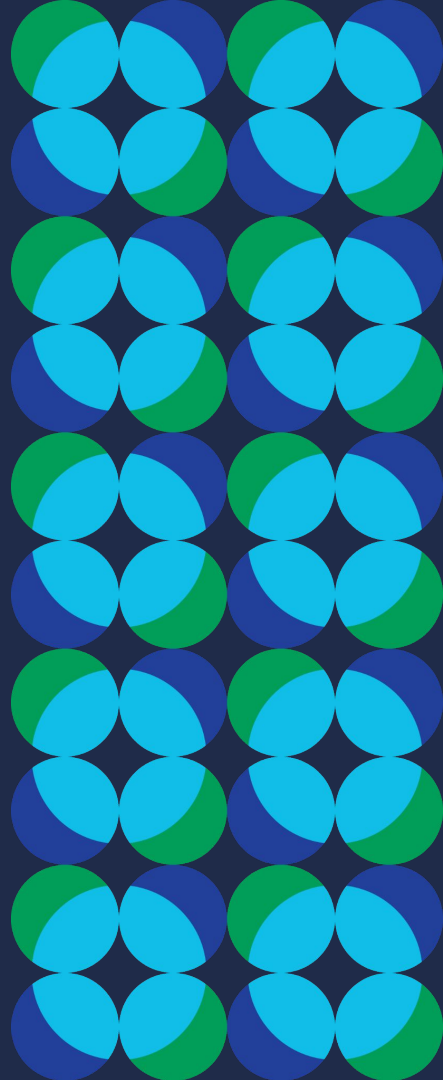




More in
Common

Attitudes to publicly owned energy in Scotland

More in Common for Platform – February 2026



Introduction

Ahead of the 2026 Holyrood elections, Platform commissioned More in Common to research the public's starting points and areas of consensus and disagreement around public energy in Scotland. Drawing on a poll of 1,017 Scottish adults (24 Jan–3 Feb 2026) and three focus groups, this deck summarises headline views on energy policy priorities, investment in renewables, and public vs private ownership of energy, alongside segment-analysis using More in Common's seven-segment model.

The Scottish public's views on the energy system in 2026 are defined by a strong sense that the status quo isn't working. Scots are deeply worried about the cost of living and think energy bills have gone up too much for the ordinary person to afford. And while investment in renewables is popular in Scotland, there are serious concerns about big businesses using the energy transition to extract profits with limited benefits for Scottish people.

The research reveals clear opportunities for a campaign about public ownership of energy in Scotland to address these concerns. The public think that big companies are exploiting the energy transition for profit, and worry about job losses and bill hikes in the process. With the right policies and communications, a campaign could help reassure Scots that public ownership can address these concerns. Scots are naturally inclined to trust publicly run companies more than private businesses, and – if done well – campaigning for more accountable public ownership of energy companies can go part of the way in cementing trust in the energy sector and renewable transition more broadly.

Introducing the seven segments



Introducing the Seven Segments

This research uses the British Seven Segments to explore division and common ground on public energy in Scotland. The British Seven segments were developed to move beyond traditional left-right or party-based analysis by exploring the deeper psychological, cultural, and value-driven foundations that shape public opinion.

This approach helps explain why political loyalties have fractured and offers a more nuanced understanding of what drives attitudes — allowing us to explore not only what people think but also why they think it.



**Progressive
Activists**



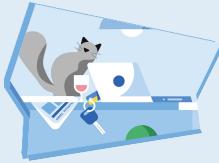
...an outspoken group that is politically engaged and globally minded, championing social justice but feeling alienated from mainstream politics

**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**



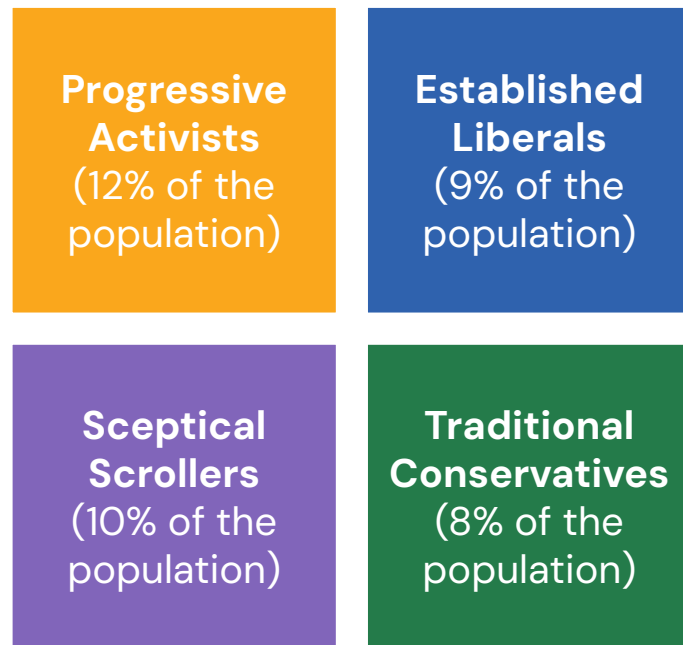
... a frustrated group that craves radical change and backs strong leaders who promise to shake up a broken system

How big are the segments?

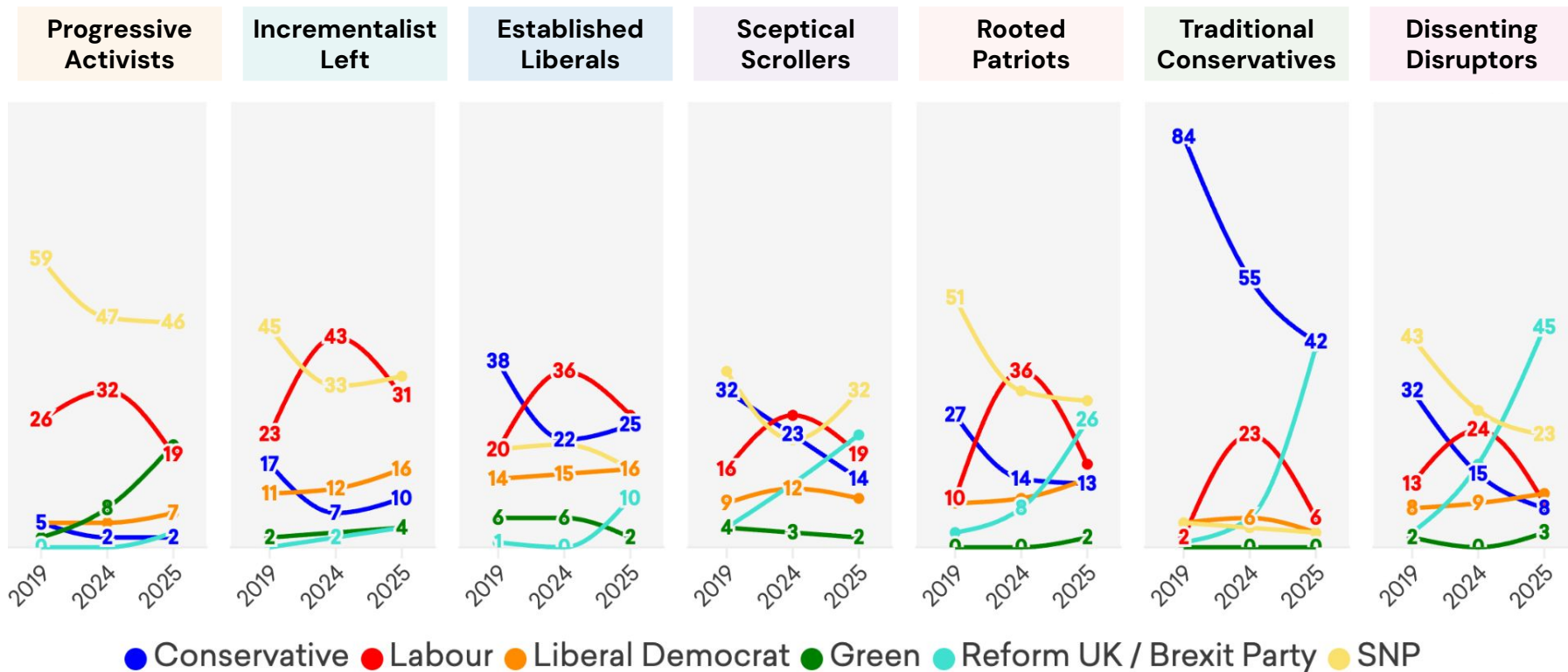
Three “big” segments




Four “small” segments



The segments at a Westminster election





Top line attitudes to climate, energy and public ownership

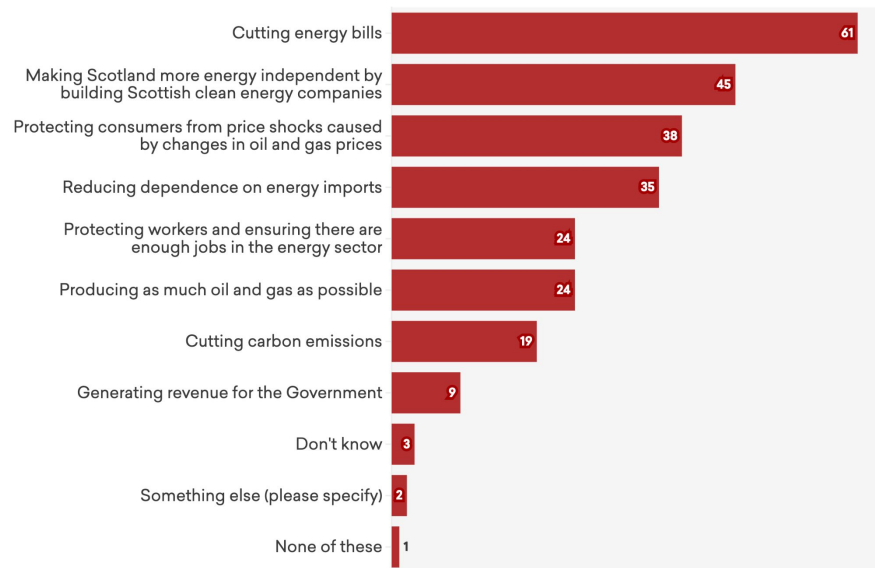
Priorities for energy policy in Scotland

The cost of living is by far the biggest issue for most voter groups around the country, so it is no surprise that when asked about their priorities for energy policy specifically, cutting energy bills is the clear top priority for Scots (61%). After this, the next most selected priorities are greater energy independence (45%) and protecting consumers from oil and gas price shocks (38%).

In focus groups, few people bring up public energy as a top priority, but it is possible to build a campaign for public energy that emphasises how this will meet Scot's broader demands on the energy transition.

Cutting energy bills is Scots' top priority for energy policy

What do you think should be the top priorities for energy policy in Scotland at the moment? Select your top three.



In their words: the cost of living

Well, clearly I think that people are being, well not asked, they're being forced to pay more than they can afford and in that respect I would've suggest that a number of people are not heating their homes properly and are suffering as result with that.

Colin, Established Liberal, Edinburgh

People assume wrongly that the people who are in poverty are the folk that don't work, et cetera. And there's that stereotyping and harmful labelling of people when actually ... the majority of people are experiencing in-work poverty. And for me that's because of wage not keeping up with costs and inflation.

Lynsay, Progressive Activist, Leith

I've got three kids. I need to have my heat on to look after my kids to make sure they're safe, they're warm. If not, then they start going down that medical route of-. You've got damp in your house, they've got asthma and then you've got waiting list and that adds to ongoing pressures. You need the basic cost of living that helps with food, warmth, housing, then all that I hopefully should put less pressure on these other services if you start with the basics. And at the moment we're not doing that. It's a war of do you feed your family or do you heat your house?

Michelle, Progressive Activist, Highlands near Inverness

Why is our energy still so expensive and why is it continually growing? I mean energy prices have not come down for long enough.

Lynette, Rooted Patriot, Cumnock

Renewables seen as benefiting Scotland

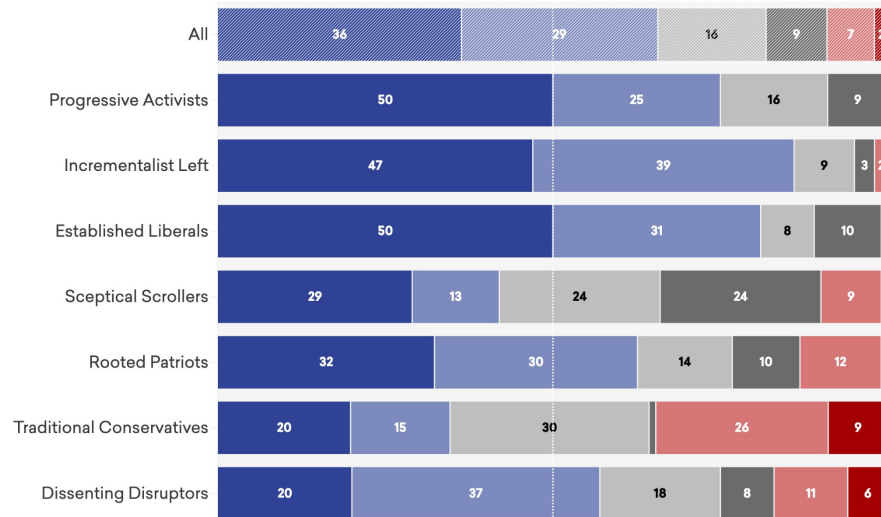
A clear majority of Scots (65%) say investment in renewable energy is good for Scotland, compared to just 9 per cent who say it is bad.

That said, there is significant polarisation on this matter. The most progressive and left-leaning segments are the most positive. For example 86 per cent of Incrementalist Left say investment in renewables is good for Scotland while the biggest scepticism comes from Traditional Conservatives, of whom just 35 per cent say renewable investment is good for Scotland. As such, national-level support for renewable energy could easily be undermined by vocal opposition from these groups.

Most Scots think investment in renewables is good for Scotland

Would you say that investment in renewable energy (such as offshore wind) is...

- Very good for Scotland
- Quite good for Scotland
- Neither good nor bad for Scotland
- Don't know
- Quite bad for Scotland
- Very bad for Scotland



Building support for the green transition means protecting workers and preventing corporate greed

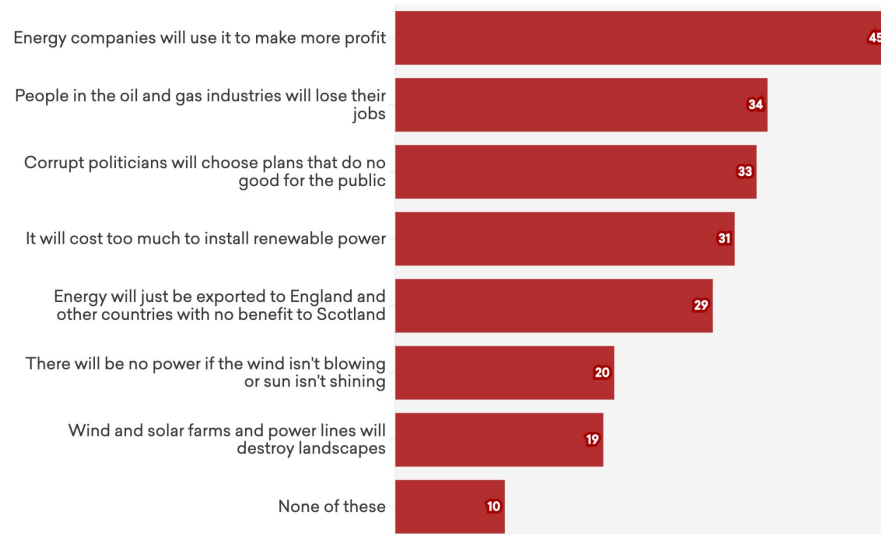
Even among groups who are broadly supportive of renewables, there are some significant concerns about how the transition will happen. Scots are most concerned that energy companies will use the green transition to make a profit (45% select this). Other major concerns include oil and gas workers losing their jobs (34%), corrupt politicians (33%), and the cost of installing renewable power (31%).

Any campaign for public ownership of renewables energy in Scotland needs to address these concerns, although it should help these campaigns that the top concern is directly related to privatisation.

“We produce the energy in Scotland, it goes down through the grids down to Southern England, whatever that goes to. And then they we are resold it at a higher cost. So there’s no benefits to us having these on our [countryside]”

Michelle, Progressive Activist, Highlands

What are your top concerns, if any, about the transition to renewable energy in Scotland? Please select your top three.



Political parties not meeting the public's priorities

No major political party in Scotland is meeting the public's priorities on energy bills: across every metric measured, the public are more likely to distrust than trust the SNP, Labour and Reform. In groups, there was clear frustration with the parties' inability to understand voter concerns on these issues.

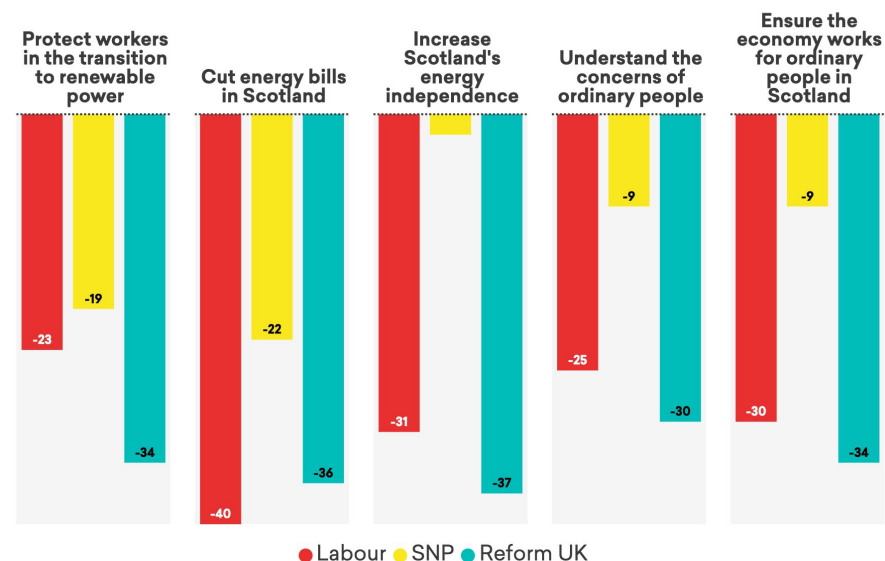
On cutting energy bills – the public's top priority – net trust is –40 for Labour, –22 for the SNP and –36 for Reform UK: significant negatives for each party to overcome. On increasing Scotland's energy independence there is greater variation between parties: the SNP is closest to neutral (–2), compared with Labour (–31) and Reform UK (–37).

"I saw they were proposing to make it a criminal offence to lie in parliament. That's a brilliant idea, but I can't see them passing it" **Robert, Rooted Patriot**

"There would be nobody left in it would there?" **Ali, Rooted Patriot**

Few Scots trust the major parties to tackle their concerns regarding energy bills

Net trust in each of the following parties to...



Starting points on publicly owned energy



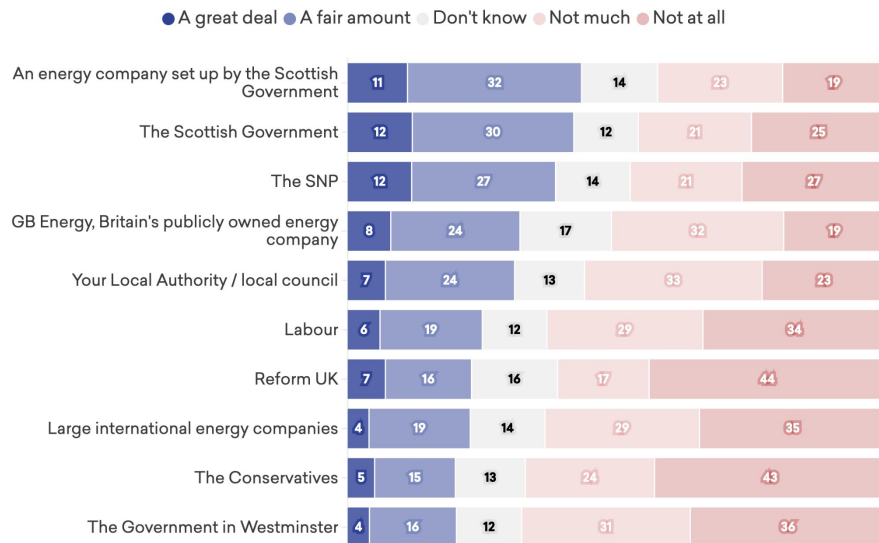
Public ownership can restore trust

In a low-trust environment, public ownership may be a way to establish trust in the energy system. While voters tend to not to trust most actors in Scotland to develop energy infrastructure, they are most trusting towards publicly owned energy and the Scottish government in the energy transition.

Trust is highest for an energy company set up by the Scottish Government: 43 per cent trust it, although 42 per cent do not. GB Energy is trusted by 32 per cent and distrusted by 51 per cent. In contrast, just 23 per cent would trust large international energy companies, and 64 per cent would not.

A publicly owned energy company is among the most trusted actors to develop energy infrastructure

How much do you trust each of the following to develop energy infrastructure in ways that benefit the people of Scotland?



Public ownership increases support for renewable energy projects

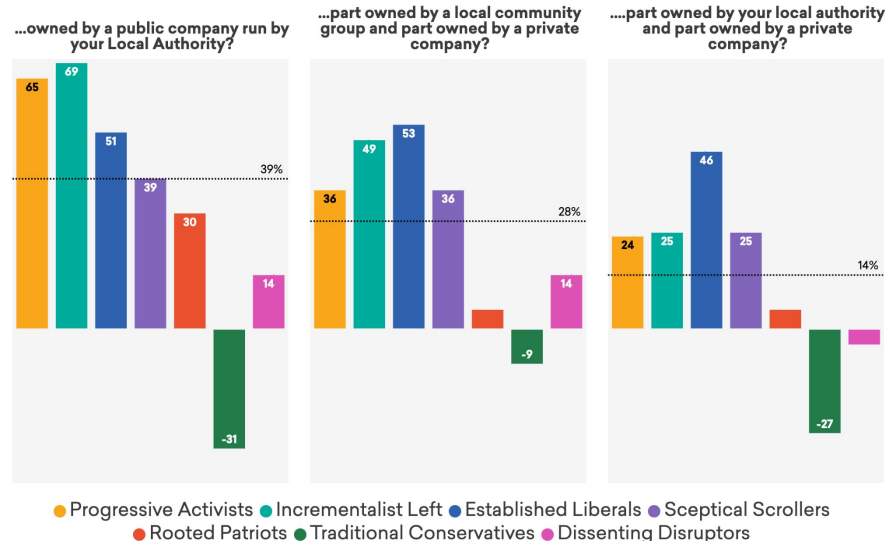
The ownership model makes a clear difference to how people react to a new renewable project on a local level.

Net support is highest when a proposed local wind farm is owned by a public company run by the local authority (39%), compared with a community-private joint model (28%) and a local authority-private joint model (14%).

However, although the first model is the most popular it also the most divisive, producing the greatest spread in support across the seven segments. The community-private joint model is slightly less popular on an over level, but receives less opposition from Traditional Conservatives.

Support for wind farms depending on different ownership models

How much would you support or oppose a new wind farm being built in your local area, if it was....



Key benefits of public energy

A campaign for public ownership needs to build on what people broadly like about public ownership. Across different possible outcomes, people are more likely to associate benefits with publicly owned energy companies than privately owned ones. 47% say public ownership leads to more revenue going to local government (vs 14% private); and 44% say local concerns taken more seriously in a public model (vs 11% private). Public ownership is also seen as more likely to bring lower bills, Scots' key measure of success (40% public vs 12% private).

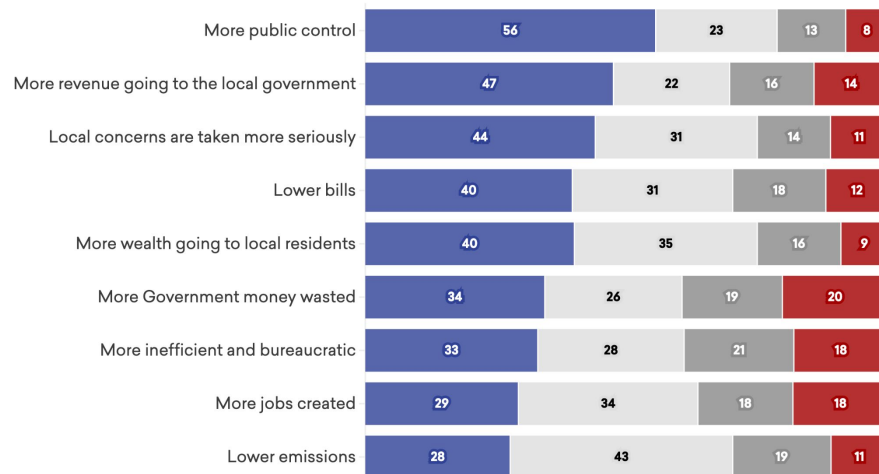
I think you can contrast the way the English water companies are run with Scottish Water. So in England they can do what they like, you know yourself what the water tastes like and et cetera, and you're stuck with 'em. They're only feeding their shareholders whereas in publicly owned such as Scottish Water, I mean they're not a hundred percent perfect but they're pretty near it. I think they're pretty good and we benefit from that.

Robbert, Rooted Patriot, Ross-shire

Public energy tends to outperform private energy on a range of measures

Would you say that each of the following are more likely from a private or publicly owned energy company?

- More likely from a publicly owned energy company
- It would make no difference
- Don't know
- More likely from a privately owned energy company



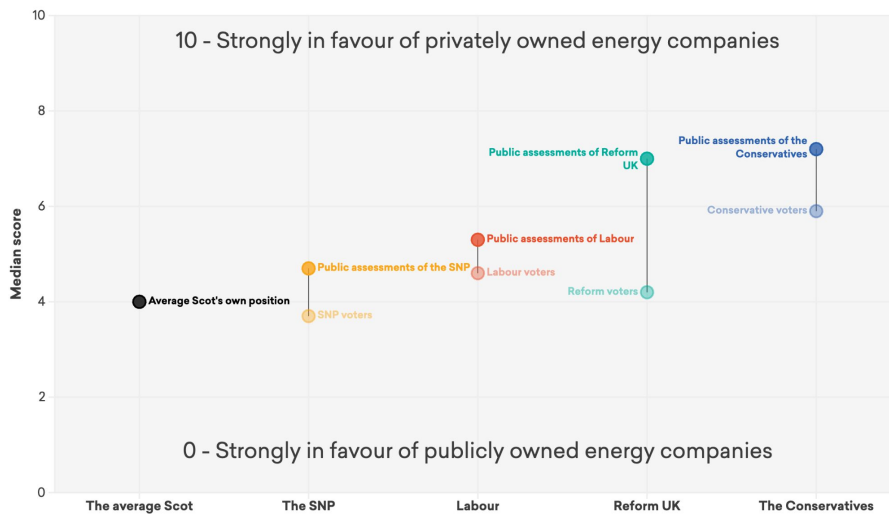
Scotland's parties are seen to be out of touch on public ownership

On a 0–10 scale (where 0 indicates being strongly pro-public ownership and 10 strongly pro-private ownership), the average Scot places their own view at 4: leaning towards public ownership overall.

By contrast, respondents locate the major parties closer to the pro-private end of the scale, suggesting a perceived gap between public instinct and party positioning. Similarly, every group of voters position themselves more on the pro-public ownership side than the associated parties are seen to be. Most notably, Reform voters are some of the most pro-public ownership voters in Scotland (even more so than Labour voters), however, Reform is seen to much more strongly favour private ownership.

Scots support publicly owned energy more than they think Scottish political parties do

For each of the following, please indicate whether you think they are more in favour of companies producing renewable energy being publicly owned or owned by private companies. Please use the scale where 0 means they are strongly in favour of publicly owned energy companies and 10 means they are strongly in favour of privately owned energy companies.



Solid preference for public ownership across sectors

Across three different parts of the energy system, respondents more often say services would be better run publicly than privately. Energy retail shows the largest preference for public operation (48% public vs 14% private), however this also holds for other sectors, such as wind turbine manufacturing.

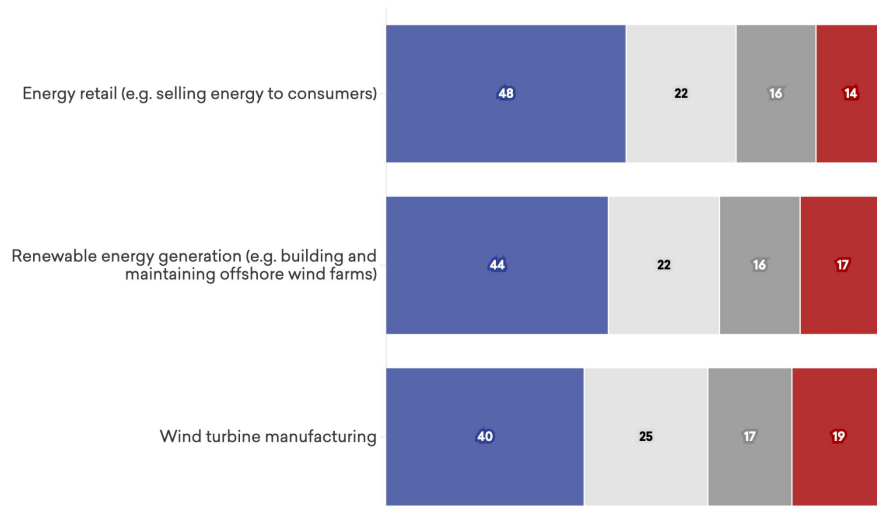
Energy companies in Scotland are the same as energy companies anywhere. It's profit first, people second Their decisions ... are never made for the common good. They're made to maximise shareholder returns... They're part of a system that commodifies a basic human necessity, which is electricity and heating and fuel. We need these things to live, but they're using them to extract profit from working people

Jordan, Rooted Patriot, Ross-shire

Scots tend to prefer public energy across a range of sectors

In your view, is it better for each of the following to be run by a publicly owned company (e.g. a company set up by the national or local government) or run by a private company for a profit?

- Better if run by a publicly owned company
- It makes no difference
- Don't know
- Better if run by a private company



Cross-party preference for public energy on a local level

When asked how they would like a local wind project to be run, there is a strong preference for a publicly-owned model. Overall, two-thirds choose a public owner: 21 per cent prefer local authority ownership, 34 per cent Scottish Government ownership and 12 per cent the UK Government.

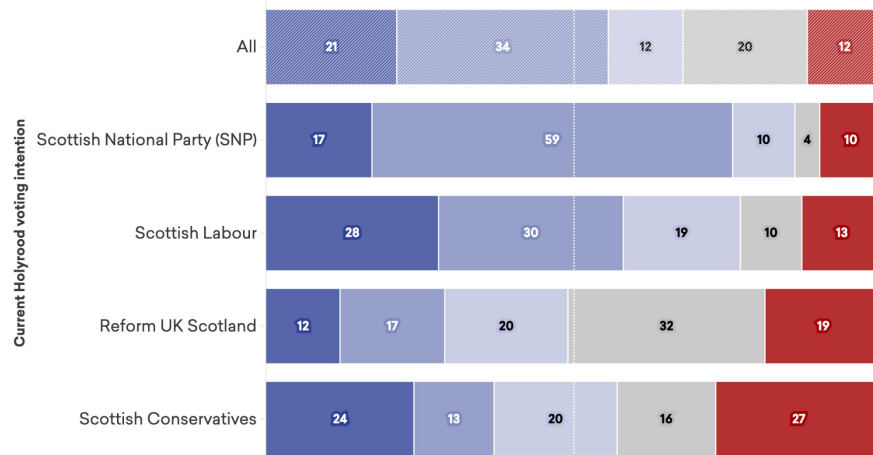
That said, there are some significant party differences: SNP voters are especially likely to prefer Scottish Government ownership (59%), while supporters of unionist parties are more likely to want the wind farm to be controlled at the Local Authority or UK levels.

Support for private ownership is highest among Scottish Conservative voters (27%). Reform voters are the only group where less than a majority prefer public ownership, as almost a third (32%) are unsure.

Most Scots prefer publicly owned local energy

If there were plans for a new wind farm in your local area, would you rather that it be...

- Run by a publicly owned company, owned by your Local Authority
- Run by a publicly owned company, owned by the Scottish Government
- Run by a publicly owned company, owned by the UK Government
- Don't know
- Run by a privately owned company



Barriers to support



Compelling counter arguments

Support for public ownership in Scotland is soft, and the research suggests that some people can be persuaded by a number of counter-arguments. Their main concerns are for a fairer and more affordable energy system, and people can be persuaded that a range of ownership models will achieve this.

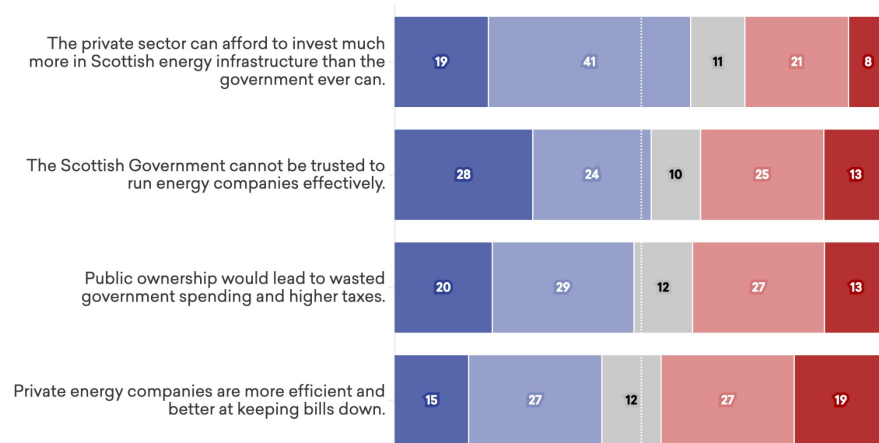
When presented with arguments against public ownership, the most persuasive challenge is whether the public sector can realistically finance and scale major projects. Six in ten find this argument convincing overall.

Concerns about competence and governance also resonate: 52% find the claim that the Scottish Government cannot be trusted to run energy companies effectively convincing. This highlights that, alongside values-based arguments about fairness, many people are weighing practical delivery and stewardship.

Levels of investment and trust in government are the most convincing arguments against public ownership

Here are some arguments people make for and against bringing more energy companies into public ownership Scotland, for each of them, please indicate how convincing or unconvincing you find them.

● Very convincing ● Quite convincing ● Don't know ● Not particularly convincing ● Not convincing at all



Who is most receptive to counter arguments?

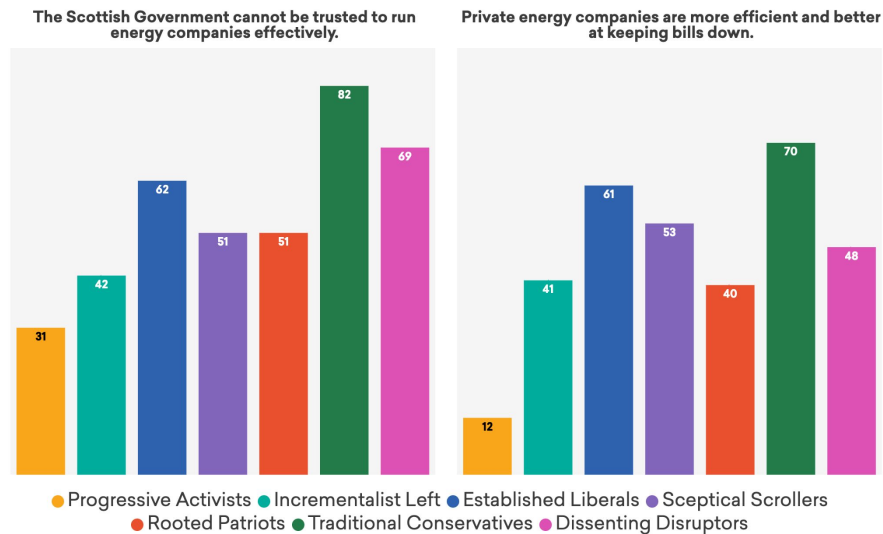
Some segments are much more receptive to these counter arguments, particularly those that are either less trusting in government or more fiscally conservative.

Established Liberals, who are generally the most supportive of free markets and liberal capitalism, are most convinced by arguments about the (in)efficiency of public companies. In focus groups, many expressed concerns about the track record of public companies throughout history in a number of contexts.

In contrast, Dissenting Disruptors' and Rooted Patriots' concerns stem from their scepticism of the Scottish Government and wariness that they could run these companies effectively and fairly. In focus groups, they often connected their concern about public ownership with distrust in politicians and specific moments that have eroded their trust in recent years.

Established Liberals, Traditional Conservatives, and Dissenting Disruptors are the most amenable to arguments against public ownership

Proportion saying they find each of the following convincing arguments



Qualitative scepticism

Focus group participants expressed similar concerns about publicly owned energy, particularly when it was framed in what was seen as overly utopian terms. Broadly speaking, participants were sceptical that public companies could operate efficiently or raise enough money. They also worried about whether they could trust the Government to set up and run an energy company.

The public sector's not going to be able to afford to do the kind of generating of new energy sources in the way that Andrew's talking about. That's just not going to happen. All Western countries are in debt already. They haven't got the ability to find the kind of money that's needed to invest in that type of problem.

Brian, Rooted Patriot, Cumnock

We had publicly owned companies and ... they were very inefficient. There was a lot of 'we will keep on employing you forever and ever and ever, whether you are any good, any at all'

Andrew, Rooted Patriot, Cumnock

I think the only downside for me is if something is sort of nationalised for example, is that as the political landscape changes, so do priorities. And so that then gets put in the back burner and actually we don't agree with that. We are going to change that. And it can be really difficult to actually effect change because if somebody else comes in into power and they disagree and they change the goalposts again.

Lynsay, Rooted Patriot, Ross-shire

Testing policy proposals



Clarity

In focus groups, participants' initial responses to the policy proposals was often one of slight confusion. When language was too technical, people were likely to ask for clarification. Across the tested policies, fewer than three in ten say that each of them are 'very clear'. The clearest proposals are requiring renewable developers to create new local jobs (73% clear) and establishing a publicly owned turbine manufacturer (72% clear). Clarity is lowest for requiring developers to offer local communities a 20% stake in future projects (58% clear; 42% unclear), suggesting that the ownership and governance details of 'stakes' need more explanation to avoid uncertainty or suspicion.

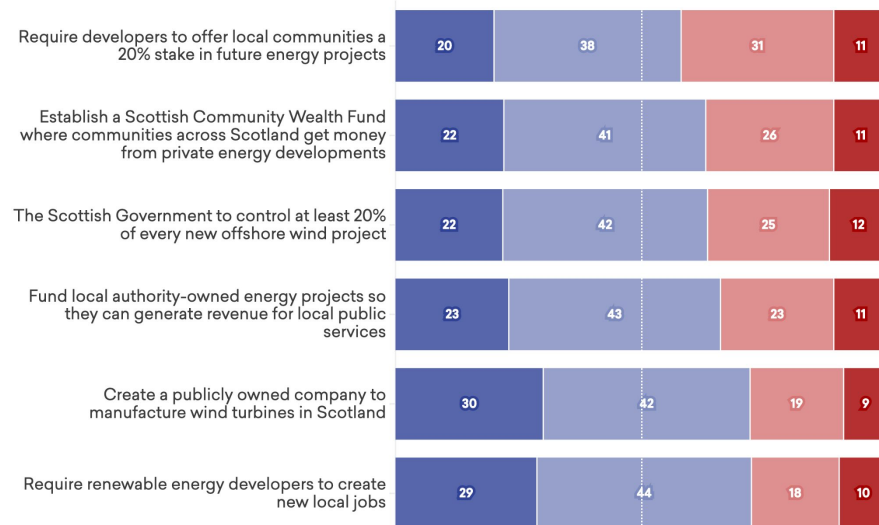
It sounds good to have a 20% stake in it as a Local Authority, but my concern would be what that would entail for smaller communities ... So I think I'd just want a bit more of a information on that to know what that really would mean.

Zara, Established Liberal, Edinburgh

How well do people understand Platform's policy asks?

For each of the following policy proposals, please indicate how clearly you understand them.

● Very clear ● Quite clear ● Quite unclear ● Very unclear



Support

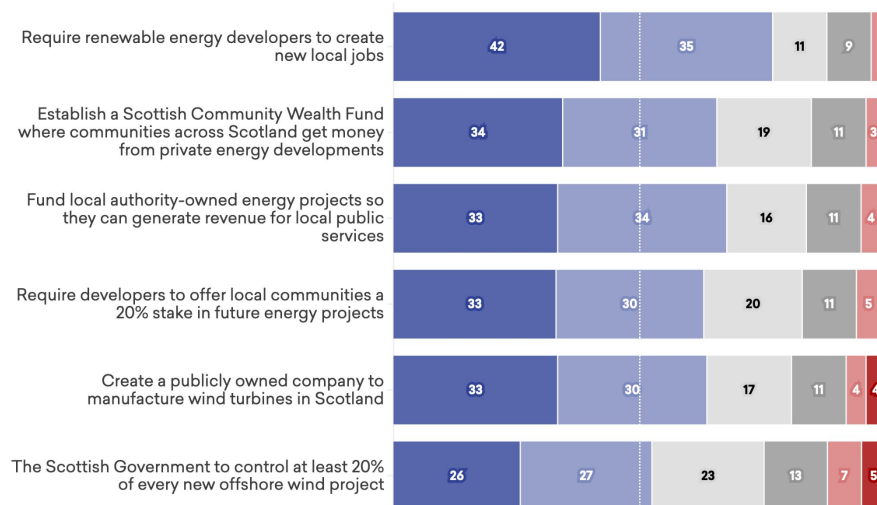
A majority of Scots support every one of the policies tested. Support is consistently high across the policy options, but it is strongest where the benefits feel direct and local. Requiring developers to create new local jobs receives the highest support (77%). Support is also solid for funding local authority-owned energy projects (67%) and for creating a Community Wealth Fund (65%), placing both in the mid-60s.

The least popular proposals are those where the benefits require slightly more explanation: Giving the Scottish Government control of 20% of new offshore wind project has the lowest support (53%), perhaps because – unlike the most popular policies, an extra sentence or two is necessary to explain how that will lead to benefits for Scots on the issues they care about.

How much do people support Platform's policy asks?

For each of the following policy proposals, please indicate whether you would support or oppose them.

● Strongly support ● Somewhat support ● Neither support nor oppose ● Don't know
● Somewhat oppose ● Strongly oppose



Policy polarisation

While these policies command the overall support of the Scottish public, there is variation in which groups support each of the policies.

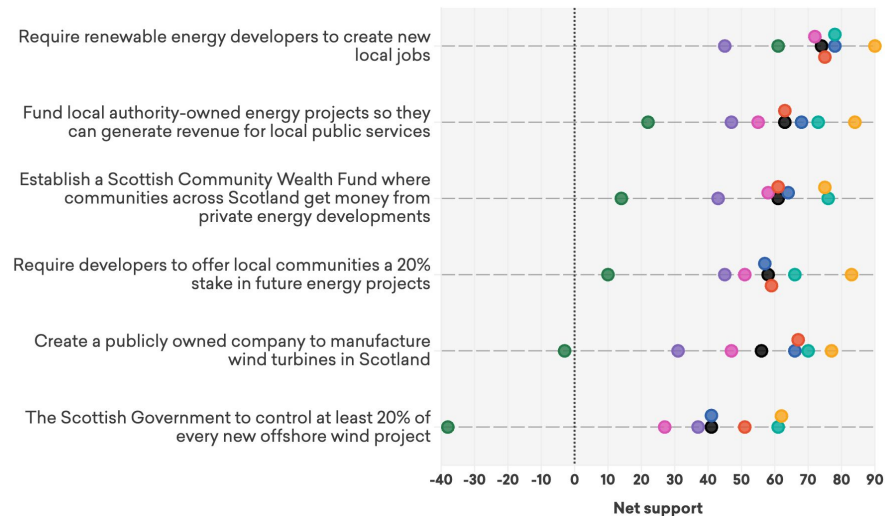
The largest opposition comes from Traditional Conservatives on each of these policies. Every other segment tends to support all six of the policies tested, whereas mandating a 20% public state in new offshore wind and a new turbine manufacturing company tend to be unpopular with Traditional Conservatives.

All of the policies are most popular with Progressive Activists, however they also enjoy support from Incrementalist Left, and often Rooted Patriots and Established Liberals.

Requiring renewable energy developers to create new local jobs is very popular with every segment. And is notably very popular even with Traditional Conservatives.

Some public energy policy proposals are more polarising than others

Segment ● All ● Progressive Activists ● Incrementalist Left ● Established Liberals ● Sceptical Scrollers ● Rooted Patriots ● Traditional Conservatives ● Dissenting Disruptors



Effective campaigning



Testing campaign messaging

In this research, we tested a range of campaign materials: specific policy asks, a written campaign narrative, and campaign graphics. A number of points stand out about what makes effective messaging on this issue.

Advocates should resist the temptation to lead with the policy solution. People's starting point is not public ownership; it is the cost of their bills, a sense that energy companies are exploiting them, and a feeling that their community sees none of the benefits of the resources on its doorstep. Messaging needs to meet people where they are, anchoring every policy goal in these practical, lived concerns about control, community benefit, and cost.

Secondly, it's important to remember how low in trust the public are at the moment. People will not simply take on faith that a publicly owned energy company will be well run or free from political interference. Effective communications need to anticipate that scepticism directly. In some cases, it is helpful to work with the fact that people don't trust privately run energy companies, but campaigners should also remember it is an uphill battle to show the public that public energy companies could be trusted more.

When campaign communications get into the technicalities of specific policies, people can become confused and sometimes more sceptical. Messaging that stays on the big picture performs better, using emotive language to connect the problems people already feel with the solutions public energy can offer. In all three focus groups, the campaign narrative resonated far more strongly and more immediately than the list of policy proposals, because it told a story rather than straight away presenting a policy solution.

Testing campaign graphics (1)

Those who noticed the Scottish outline in the graphic thought it was a clever element, and liked how it had been shaped out of energy bolts.

Participants broadly liked the emphasis on community, and thought the image of the town painted a vision of a more hopeful future: “They’re feeding back into the community. So I like the idea of the community. That’s great. Positive.”.

That said, in two groups, participants brought up the man with his arms crossed, saying he looked overly negative and unwelcoming: “Having your arms crossed is not a good look” / ‘I don’t like because he’s dead defensive, He’s fighting, he’s pushed out, he’s fighting someone outside the, it’s quite intimidating”.

“I like the graphic behind the lightning strike that is supposed to look like Scotland is very clever”

Andrew, Rooted Patriot, Ross-shire



Testing campaign graphics (2)

The use of the bright green colour is polarized. While some like it for how eye-catching and modern it feels (“It’s quite modern” “It pops in your face”), others felt it was garish and difficult to look at (“Maybe not so green though. It looks a bit like a virus”).

People broadly liked the outline of Scotland in the background, and tended to prefer the lower case letters, which they saw as more friendly. Similarly, they also felt that the image of the worker on this slide was friendlier and more welcoming: “It’s all Mmre friendly, the lowercase, ‘our energy, our workers’ with the full stops and the sort of slightly friendlier smiley worker. It’s all a lot friendlier”.



Convincing messages

Across the message tests, Scots respond most strongly to themes of fairness and public benefit. The single most convincing statement is that 'natural resources should benefit ordinary people' (71% convincing).

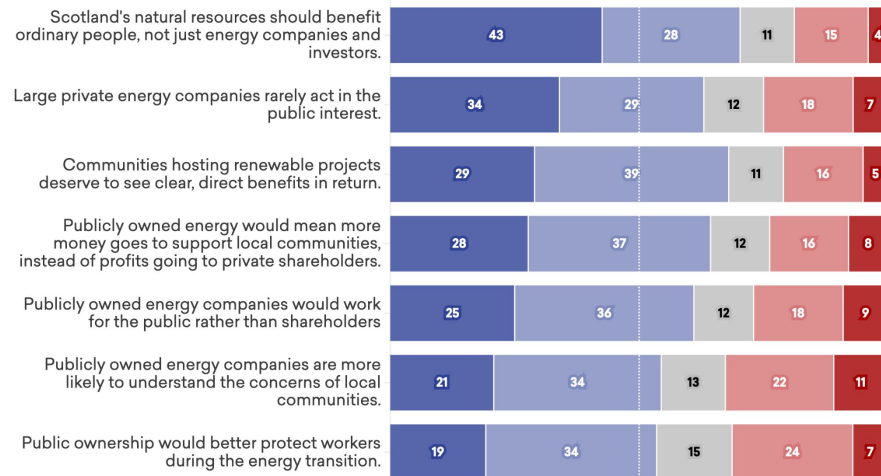
Messages about ensuring clear local benefits also perform strongly (68% find 'communities hosting renewables deserve clear benefits' convincing), as does scepticism about private motives (63% find 'large private energy companies rarely act in the public interest' convincing).

Overall, the most effective narratives are those that connect renewable development to perceived fairness, tangible community return, and limits on profiteering, rather than arguments framed primarily around ideology.

Most convincing arguments for public ownership

Here are some arguments people make for and against bringing more energy companies into public ownership Scotland, for each of them, please indicate how convincing or unconvincing you find them.

● Very convincing
 ● Quite convincing
 ● Don't know
 ● Not particularly convincing
 ● Not convincing at all



Summary

The background features a dark blue field with two large, overlapping circles. The upper circle is outlined in a light blue color, and the lower circle is outlined in a green color. The circles overlap in the center, creating a darker blue area. The top right and bottom right corners of the image are partially filled with solid blue and green colors, respectively.

Key findings

Preference for public ownership

Across the energy system, respondents more often say public bodies would run things better than private businesses.

Bills are the dominant priority

Energy policy priorities are led by cutting energy bills, ahead of energy independence or building Scottish clean energy.

Renewables widely seen as good for Scotland

The vast majority of Scots rate investment in renewable energy as good for Scotland, and the green transition is broadly popular.

Significant scepticism of private companies

Scots are sceptical of the motives of private energy companies and their ability to deliver for the public. This has wider implications for trust in the green transition.

Support for Platform's policy proposals

There is strong support for the policy measures tested in this report, with each receiving very limited opposition.

Communications matters

From focus group conversations it is clear that the way these policies are communicated matters, and any communications must be clear about the policies, and tap into Scot's priorities for the energy system.



Thank you

This research was conducted by More in Common.

More in Common polled 1,017 Scottish adults between 24th January and 3rd February 2026. Respondents were recruited from online panels and weighted to be representative of the Scottish population by age/gender, ethnicity, 2024 General Election vote and education.

Focus groups were conducted on 22 January and 4 February, with participants screened to be from relevant segments and areas of interest to this research.

More in Common is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by their rules