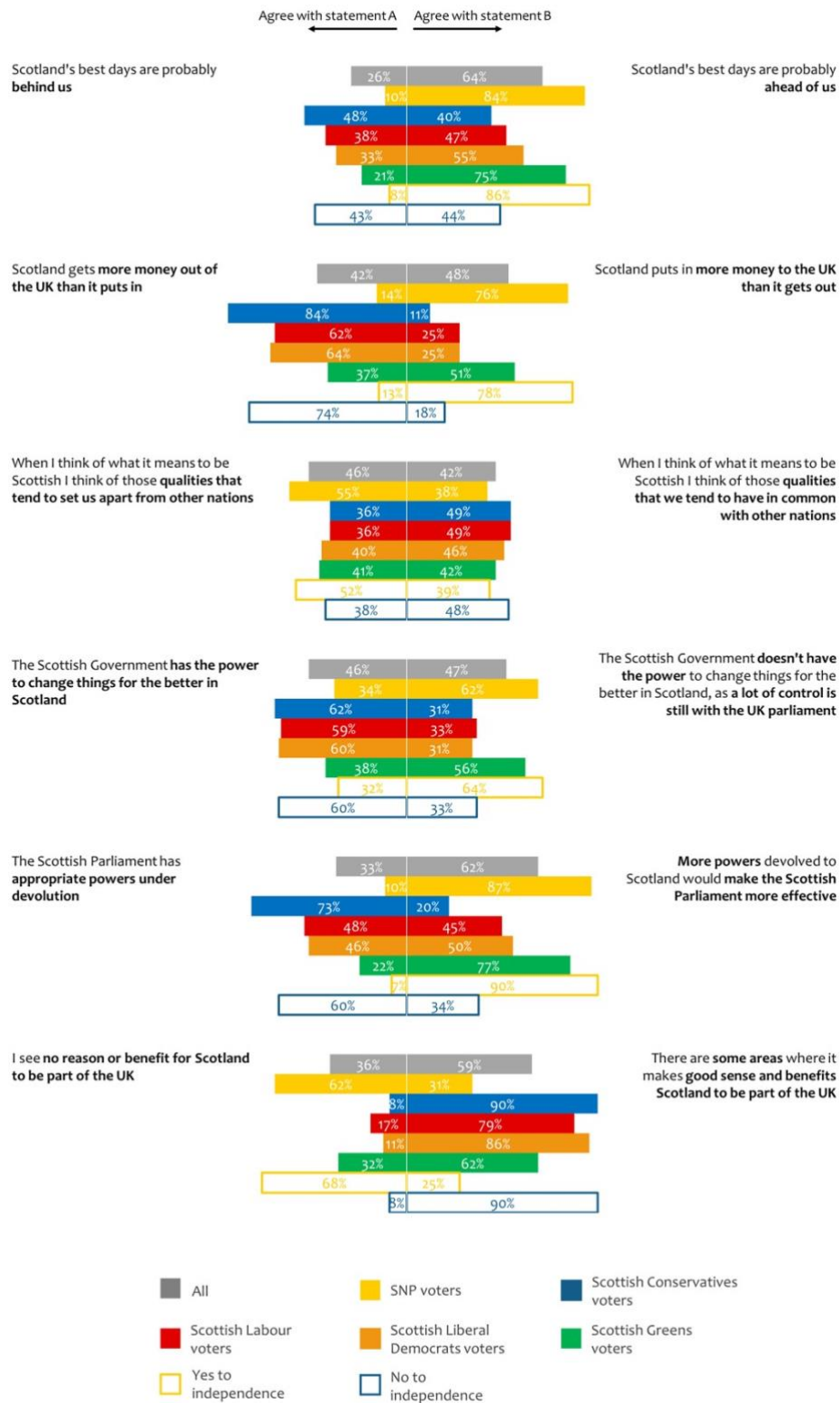
Nonetheless, other arguments were more divisive. The idea that Scotland got more money out of the union with the UK than it put in was rejected by SNP supporters by 76% to 14%. Scottish Conservatives supporters, by contrast, were much more inclined to believe Scotland got a better deal from remaining in the UK (by 84% to 11%). Other parties' supporters were more evenly divided, Green voters feeling Scotland paid in more by 51% to 37%; Labour and Liberal Democrat voters feeling that Scotland got the better deal from the UK by 62% to 25% and 64% to 25% respectively.

The picture was similar when it came to perceptions of whether the Scottish Government currently had the power to change Scotland for the better. Whilst 46% agreed that it did, 47% felt that the devolved government was limited by the concentration of power in Westminster. Supporters of the Scottish Conservatives (by 62% to 31%), Labour (by 59% to 33%) and the Liberal Democrats (by 60% to 31%) overwhelmingly felt that the Scottish Government had the power to change things for the better in Scotland whereas those of the SNP (by 62% to 34%) and the Greens (by 56% to 38%) thought that it didn't.

There was more nuance on whether more devolved powers would make the Scottish parliament more effective. Overall, 33% thought Holyrood had enough powers under devolution already, whereas 62% thought more powers would make it more effective. SNP supporters thought more powers would make it more effective (by 87% to 10%) and Scottish Conservatives supporters said that Holyrood had sufficient powers already (by 73% to 20%). However, views were more mixed among supporters of the other Unionist parties. Among Scottish Liberal Democrats and Scottish Labour supporters, 46% and 48% felt the Scottish Parliament already had enough powers, while 50% and 45% said more powers would make the Scottish Parliament more effective.

When asked whether they associated their Scottish identity with those qualities that set them apart from other nations or whether their Scottish identity was predicated on what they tended to have in common with other nations, voters were roughly equally divided.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each pair of opposing statements.



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How would Scotland change after independence?

We asked poll respondents whether they thought various things would change for the better or worse if Scotland were to become independent.

If Scotland were to become an independent country, do you think the following things would increase, decrease, or stay about the same?



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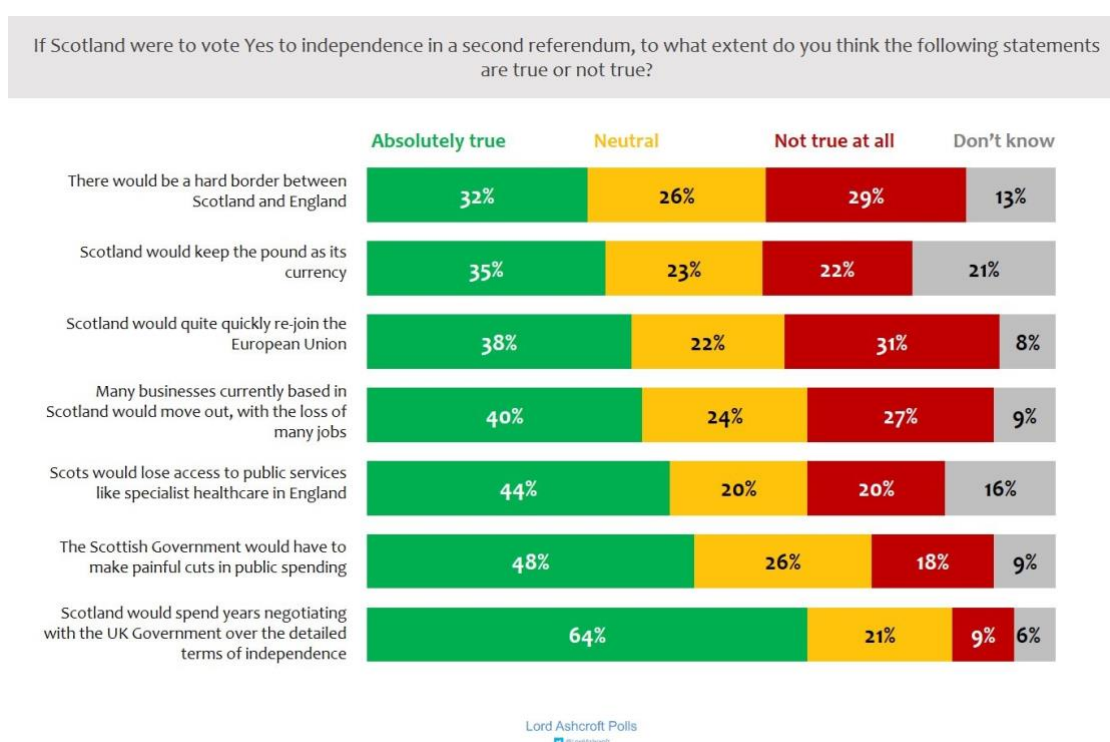
Notwithstanding SNP supporters, more Scots expected taxes, food prices, energy bills, immigration and unemployment to increase rather than decrease, and that investment in Scotland by UK-based businesses and the overall standard of living in Scotland would decline rather than rise. Scotland's ability to deal with a future financial crisis or handle another pandemic was also perceived to be weakened by a departure from the UK by many outside SNP supporters, confirming the sentiment we heard from some participants in our focus groups that people

wanted independence, but that it was not yet viable in today's economic climate given the pandemic and the fallout of Brexit.

Independence supporters expected multiple benefits, however. SNP and Scottish Greens supporters on the whole believed that equality, tourism, educational attainment and opportunities for young people in Scotland would improve under independent rule, alongside an increased standing on the world stage and better opportunities for international trade. Nonetheless, some did voice concerns in our focus groups around the actual delivery of some of the promises made around independence:

“One of the things about independence that scares me is that I’m hearing a lot of promises but it’s the delivering of them that’s going to be the big issue. Where’s the money going to come from? We can’t live off the oil and gas promise for ever and ever. It’s a big concern for me, that.”

Supporters of all other parties were more likely to believe that these things would all be jeopardised by independence, particularly Scottish Conservatives supporters who found it hard to identify any benefit in a separation from the UK.

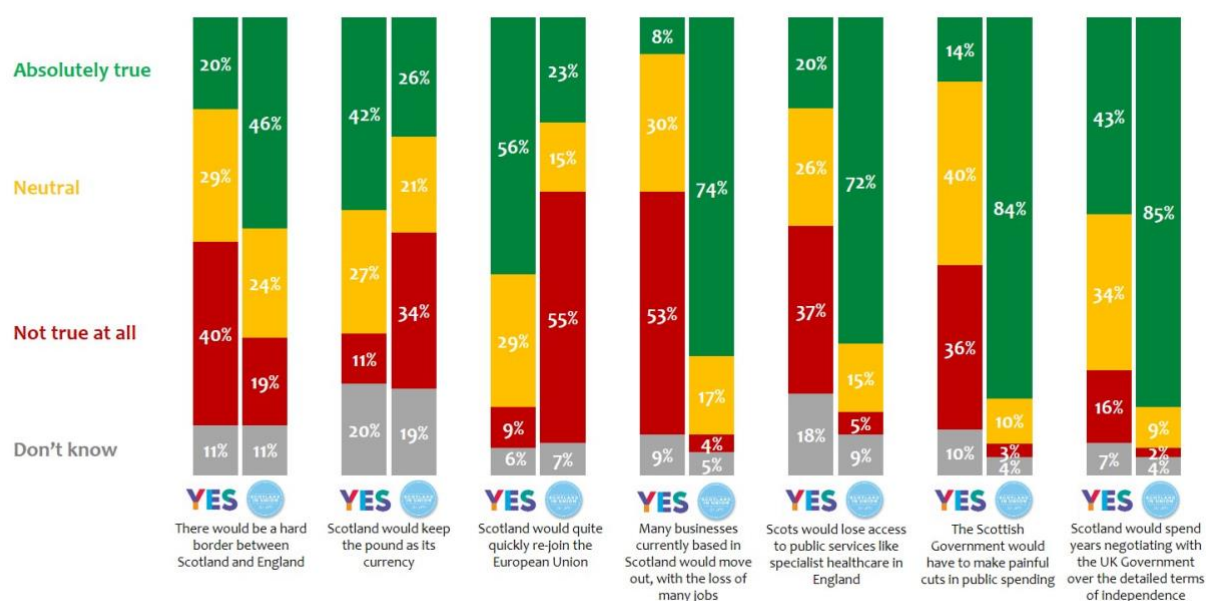


We also asked respondents whether they believed a series of statements would be true or false were Scotland to vote yes to independence in a second referendum. Regardless of partisanship, many believed that Scotland would spend years negotiating the detailed terms of independence. Scottish Conservatives were predictably the most pessimistic about independence, especially about the economic consequences. 86% of Conservatives supporters agreed that the Scottish Government would have to make painful cuts in public spending and 81% believed that many businesses currently based in Scotland would move out, causing significant job losses.

Scottish Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters likewise had their doubts about independence, more often than not believing that there would be a hard border between England and Scotland and that Scots would lose access to public services like healthcare in England.

On the other hand, SNP and Scottish Greens supporters were across the board much more optimistic about independence, including about the potential for Scotland to re-join the European Union were Scotland to become its own state.

If Scotland were to vote Yes to independence in a second referendum, to what extent do you think the following statements are true or not true?
[Yes vs No to Scottish independence]



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