



University
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Centre for
Public Policy

The 2026 Election: What it means for the future of Scotland and your work

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Introduction to the Centre

CPP Mission: foster collaboration between the research and policy community, by sharing evidence, nurturing skills, creating space for fresh thinking and preparing the next generation of policymakers

Activities/Outputs:

- Research & analysis
- Spotlight Podcast
- Connecting policy practitioners to research expertise
- Policy Lab: challenge-led, solution-oriented
- Executive Education
- Policy Evaluation Hub



Our plan for the next 60 mins

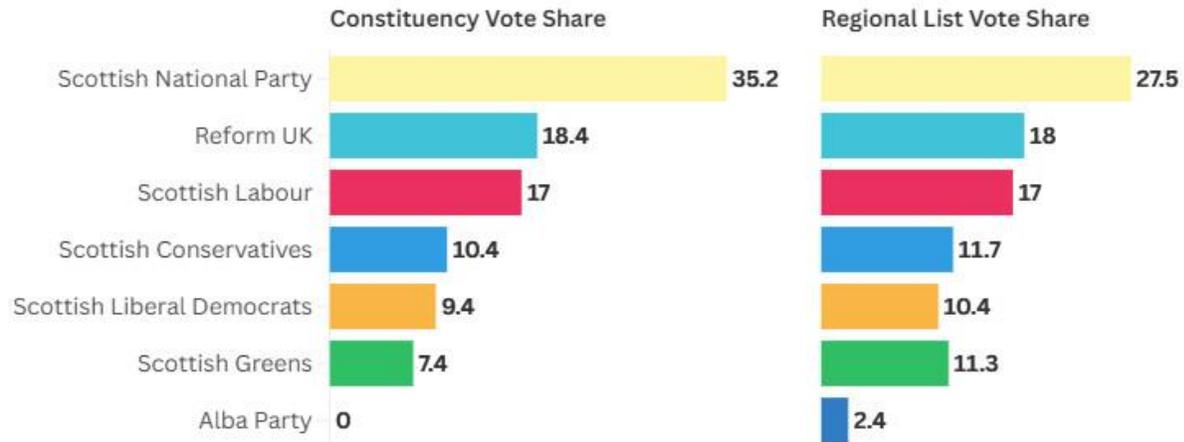
We will:

- Walk you through the latest Scottish Parliament polling
- Explain what will happen after polls close and in the immediate days after
- Explore what's in the inbox of the new Government, whatever shape it takes.
- ... and answer your questions!



The SNP are on course to remain the largest party.

Scottish Parliament Voting Intention



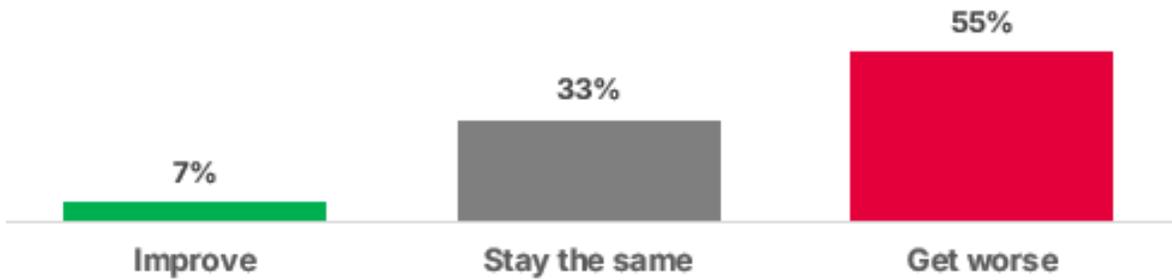
Source: LOESS regressions of all Scottish Parliament polling



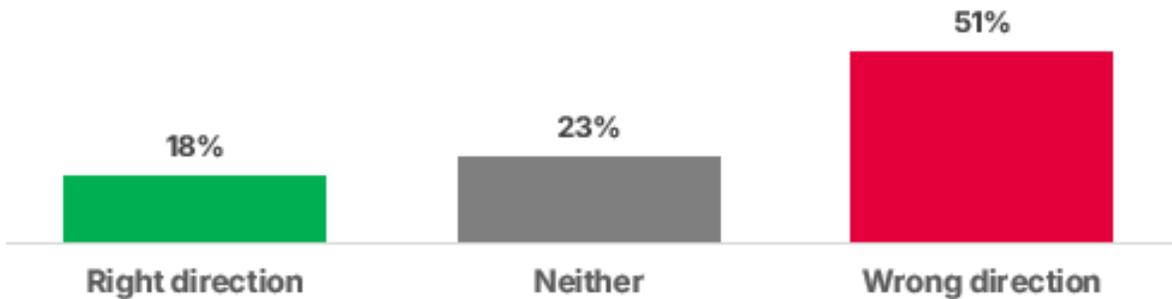
Photo by Phil Hearing on Unsplash

Despite the pessimistic mood of the nation.

In the next year, the general economic condition of Scotland will...



Things in Scotland are heading in the...

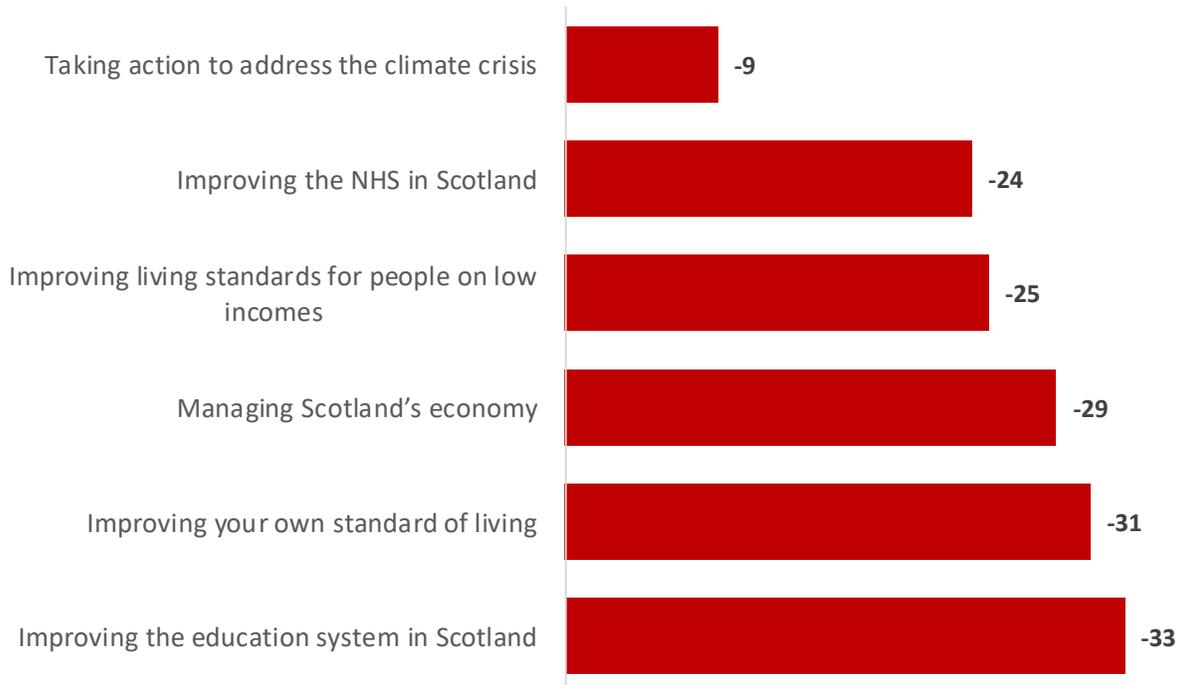


Source: Ipsos Scotland Political Monitor, December 2025



And dissatisfaction with the Scottish Government

Scottish Government net approval



Source: Ipsos Scotland Political Monitor, September 2025

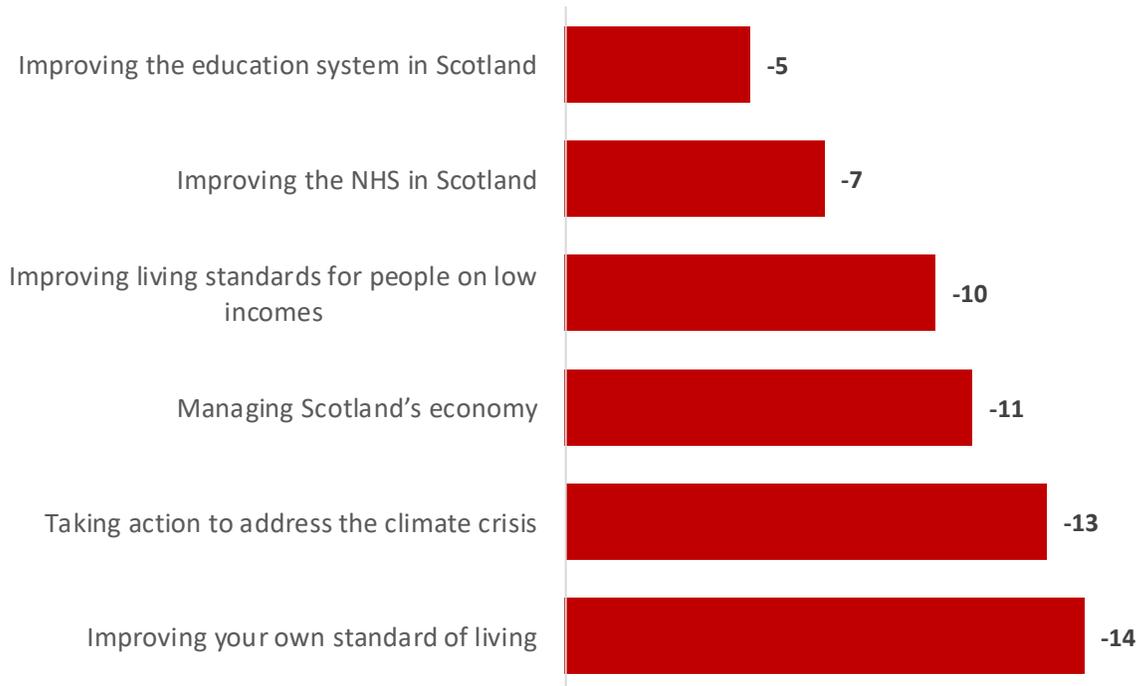


Photo by Chris Flexen on Unsplash

Why?

Scots don't believe that Scottish Labour would do any better.

Net 'A Scottish Labour government would do a better job'



Source: Ipsos Scotland Political Monitor, September 2025

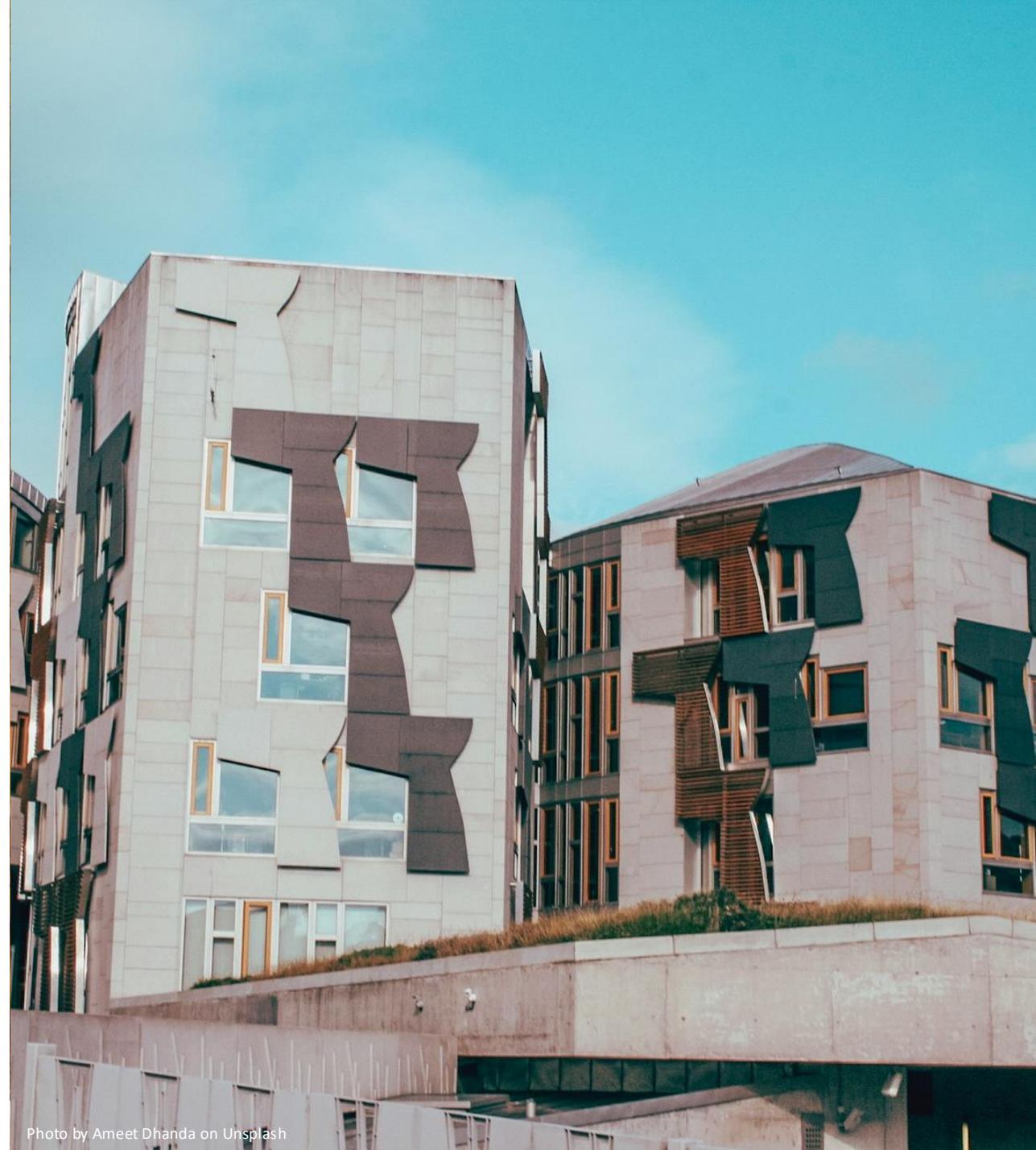
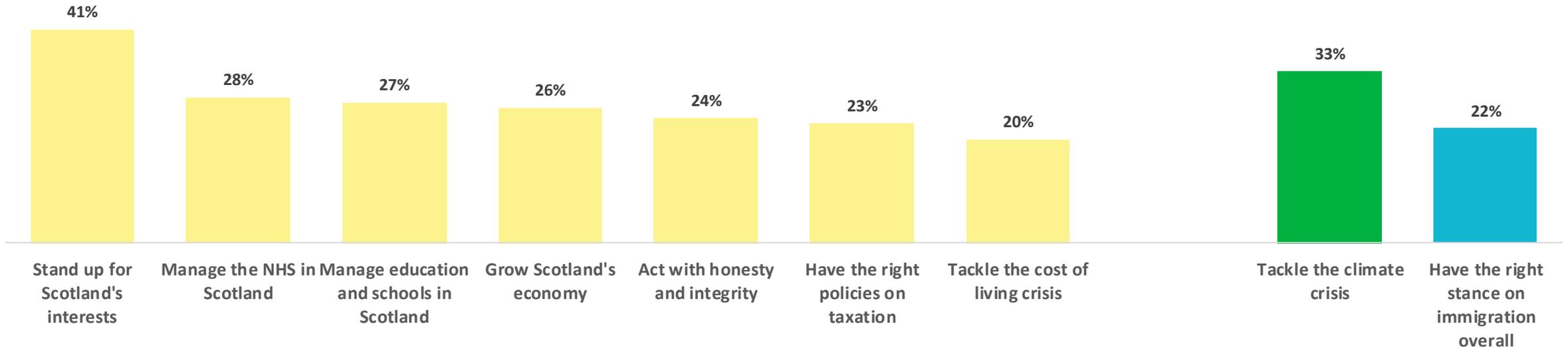


Photo by Ameet Dhanda on Unsplash

Despite their perceived poor performance, the SNP are still Scotland's most trusted party...

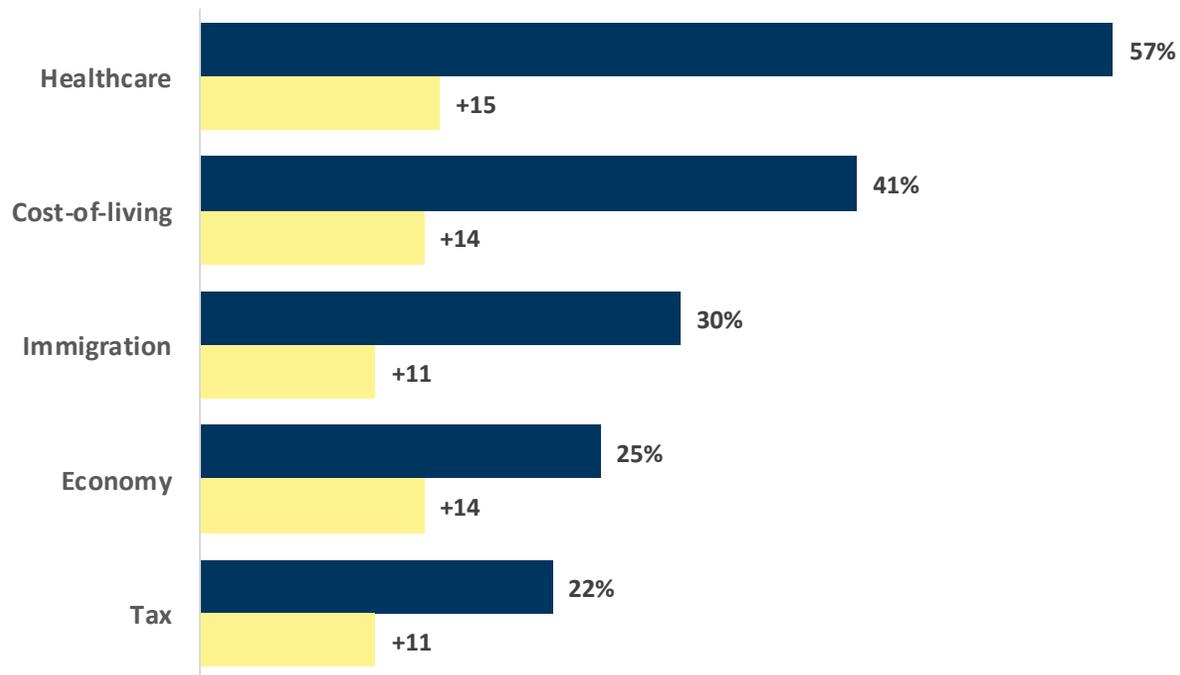
Most trusted party by issue area...



...including on most Scots' top issues.

SNP lead over Labour by issue

■ Issue importance ■ SNP lead over Labour

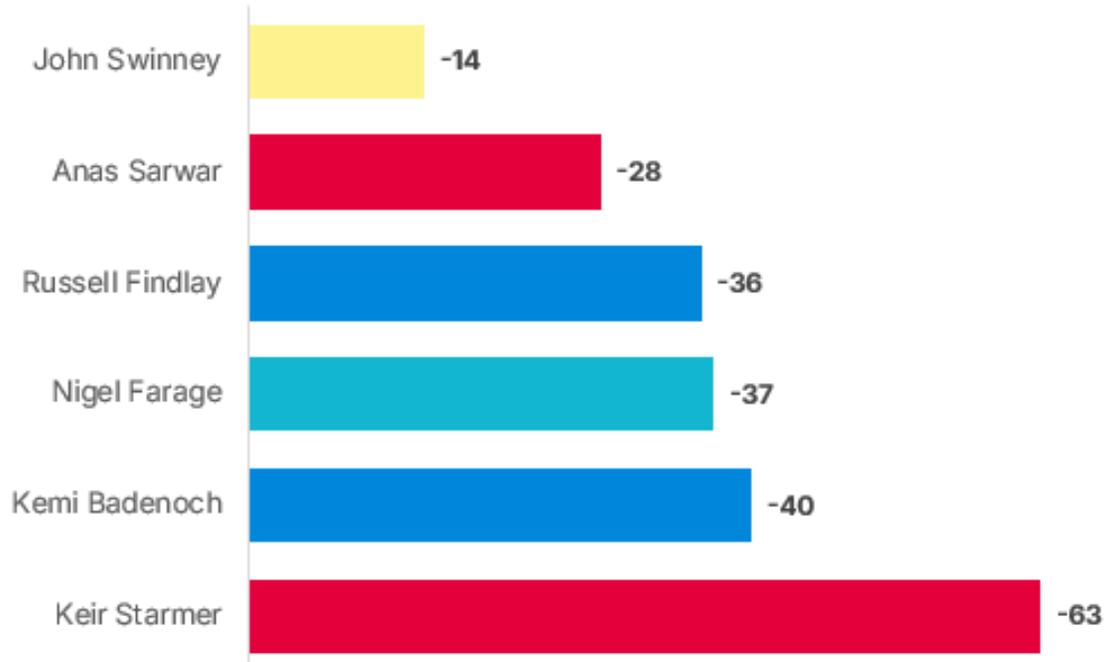


Source: Ipsos Scotland Political Monitor, December 2025



And John Swinney is Scotland's least unpopular politician.

Net satisfaction



Source: Ipsos Scotland Political Monitor, December 2025

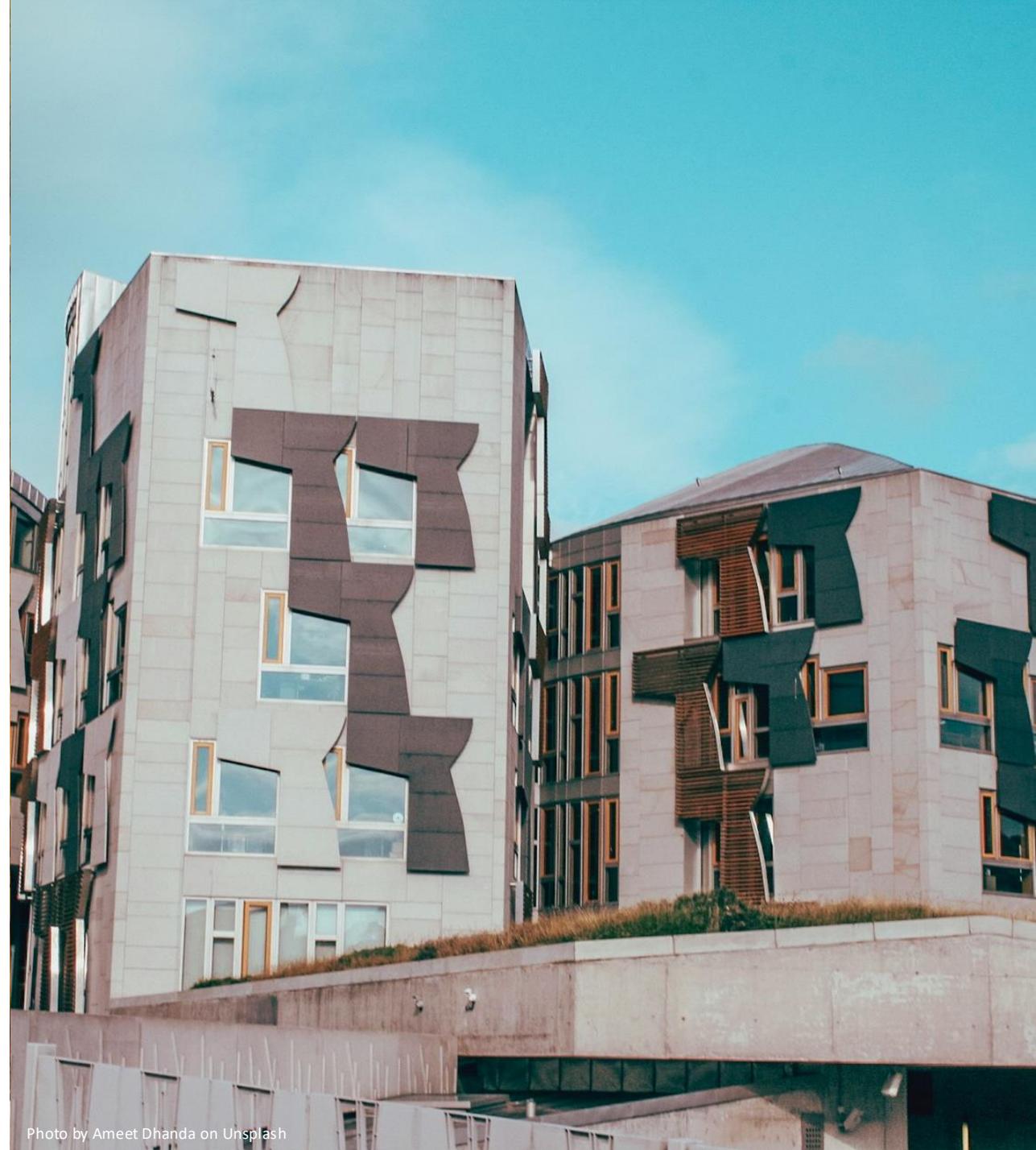
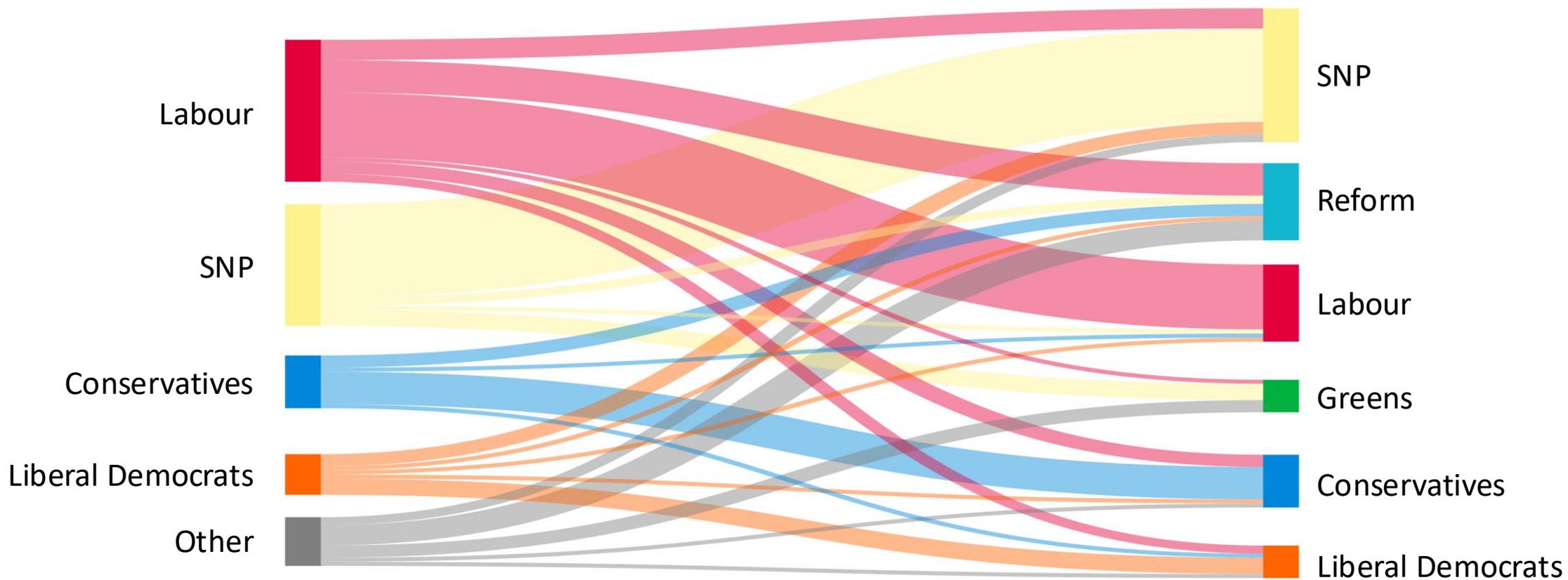


Photo by Ameet Dhanda on Unsplash

Labour's 2024 coalition has fragmented, losing voters on both left and right.



7 May - Polls close

Then what....?

No overnight count. No exit poll. Counting set to begin 9am Friday.

First result expect to be Orkney or Cambuslang & Rutherglen

All 73 constituencies then the 8 regional lists of 7 MSPs. Likely early evening result.

65 MSPs is the magic number

Best guess: MSPs sworn in Thursday 14th May. First Minister election 19th May, Cabinet 20th May

- That's if result is clear...



Photo: Kezia Dugdale

How do you become FM?

If the result is unclear then the timetable may be delayed by a) wrangling over votes for first minister and b) coalition negotiations.

Any MSP can be nominated for first minister. To date, the leader of the biggest party in Holyrood has always become first minister.

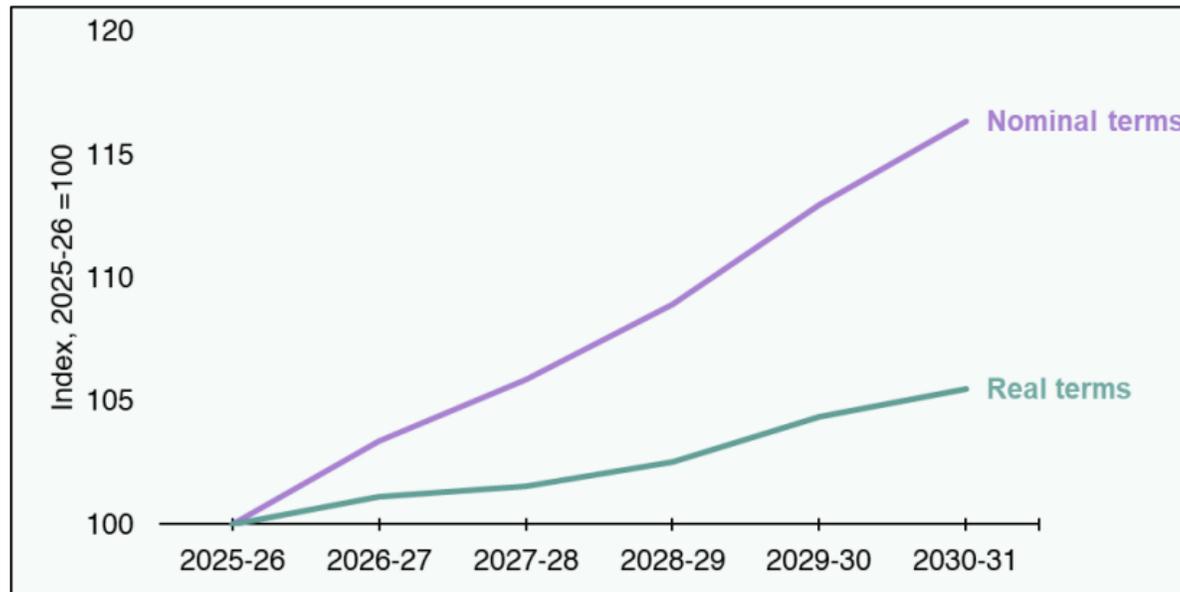
If there are two candidates, the winner needs a simple majority of votes. If there are more than two candidates the MSP with the fewest votes is eliminated and another vote is held until one candidate has received more votes than everyone else combined.



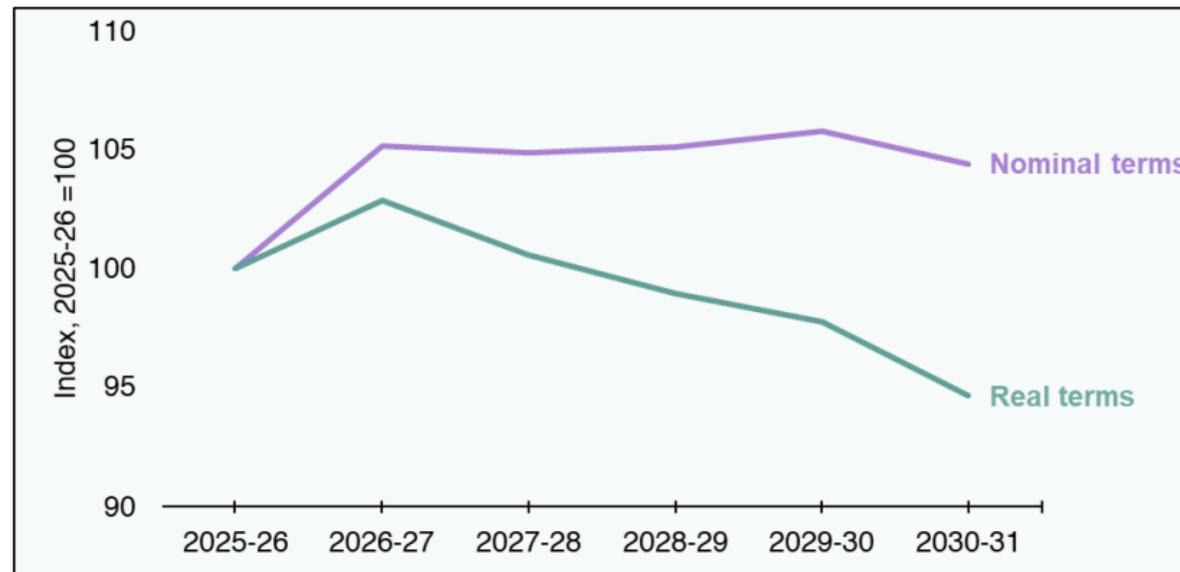
What's in the Inbox?



Resource funding grows over time, but growth is lower after adjusting for inflation



Capital funding grows in 2026-27 but remains flat over the forecast and is falling in real terms



Reset Moment?

- Complex challenges need new approaches
- Evaluate, learn, stop doing things that don't work
- Focus on ambitious strategic goals and delivery – not everything can be a priority
- Complex challenges need collaborative delivery



What does it mean for you?

- Highest turnover of MSPs in devolution history > opportunities and challenges.
- Incredibly tight fiscal backdrop – cost-based demands may get little traction.
- See the system, not the sector – multi-dimensional nature of policy challenges
- Collaboration and co-production of solutions
- Reset opportunity for government relationship with voluntary sector



Q&A?





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