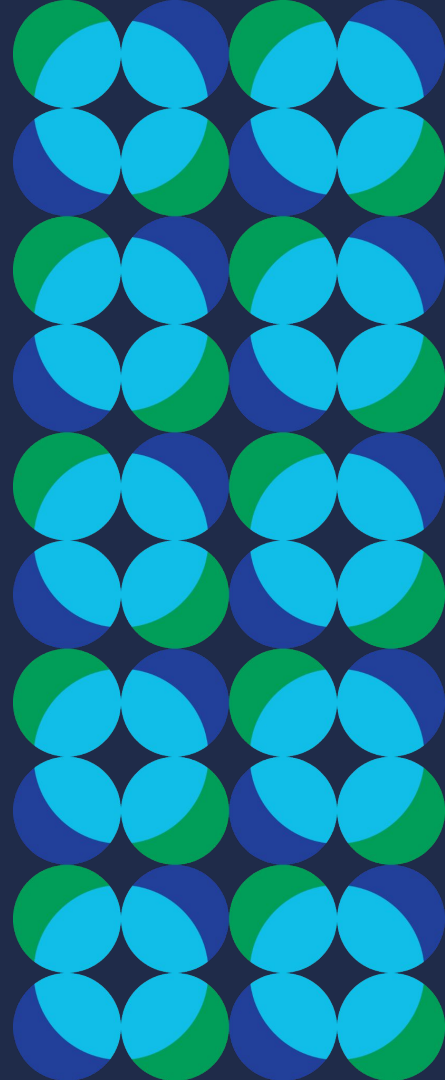




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Scotland in the World

April 2026



Key takeaways



Scots think their country has a far better reputation globally than the UK does



A majority think that Scotland should have its own voice on global issues, separate from the UK's



Relations with the EU are a key driver behind wanting to have a distinct foreign policy



Scots are less likely than other Britons to want aid spending to be cut



The public in Scotland are more receptive to arguments around aid being mutually beneficial



46 per cent of Scots think the Scottish government should maintain or increase its aid spending in face of Westminster cuts

Introducing the seven segments of Britain



**Progressive
Activists**



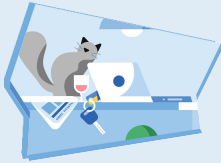
...an outspoken group that is politically engaged and globally minded, championing social justice but feeling alienated from mainstream politics

**Incrementalist
Left**



...a group that leans left and trusts institutions, often stepping back from the news and avoiding politically fraught debates

**Established
Liberals**



... a prosperous group that is confident in institutions, values expertise, and believes the system broadly works

**Sceptical
Scrollers**



...a disengaged group that has lost trust in mainstream institutions and increasingly looks online for sources of truth

**Rooted
Patriots**



...a patriotic group that feels overlooked by elites and wants leaders with common sense to protect local identity

**Traditional
Conservatives**

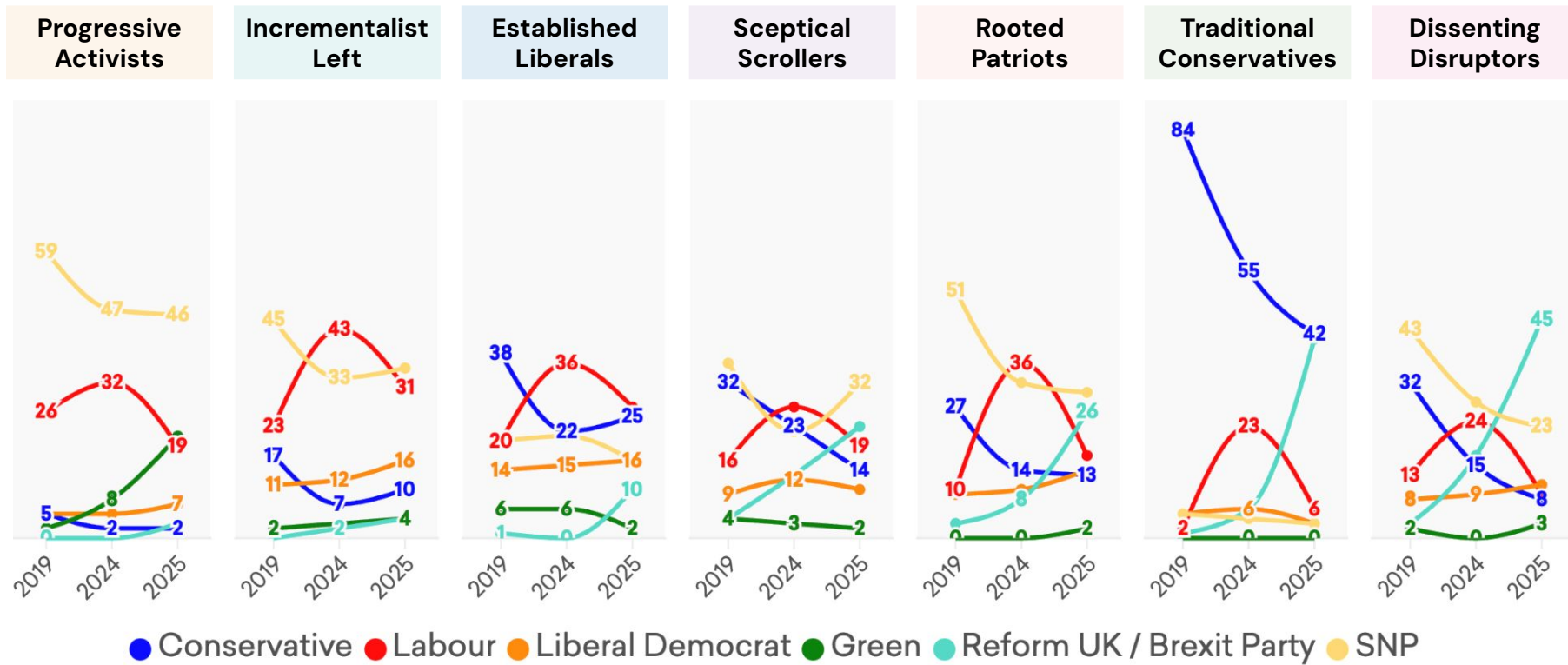


... a nostalgic group that respects tradition, authority and personal responsibility, while remaining sceptical of rapid change

**Dissenting
Disruptors**



... a frustrated group that craves radical change and backs strong leaders who promise to shake up a broken system



Starting points on global issues



Scots are less likely than other Britons to see other countries as enemies

Scots are less likely than other Britons to consider other countries to be enemies, especially countries in the EU. Of those tested, only China, Iran and Russia are more likely to be considered enemies than allies.

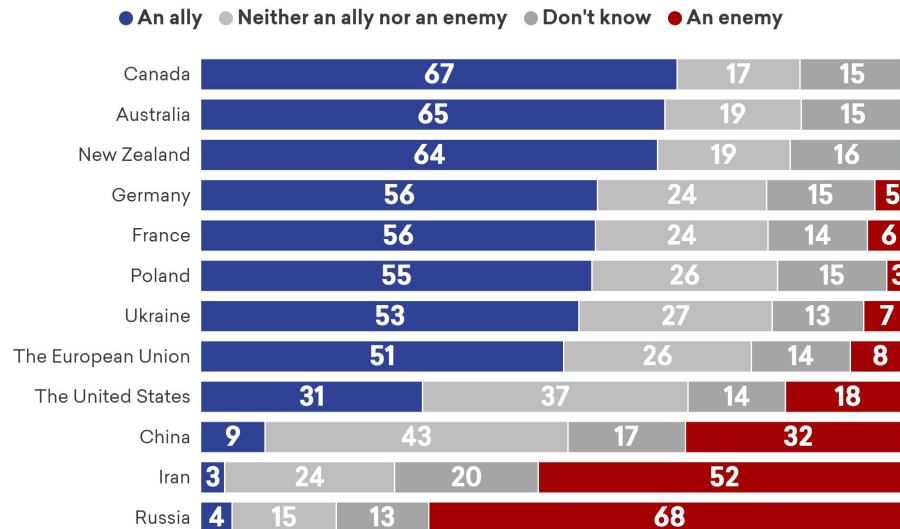
However, **Scots are less sure about the United States**. Only 31 per cent see them as an ally, compared to 38 per cent of Britons overall.

Watching how Starmer dealt with Trump in that situation [around Ukraine] was quite difficult for people in Scotland. I don't think... if it was the First Minister in Scotland, they would've treated Trump quite the same way.

Amanda, 37, Glasgow, Incrementalist Left

The majority of Scots see Ukraine, CANZUK and EU countries as allies, but are not as sure about the United States

Overall, do you think the following countries and organisations are allies or enemies of the UK, or neither?



Scots diverge from the rest of Britain on EU relations

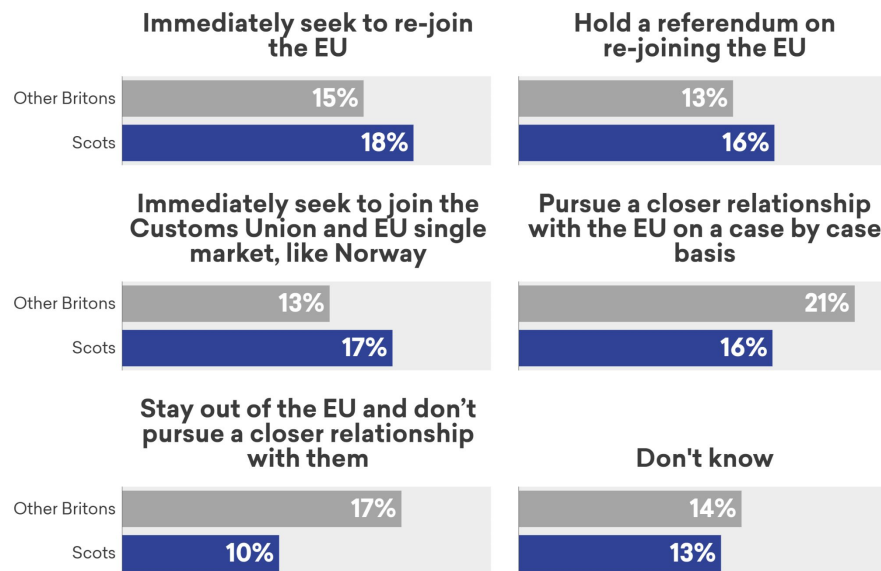
One key difference between Scots and other Britons is **how close they want to be to the EU** – when asked to pick their ideal policy, the public in Scotland are more likely than other Britons to want to either rejoin, have a second referendum to rejoin, or try to join the customs union and single market. **Only 10 per cent of Scots think the best policy would be to stay out of the EU** and not pursue any closer ties – compared to 17 per cent of other Britons.

Brexit was kind of a really big torture, because you have the vast majority of people in Scotland, I think you had were quite clear that they wanted to remain part of the European Union... but is forced out of that institution because of the Westminster establishment.

Gordon, 37, Paisley, Rooted Patriot

Scots are more in favour of closer relations with, or rejoining the EU

Which of the following would be your ideal policy on the EU?



Scotland's reputation



Scots think the rest of the world sees them very positively

The public in Scotland see their own country in a positive light – **humane, compassionate, peaceful, generous, and globally-minded.**

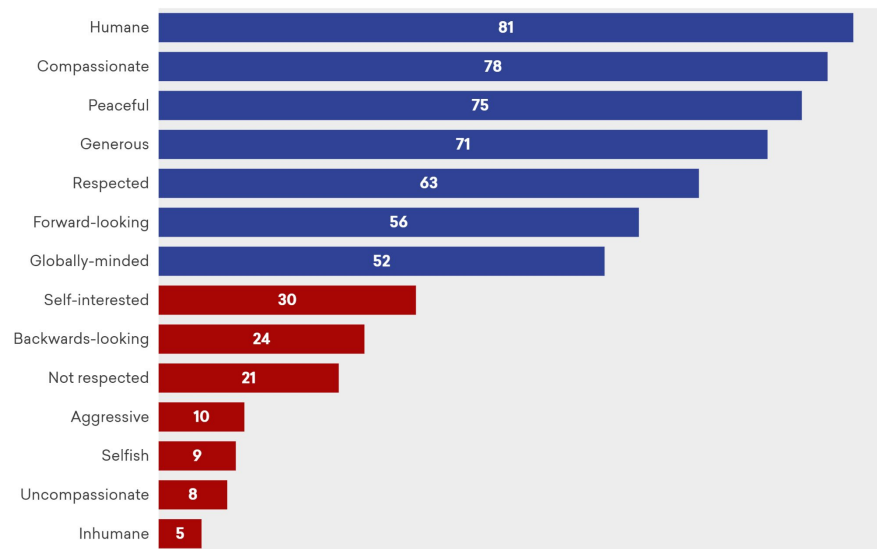
In focus group discussions, Scots feel that the rest of the world thinks of them as friendly and welcoming – even, as some pointed out, if this might be a stereotype.

I dunno if they get it from films or whatever, but yeah people abroad do seem to assume we're all, I dunno, really friendly and happy and jolly and whatnot.

Natasha, 39, Inverness, Rooted Patriot

Scots overwhelmingly think their country is compassionate, humane, peaceful and generous

Would you say that Scotland is...



Scots think they have a better reputation than the UK as a whole

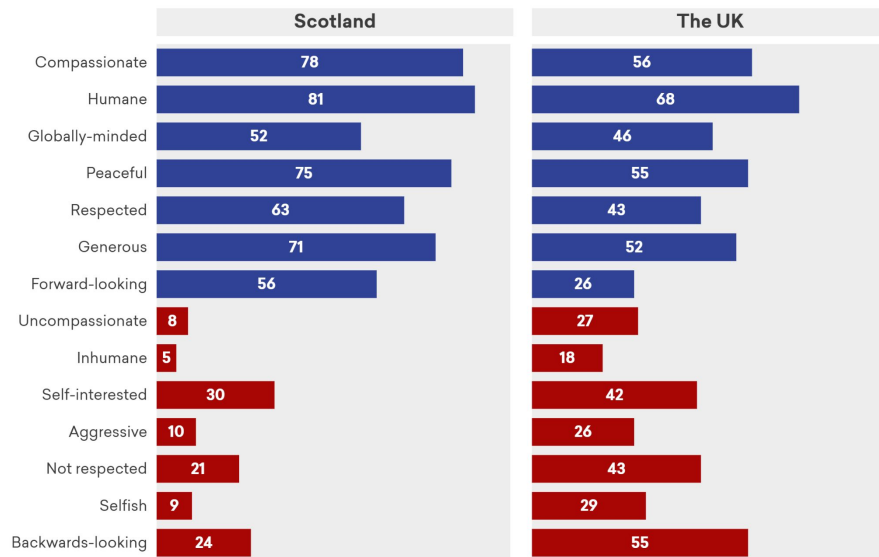
The public in Scotland are significantly more likely to describe their country as **compassionate, generous and forward-looking** than they would the UK as a whole. In focus groups, participants told us they prefer to introduce themselves as Scottish rather than British when meeting people abroad, as they believe that (rightly or wrongly) **people from other countries assume Scots to be nicer** than people from England.

I've been in France a lot of times and, the minute you say you're Scottish rather than English, it's almost to the point of being rude because one minute they've got a face on them like a wet weekend, and when you say you're Scottish, their face lights up.

John, 66, Bathgate, Incrementalist Left

Scots tend to think that Scotland is perceived far better by the rest of the world than the UK is

Would you say that _____ is...



Belief that the UK's reputation has fallen, while Scotland's is unchanged

While Scots believe that their country is perceived positively by the rest of the world, they are more likely to think the opposite for the UK overall. 61 per cent of Scots also say that the UK's reputation has declined in recent years. In focus groups, **Brexit looms large** as a major cause of this perceived collapse in the UK's reputation abroad.

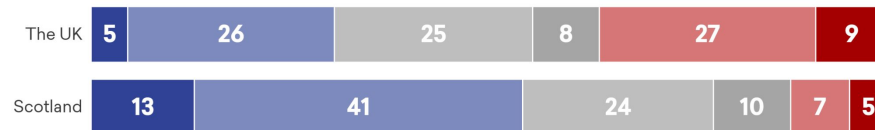
I go to Spain quite regularly... and they're quite curious. They bring up Brexit and the whole situation quite frequently, and still asking those same questions about why, and not really understanding it and clearly getting the difference between Scotland and England.

Karen, 64, Glasgow, Incrementalist Left

Scots think they are perceived much better than the UK

How do you think _____ is perceived by the rest of the world?

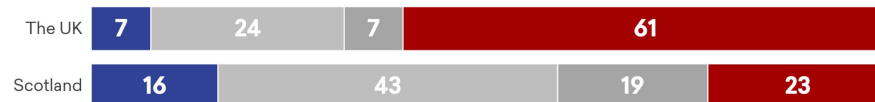
● Very positively
 ● Somewhat positively
 ● Neither positively nor negatively
 ● Don't know
 ● Somewhat negatively
 ● Very negatively



...and that while the UK's reputation has worsened in recent years, Scotland's has largely stayed the same

Do you think _____'s international reputation has improved, worsened, or stayed the same in recent years?

● Improved
 ● Stayed the same
 ● Don't know
 ● Worsened



**Scotland's own
voice**



Scots tend to think Scotland lacks a global voice

Scots tend to say that Scotland does not have its own voice in the world, and Reform supporters are especially unlikely to think that it has its own voice.

However **most Scots (53 per cent) think Scotland's voice should stand apart from that of the UK as a whole.**

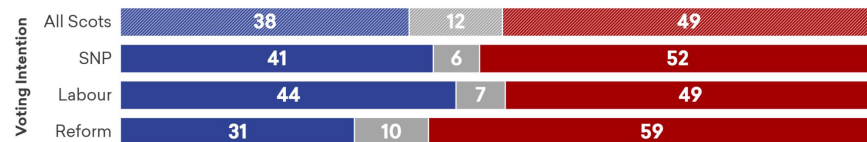
I think that at an international level we don't have much of a voice, because that will be the voice of Westminster and that will be predominantly an English voice. And then even to bring it to a UK level, I wouldn't say that Scotland has much voice at all. Again, predominantly English.

Catriona, 29, Glasgow, Incrementalist Left

Most SNP and Reform supporters think that Scotland does not have its own voice in the world

Which of the following is closest to your view?

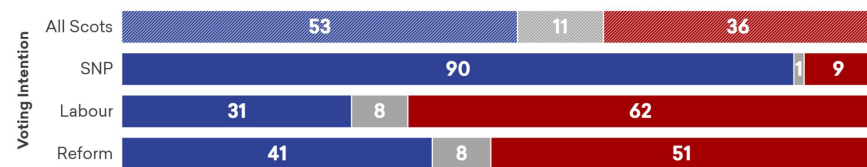
- Scotland has its own voice in the world
- Don't know
- Scotland does not have its own voice in the world



...but do not agree on whether it should have one separate from the UK

Which of the following is closest to your view?

- Scotland should have its own voice, separate from the UK
- Don't know
- Scotland's voice should mainly be part of the UK's voice



Most want Scotland to have its own voice in the world

The question of whether Scotland should have its own voice is inevitably wrapped up in the broader constitutional debate.

There is a **clear divide between the ideologically most progressive and most conservative segments:**

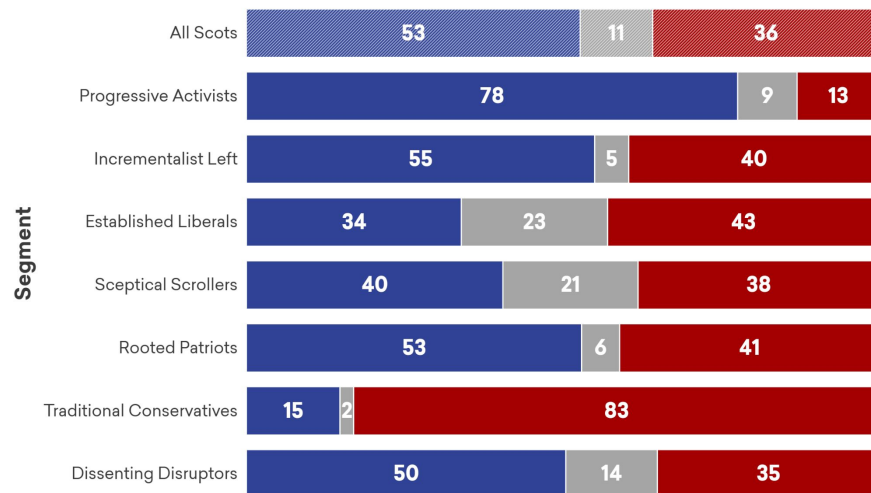
Progressive Activists overwhelmingly believe that Scotland should have its own voice separate from the UK, while Traditional Conservatives strongly believe the opposite.

However, this should not be confused for a general polarisation – **most segments are more balanced on the issue**, with slight majorities of the Incrementalist Left, Rooted Patriots and even Dissenting Disruptors being in favour of Scotland having its own voice.

Progressive segments favour Scotland having its own voice, but Traditional Conservatives especially prefer it to be part of the UK's

Which of the following is closest to your view?

- Scotland should have its own voice, separate from the UK
- Don't know
- Scotland's voice should mainly be part of the UK's voice



Doubts over whether Scotland ought to be more outspoken, or what difference it will make

Nobody's taken a blind bit of difference what John Swinney thinks of Gaza or whatever, all these sort of things. We are not a player in the world stage, we don't have any weight. It's just to make the politicians there feel important.

Richard, 58, East Renfrewshire, Rooted Patriot

When I think about how I want my voice to be heard, I don't know what the right system is. I know the current system isn't working, but I don't know what that right system is to get moving forward. We are, in the end, quite a small nation... we're quite a small nation, similar to Scandinavian countries, so how much do we expect to get of an outreach, what do we want our voice to mean?

Daniel, 28, East Renfrewshire, Incrementalist Left

I think Scotland, whether independent or not, the first responsibility of its government should be to look after its own internal affairs, its own citizens and for politicians to speak. I mean don't get me wrong... if it's some humanitarian crisis somewhere for example, then it's only appropriate that empathy should be shown for what's going on across the world because we're not in isolation from the rest of humanity. But having said that, especially when you're a small country like Scotland that has no independent military force and has no actual geopolitical influence whatsoever, we're a small country, we should just focus on ourselves primarily and doing our best to promote our own interests on a global stage. It is pretentious and arrogant for politicians to speak on global issues that they can have no actual impact and have no relevance.

Gordon, 37, Paisley, Rooted Patriot

Many think Scotland could make the world a better place

Though many Scots are doubtful that Scotland taking on a bigger role in international affairs could make a difference on the world stage (42 per cent), **just as many (43 per cent) think that they could make the world a better place.**

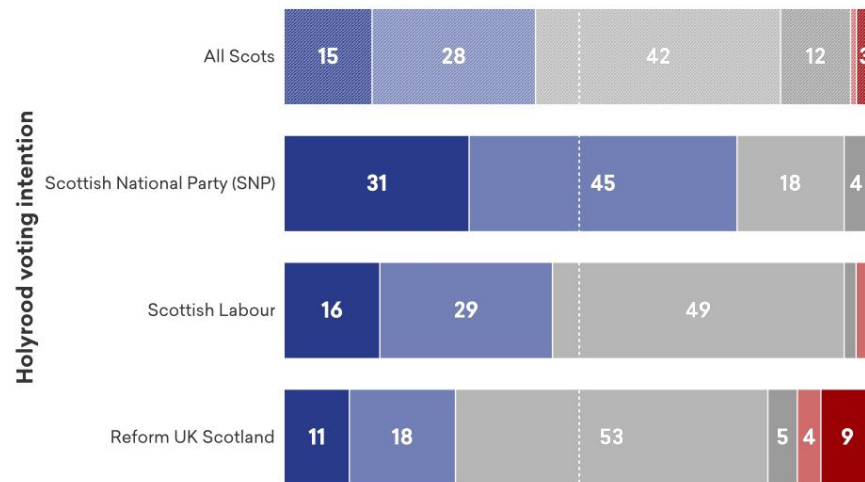
SNP supporters are especially more likely to think that Scotland taking on a bigger role would make the world a somewhat or much better place (76 per cent).

No voter group thinks that Scotland would make the world a worse place, but rather that Scotland would be unable to make a real difference.

Scots tend to think their government taking a bigger role globally would make the world a better place

If Scotland took on a bigger role in international affairs, do you think it would:

- Make the world a much better place
- Make the world a slightly better place
- Make no real difference
- Don't know
- Make the world a slightly worse place
- Make the world a much worse place



Navigating the world without Westminster



Scots are divided on whether they could be more influential without Westminster

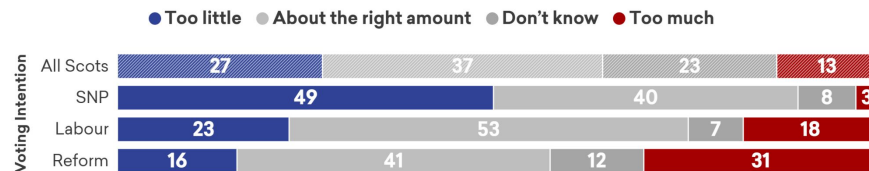
Party politics and opinions on independence greatly affect how Scots feel about what they could achieve on the world stage.

Half of SNP voters – and a quarter of Scots overall – think that Scotland is not doing enough internationally. Reform supporters lean in the opposite direction, with a third thinking Scotland is doing too much and only 16 per cent believing it could be doing more.

Fundamentally, Scots are unsure whether acting alone will give them more influence (38 per cent) vs. acting globally as part of the UK (43 per cent). SNP supporters favour the former; Labour and Reform supporters the latter.

Scots either think they are doing the right amount or not enough internationally

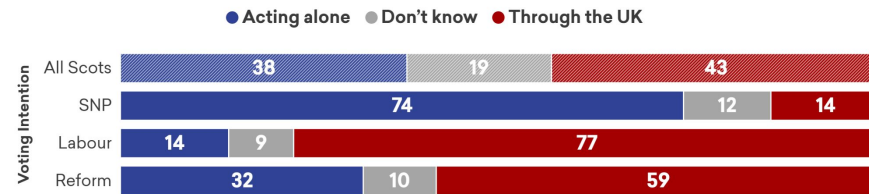
Overall, do you think Scotland currently does too much, too little, or about the right amount internationally?

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...but their views on the constitutional question inform whether they think Scotland could be more influential without the UK

Which of the following is closest to your view? Scotland would have more global influence...

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Scots think Holyrood should be challenging Westminster publicly on global issues

Even if Scots have reservations about how much influence they can hope to have, **most still believe it is right that the Scottish Government feels empowered to take a different stance on global issues to Westminster.**

Even Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors, who may feel less represented by the SNP's stances on Gaza and immigration, still tend to think it's better for their government to speak out.

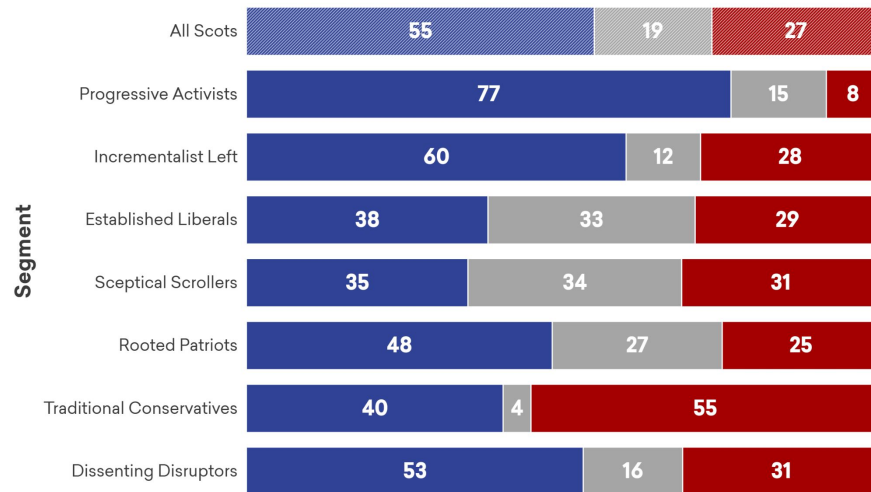
For me, Scotland have taken a very individual stance, which is quite refreshing, and they've not gone by the narrative, they've spoken up where they felt they've needed to speak up about the things that are happening in, for example, Gaza

Jim, 55, Livingston, Incrementalist Left

Most Scots think the Scottish Government should be free to publicly challenge Westminster on global issues

Which of the following is closest to your view?

- It is better for Scotland to publicly challenge Westminster on global issues
- It is better for Scotland to avoid public disagreement with Westminster
- Don't know



Scots have different goals for Scottish foreign policy

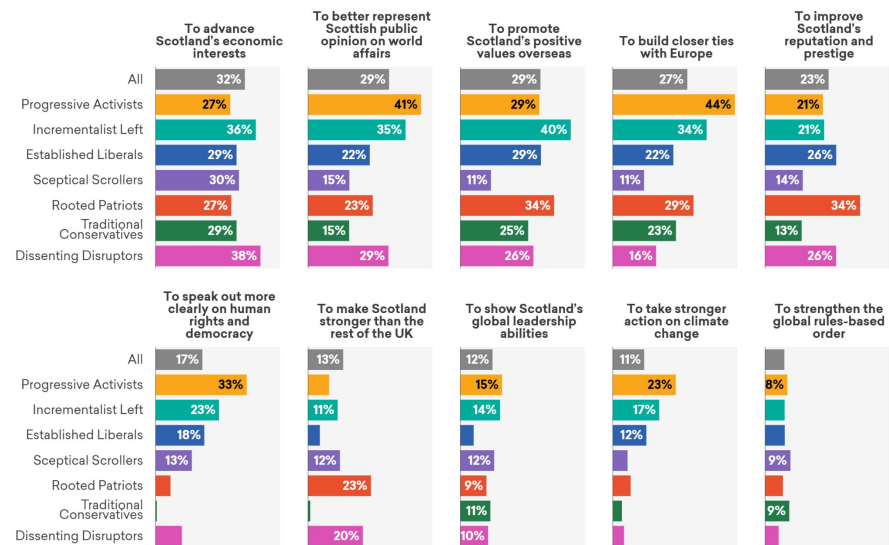
All segments think that advancing Scotland's economic interests are a strong reason to take different stances to Westminster on global issues, but otherwise **the segments have different reasons for Scotland to have a global voice separate from the UK's**. Progressive Activists want to build closer ties to the EU; Rooted Patriots want to improve Scotland's reputation and prestige; and the Incrementalist Left want to promote Scotland's positive values overseas.

I think a lot of [my university friends] felt it resonated with them a lot more and it kind of makes them almost want to stay here instead of moving back down to England because they prefer the values of the Scottish people and the values that the government like to express.

Catriona, 29, Glasgow, Incrementalist Left

Aside from advancing Scotland's economic interests, Scots have different priorities for their foreign policy

What are the main reasons you might want Scotland to take different positions on global issues than the rest of the UK does? Select your top 3.



On dealing with China and the US, Scots lean towards working via the UK

In focus group discussions, Scots are keenly aware of their country's size, and this informs how they want to approach the world's great powers.

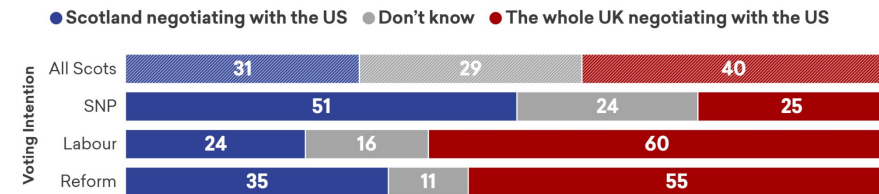
With China, most of the public in Scotland favour standing behind the UK. Scots tend to feel the same with regards to Trump, albeit to a lesser extent.

I don't think anyone would have any objections in anything relating to trade. So, Trump was in Scotland last year, and it was fully right that we met with him and tried to influence on whisky, etc, don't have a problem with that in any way, shape or form. Try to boost our own tourist industry, etc, because that directly benefits the economy within Scotland.

Richard, 58, East Renfrewshire, Rooted Patriot

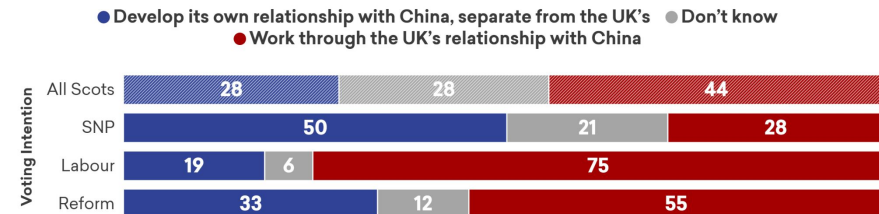
Scots are split on how best to negotiate with Trump

When thinking about maintaining good relations with the United States led by Donald Trump, do you think Scotland would get a better deal from:



...and how to approach China

Thinking about relations with China, do you think Scotland should:



International development



Scots tend to think that less should be spent on aid, but are not as firm in this view as other Britons

Similar to findings from Britain-wide polling, many Scots tend to think that the UK should be spending less on international aid.

However, this view is not held as strongly as it seems to be in the rest of Britain – the median Scottish voter thinks aid should be maintained, while the median Briton overall thinks it should be cut.

In focus group discussions, few were enthusiastic about cutting funding for aid, and some expressed regret that Scotland couldn't be doing more.

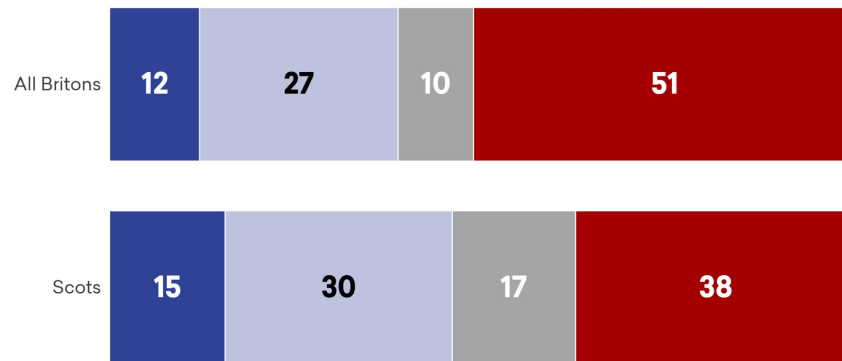
Once you've got the money, help anybody and everybody you can, when you have excess money. But when you have your own people starving, sleeping in the streets, fix your own country, then help everybody else. Sorry, that sounds really bad.

Natasha, 39, Inverness, Rooted Patriot

A majority of Britons think the UK should spend less on international aid, while 4 in 10 Scots think the same

Do you think the UK government should spend more, less or the same as we do now on international aid?

- The UK should spend more on international aid
- The UK should keep spending about the same on international aid
- Don't know
- The UK should spend less on international aid



46 per cent of Scots think the Scottish government should maintain or increase its aid spending in face of Westminster cuts

In light of Westminster reducing its international aid spending, the Scottish public are split: 37 per cent think Holyrood should follow suit, while 35 want to maintain spending at current levels. **However, there is little enthusiasm for Scotland to fill any aid spending gap left by Westminster** – only 11 per cent would support this.

Scottish Labour voters are the most likely to group to believe the Scottish government should increase its aid budget in the face of Westminster cuts – though they tend to say the Scottish aid budget should be kept the same.

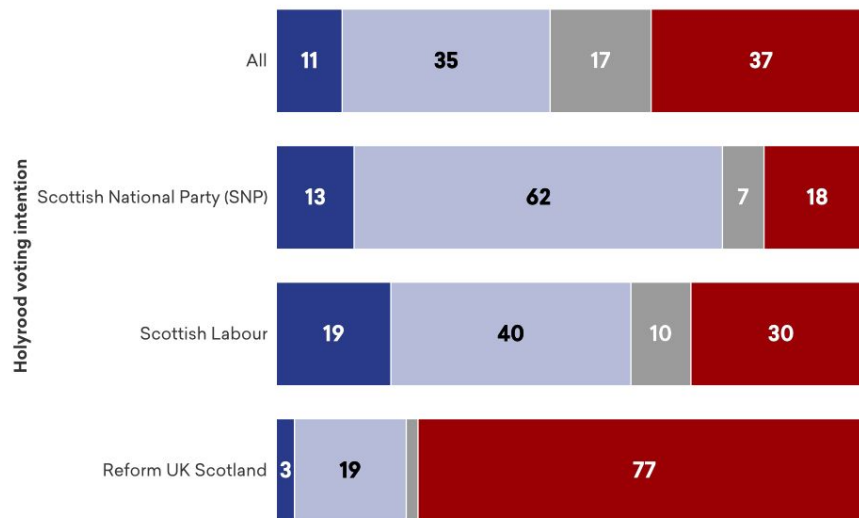
I'm wanting to give as much as we can away, but then it also frustrates me, I think, well, is that just saying "well Scotland, you give all the aid and we'll deal with everything else" kind of thing. It's then a bit unfair if we're leaving it to Scotland.

Vhairi, 32, Paisley, Incrementalist Left

Most SNP voters want government to maintain aid budget

If the Westminster government is reducing the amount of aid it sends to poorer countries, do you think the Scottish government should...

- Increase the amount of aid it sends
- Maintain the amount of aid as it does right now
- Don't know
- Also reduce the amount of aid it sends



Having aid spending controlled by Holyrood may make progressives more supportive

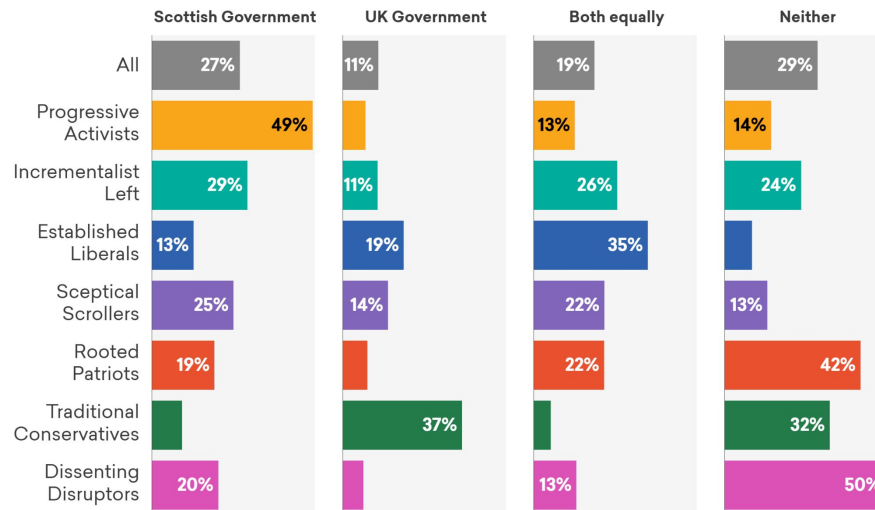
Left-leaning segments, among whom the SNP fare best, tend to trust the Scottish government to spend aid more effectively.

But this does not hold true with most Scots: while 27 per cent most trust Holyrood, compared to 11 per cent for Westminster, 19 per cent say that they would be equally effective, and **29 per cent say “neither”**.

Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors in particular are more likely to say that neither the Scottish Government nor the Westminster Government will spend international aid effectively.

Progressive segments tend to trust the Scottish government to spend aid better than Westminster would - but more conservative segments tend to think that neither would do a good job

Who do you trust more to spend aid effectively?



Scots are more likely to see value in providing aid than other Britons

The public in Scotland are more receptive to arguments that providing international aid could bring benefits back home – and that this, in turn, would make providing aid worth it.

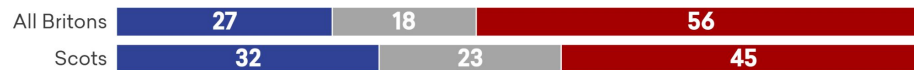
A quarter of Britons believe that spending on overseas aid brings benefits to the UK – this rises to a third among Scots.

Similarly, a third of Britons think that sending aid abroad would not be worth it, even if it helped the UK's economic growth, while only a quarter of Scots hold the same view.

Scots are less likely to think that providing overseas aid brings no benefits to the UK

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- The money the UK spends on overseas aid brings benefits to the UK
- Don't know
- The money the UK spends on overseas aid brings no benefits to the UK



Scots are more in favour of aid if it brings economic growth to the UK

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- It is worth the UK sending international aid to poorer countries if it contributes to UK economic growth
- Don't know
- It is not worth the UK sending international aid to poorer countries even if it contributes to UK economic growth



Aid spent on vaccinations and disaster relief is seen more favourably

Preventing future pandemics with vaccinations is a way of sending aid that is seen as worth it for the public, and especially among Scots. Only 20 per cent say this type of aid is not worth it, compared to 28 per cent of all Britons.

Even Dissenting Disruptors, among the most anti-aid segments, tend to be in favour of this type of aid.

Disaster relief was brought up in focus groups as another type of aid which otherwise aid-sceptic Scots are supportive of.

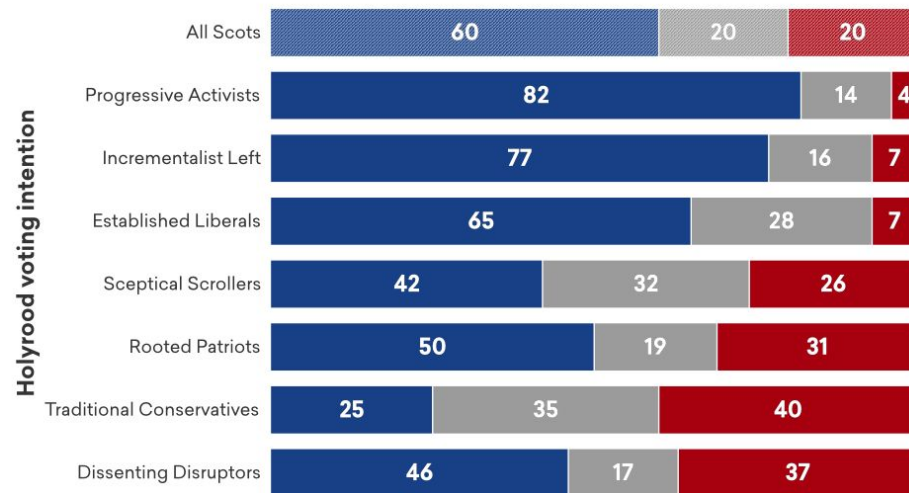
I have no reservations about disasters and things like that. We should be throwing money at that. They would do the same for us for sort of stuff. You've got a country that's having a really bad time of it, then we should be helping out definitely.

Richard, 58, East Renfrewshire, Rooted Patriot

Aid to alleviate/prevent pandemics is seen as worth it by Scots, even a plurality among more conservative segments

Which of the following is closest to your view?

- It is worth the UK/Scotland sending international aid to poorer countries if it improves public health in the UK/Scotland and prevents pandemics like covid or bird flu
- Don't know
- It is not worth the UK/Scotland sending international aid to poorer countries even if it improves public health in the UK/Scotland and prevents pandemics like covid or bird flu





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