



The Political Institute  
of Action Research

# Political Priorities in Fife

An investigation into the reasons why  
political priorities in Fife diverge from  
the rest of the UK

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- An analysis of the statistical trends in recent polls can begin to show the diverse landscape of Fife and the United Kingdom.
- Fife's recent electoral shift from the SNP to Labour and the Liberal Democrats reflects growing voter disillusionment with Scottish nationalist policies and a demand for pragmatic solutions to persistent local challenges such as poverty, employment, and post-Brexit economic disruption.
- Fife's political landscape reflects a balance between Scottish National Party values on a constituency level and Conservative values on a regional level, fostering debates in parliament on how to address issues such as independence, the Brexit, economics, healthcare and immigration
- Fife MPs in Westminster have shown specific interest in the areas of foreign affairs and social care but their behaviour has largely been shaped by national party political priorities.
- Globally, nations with devolved powers tend to experience distinct divergence between regional and national political preferences, owing in part to the ability for smaller regions to react more quickly to events and political change.

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the last ten years, Scotland and the United Kingdom’s political landscape has altered significantly in the wake of the unsuccessful Scottish independence campaign, Brexit, and a move from Conservative to Labour leadership in Westminster. Amongst these issues, a trend prevails that sees Fife consistently display different political priorities to those of the rest of Scotland and the UK more broadly. Despite broader UK trends toward Conservative governance and market-oriented policies in recent years, Fife has maintained a distinctive political character—often favouring more progressive parties such as the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Labour, and displaying strong support for policies rooted in social justice, community welfare, and local autonomy. This divergence raises critical questions about the nature of political identity, regionalism, and the factors that shape political priorities. In this paper, we have employed five broad lenses from which to explore these differences in political preferences: Brexit, independence, immigration, economic development, and health and social care. In coming to understand the way in which each of these issues has affected Scottish voters on a regional and national level. Drawing on electoral data, the participation of MPs and MSPs in the committees they sit on, and global examples, this project aims to illuminate the unique political culture of Fife. In doing so, it contributes to wider debates about the future of the Union, the meaning of localism, and the growing significance of regional differences in UK politics.

## **1.0 Trend Analysis of Scottish Political Priorities**

### **1.1 Introduction and Groundwork for Statistical Analysis**

This analysis utilises surveys from eight different periods between 2015 and 2025 from two agencies, YouGov and the Fife People’s Panel, the latter conducted by the Fife Council. It should be mentioned that the periods and dates are slightly different. This was done for two reasons. First, no surveys were conducted or released on the same days. The surveys that provide data for Fife and Scotland simultaneously from YouGov specify the exact dates of the fieldwork, while the remaining surveys from YouGov only state when the survey was released, so the values for the United Kingdom come from the survey released immediately after the specified fieldwork dates. For example, the data that states 17-21 March 2025 uses the YouGov survey released on 24 March 2025 for the United Kingdom’s values. The second reason is that the surveys released by the Fife Council provided only a year or a month in which the survey was conducted. For these scenarios, an average of the YouGov surveys conducted in the timeframe

specified by the Fife Council is used as the data points for Scotland and the United Kingdom. For example, the first survey used in the dataset from the Fife Council only states that it was conducted in 2015, so the corresponding data for Scotland and the United Kingdom are the averages of all YouGov surveys conducted in 2015.

These surveys deviate slightly from each other in terms of the questions posed and the responses recorded but not enough that they cannot be used in conjunction with each other. The most glaring difference among these surveys is the number of reactions a respondent could mark down. Regarding Fife People's Panel surveys, there appears to be no limit to the number of responses any individual can give. Still, respondents were given the option between major, minor, not an issue, don't know, and no answer (Fife Council, 2017). For this analysis, only the percentages of major issue responses are examined. On the other hand, the surveys conducted by YouGov specify that respondents should tick up to no more than three options (YouGov, 2020). Therefore, a quick examination of the data shows that many percentages are inflated for the Fife People's Panel results compared to those in the YouGov results. Thus, instead of comparing the percentage point results directly, much of this analysis looks at the ranking of the issue based on its percentage in a given survey. For example, 75.3% of respondents in the June 2017 Fife People's Panel survey marked the response "NHS / hospitals / healthcare" as a significant issue and it was the number one answer in this survey, so for this analysis that response is given a value of 1 (Fife Council, 2017). More specific information about the surveys used in this analysis can be found in Appendix 1.

## **1.2 Trend Analysis of Rankings**

Though Fife People's Panel surveys provided over twenty-one different issue-specific options to choose from and the YouGov surveys provided around fifteen, not all of the options from both entities were the same. Six specific ones contain data from all eight survey periods: healthcare, the economy, education, the environment, crime, and housing. Of these six, three issues are consistently top priorities in the three regions of Fife, Scotland, and the United Kingdom.

First, citizens across all three regions see the healthcare system and the National Health Service as a political priority. This issue was ranked in the top three of all issues for all eight periods for Scotland and the United Kingdom with the only time outside the top three for Fife being the 2024 period when it was ranked fourth (See Appendix 2.1).

Healthcare has been the top priority in Scotland over the last three survey periods, while the economy has bumped it down to the second most important priority in Fife over the previous two surveys. The economy has been in the top three for Scotland and the United Kingdom in all eight surveys while it was in the top three in only five of the surveys examined for Fife. Notably, these five occurrences were all YouGov surveys, while the Fife Council conducted the three below the top three. That being said, the Fife People's Panel surveys specified many other issues that lend themselves to the broader issue of the economy, such as pensions, unemployment, and the cost of living. Though the economy

may have fallen to ninth in the 2024 Fife People's Panel poll, the cost of living was ranked the top issue. Going along with the two most recent YouGov polls that put the economy as the top priority in Fife, it can be seen that the economy has recently become the sole top priority in Fife and the United Kingdom. At the same time, healthcare remains the top in Scotland (See Appendix 2.2).

The most notable difference between Fife and Scotland, compared to the whole United Kingdom, is the prioritising of education. The education and school system was ranked in the top three priorities in four surveys, while it never reached this threshold for the United Kingdom, never reaching any higher than the fifth spot. This issue has slowly been on the rise in Fife and Scotland as it has been ranked third overall in both regions for the last three survey periods, coinciding with a dip in the United Kingdom, falling to eighth in the previous two surveys (See Appendix 2.3).

### **1.3 Trend Analysis of Percentage Differences**

Looking at the ranking of different issues helps align officials to see which issues to prioritise over others, but it does not tell the whole picture.

Hypothetically, it could be possible that the number one priority has a much higher percentage in one region than all the other issues, meaning that it is far and away the most critical priority. On the other hand, officials could decide to tackle two issues that are close in their percentages even if one is ranked first and the other second. To gain a clearer picture, it is possible to look at the percentage differences of the three priorities discussed in the last section.

As stated earlier, this analysis would be statistically inaccurate if all eight survey periods were utilised, given the differences in the number of options respondents could choose. That is why data from the five YouGov surveys will be used for this part of the analysis.

Healthcare has been established as an essential priority in all three regions. Still, citizens in Fife see it as a much higher priority than those in Scotland and the United Kingdom. At their peaks, 69% of respondents in Fife reported that healthcare was a political priority (YouGov, 2024), and that figure was 60% for Scotland (ibid.) and the United Kingdom (YouGov, 2020). Healthcare, when taking the five surveys into account, is on average 6.2% more of a priority in Fife than in Scotland and, staggeringly, 17.8% more of a priority when compared to the United Kingdom. The percentage has slowly declined in Fife while still staying above 50% and 16% above the figure of the United Kingdom in the most recent survey (See Appendix 3.1).

The economy has only recently become a political priority for most respondents in Fife. Its lowest number was in May 2024 at 40% (YouGov, 2024), before jumping to 63% (YouGov, 6-11 March 2025) and 59% (YouGov, 17-21 March 2025) in the two most recent surveys. This, along with the fact that it is becoming the number one ranked issue, shows that it is a priority that Fife residents are increasingly concerned about. These last two surveys are the only ones in which the percentages reported in Fife were higher than in Scotland and the United Kingdom, further proving that this issue is becoming more critical in the area (See Appendix 3.2). Unsurprisingly, the most considerable difference between

Fife and the whole United Kingdom comes from the education system. If the Fife People's Panel surveys were considered for this analysis, this figure would be even higher, since no figure from any YouGov survey exceeds 35% and the greatest value from a Fife People's Panel survey is 62.3% (Fife Council, 2015). Regardless, this difference is still evident, with the average difference being 18.4% and the most significant in the most recent survey (YouGov, 17-21 March 2025) (See Appendix 3.3).

Balancing political priorities to please everyone is difficult for officials. This section provides evidence as to which priorities should be focused on in different regional contexts, such as local versus national. Three issues, based on these data, that officials should prioritise in Fife, Scotland, and the United Kingdom are healthcare, the economy, and education. This does not mean that other issues should not be addressed because it is crucial to not give up one problem for another. Another key piece that these data do not provide is direct solutions to address these issues, as there are many different opinions on how to fix each problem. This question will be answered in the following sections.

## **2.0 Political priorities in Fife**

Fife is comprised of four UK parliamentary constituencies: Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline and Dollar, Glenrothes and Mid Fife, and North East Fife (Fife Council, 2024). Over the past six years, the region has experienced a significant shift in political priorities. In the 2019 general election, the Scottish National Party (SNP) won three of these constituencies, while the Liberal Democrats secured North East Fife. However, the 2024 general election marked a major political shift, with the SNP losing all three of their seats to the Scottish Labour Party. Melanie Ward was elected in Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy, Graeme Downie won in Dunfermline and Dollar, and Richard Baker claimed victory in Glenrothes and Mid Fife—all representing Labour. Meanwhile, Wendy Chamberlain of the Scottish Liberal Democrats retained her seat in North East Fife (UK Parliament, 2025). This suggests that voters in Fife have grown disillusioned with SNP policies and are seeking alternative approaches to address local priorities and improve constituency conditions.

Community priorities in Fife are outlined through *Our Fife*, a strategic portal developed by Fife Council to articulate local development goals and align the efforts of councillors and Members of Parliament across the region. A central focus of this strategy is addressing the root causes of poverty (Our Fife, 2024), reflecting its persistent and pressing nature in the area. As of 2024, there are 33,784 low-income households in Fife (Fife Council, 2024). Child poverty is particularly concerning, with 23% of children living in relative poverty and 18% in absolute poverty. Notably, relative poverty has increased significantly, from 16.1% 7

in 2015-16 to 23.6% in 2022-23. (Fife Voluntary Action, 2024). These staggering figures can be reflected in voter attitudes towards electing MPs in the general election, as outlined in the Scottish Labour manifesto, the New Deal for Working People proposes to eliminate exploitative zero-hour contracts and implement a genuine living wage for 200,000 Scots—marking a foundational step in addressing poverty, a core commitment of the party (Scottish Labour Party, 2024). Additionally, Wendy Chamberlain advocates for a reduction in the Energy Price Cap, a policy that could exacerbate existing levels of fuel poverty. She has also prioritised supporting pensioners in North East Fife by aiming to secure a winter fuel payment (Malallah, 2025).

The shift from SNP to Labour in three Fife constituencies can be understood in the context of broader national trends. Many voters, motivated by the desire to see the Conservative government removed from power, redirected their support from the SNP to Labour, recognising the latter as the most viable alternative (Bennie, 2024). Additionally, the transition from the SNP's pro-independence rhetoric to a broader focus on national unity played a significant role in this realignment. This shift is particularly evident in Fife, a region that opposed Scottish independence in the 2014 referendum (BBC News, 2014).

Furthermore, political priorities in Fife are also evident at a broader economic level. Scottish Labour played a key role in preventing the closure of Rosyth Shipyard, a major employer located in the Dunfermline and Dollar constituency, now represented by Graeme Downie. The shipyard's continued operation is of strategic importance to the regional economy, contributing significantly to local employment and economic stability (Downie, n.d.). Also relevant to this discussion are the ongoing impacts of Brexit on Fife's local economy and the opportunities available within its constituencies. For context, 58% of eligible voters in Fife voted to remain part of the European Union (EU). The withdrawal from the EU has particularly affected young people, who no longer have the same freedom to live, work, or study across Europe. Moreover, changes to trade regulations have introduced significant challenges for local businesses. For instance, InchDairnie Distillery in Glenrothes is experiencing increased logistical and financial pressures related to the import and export of goods—especially with the EU, which remains the UK's largest trading partner. (Gilruth, 2025).

In summary, Fife's political and economic landscape reflects a broader shift in public sentiment, marked by a move away from the SNP towards parties offering concrete policy responses to entrenched issues such as poverty, employment, and the post-Brexit economy. The region's electoral outcomes, socio-economic priorities, and responses to national developments illustrate how local dynamics both shape and are shaped by wider political trends. The following section will examine how these patterns in Fife resonate across Scotland, offering insight into the evolving political climate at the national level.

### 3.0 Political Priorities in Scotland

Transitioning from a local to a regional level, we will analyse these political trends in Fife and Scotland as a whole. The electoral region of Mid Scotland and Fife is made up of nine constituencies: Clackmannanshire and Dunblane, Cowdenbeath, Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, Mid Fife and Glenrothes, North East Fife, Perthshire North, Perthshire South and Kinross-shire, and Stirling (The Scottish Parliament, 2025). The Scottish National party is represented in eight of the nine constituencies by Keith Brown, Shirley-Anne Somerville, David Torrance, Jenny Gilruth, John Swinney, Jum Fairlie and Evelyn Tweed respectively, while Willie Rennie from North East Fife represents the Liberal Democrats. Regionally, Mid Scotland and Fife is composed of seven parliament members; four conservatives, two Labour party members, and one Green party member (The Scottish Parliament, 2025). Murdo Fraser, Liz Smith, Alexander Stewart and Roz McCall demonstrate the dominance of the Conservative party in the region as they outnumber Claire Baker and Alex Rowley from the Labour party two to one, and Mark Russell from the Green party four to one. The supremacy of the Conservative party regionally and the Scottish National party constituency highlight the political priority division from a regional level of analysis. The Conservatives typically support local healthcare services and oppose independence, while the Scottish National party typically support strengthening the public job sector and open door immigration policies, which can be evaluated in the voting trends of the following debates (Scottish Conservative Party, 2025; Scottish National Party, 2025).

In 2013, the Scottish Independence Referendum was introduced into parliament and was voted on in 2014. In Mid Scotland and Fife, the region unanimously voted against independence, while the main areas in favour of secession were in Dundee and the greater Glasgow area (Electoral Management Board for Scotland, 2014). Murdo Fraser specifically has placed remaining in the United Kingdom at the top of his platform while in parliament (Fraser, 2025). This demonstrates the dominance of the Conservative party in the electoral region as its members value unison with the rest of the United Kingdom (Scottish Conservatives, 2014). On a similar topic of independence, Great Britain's Brexit from the European Union was a referendum voted on in 2016 by the UK parliament. With the vote being held nationally, Scotland supported remaining in the European Union, emphasising how the movement could lead to a poorer nation with increased trade expenses, as well as lack of funding and a cost of living crisis (Scottish Government, 2023). The continued debate of Scottish independence has grown from the desire for cultural freedom and into a desire for economic freedom, with the ability to rejoin the European Union and contribute to the global economy as its own nation (Scottish Government, 2024).

Internally, Scotland has focused its economic development in its main industry: tourism and the service sectors. These compose over 50% of the Scottish economy, encompassing health services, food and beverage, sports

and entertainment, real estate, transportation and more (Scottish Government, 2022). Many bills have been passed in recent years that have impacted the economy's development. In 2019, the Transport Scotland bill went into effect, aiming to help councils improve local bus services and encourage online ticketing, connecting different transportation services (The Scottish Parliament, 2019). Fife's constituent and regional representatives supported the bill, while the outlier, Murdo Fraser, opposed the bill's enactment (The Scottish Parliament, 2019). This conclusion demonstrates Fife's value in environmental sustainability, as well as connecting more rural parts of Scotland with funding public transportation, aligning with many Scottish National party ideals in strengthening the public service sector. In 2012, the Alcohol Minimum Pricing Act went into effect, amending the previous Licensing Act of 2005 while aiming to establish a new minimum price in addition to decreasing excessive drinking in Scotland. The act provided a formula for calculating the new alcohol prices which may negatively impact the sale rates of pubs, restaurants, and other beverage sectors. As the bill was introduced by the majority Scottish National party, it is reasonable to conclude that the Fife SNP representatives voted in favour of the bill, while the Conservatives and Labour parties also demonstrated support (The Scottish Parliament, 2012). Votes on these bills and similar demonstrate both Fife and Scotland's emphasis on growing the public sector of labour, as well as ensuring health and safety of Scottish citizens.

In an effort to further ensure health nationwide, the role of healthcare continues to be debated. The National Health Service (NHS), while recognised throughout Scotland as an essential and beneficial establishment, has received criticisms from many members of parliament. In September 2024, Roz McCall responded to the rise in response times of ambulances, calling for an increased availability of resources and pushing Parliament to address the issue in an effort to minimise the loss of life that has resulted in wait times (McCall, 2024). McCall's concern on the efficiency of the NHS symbolises the values of Fife on issues of healthcare, as well as the greater Conservative party who emphasise incorporating local health services to guarantee care closer to home at a less costly rate (Scottish Conservative Party, 2021).

Finally, especially with recent armed conflict developments in Ukraine, Syria and Iran, the issue of immigration has been greatly contested throughout Scotland. In 2022—through the presentation by the Scottish National party—the Scottish Parliament passed the motion “Scotland's Population – Meeting the Needs of our Communities, Economy and Public Services” which aimed for more flexible migration policies, especially in rural areas (Scottish Parliament, 2022). Additionally, in the 2023 Scottish government debate on the Illegal Migration bill, Shirley-Anne Somerville claimed that the bill was dehumanising and immoral, noting how it removes support for some of the world's most vulnerable adults and children and potentially forcing them into further exploitation with forcing

individuals to return to their home countries (Somerville, 2023). Both the Scotland's Population motion and stances on Scottish immigration policy align with the greater Scottish National party who value compassion and acceptance towards all immigrants as it is diversity that makes the nation stronger (Scottish National Party, 2015).

Fife's election of Scottish National party constituency representatives and Conservative regional representatives demonstrates a proportional range of representation in Holyrood. In an effort to expand our scope of analysis further, we will evaluate these political trends in Scotland on a national scale of the entire United Kingdom.

#### **4.0 Political Priorities in the United Kingdom**

Moving on from the Scottish level, we will now consider how Fife politicians are positioned within Westminster. With boundary changes at the last election, there are four Members of Parliament (MPs) representing the county—three of which represent the Labour party and one Liberal Democrat (Fife Council, 2024). This means that the majority of MPs in Fife are now politically aligned with the governing party. Additionally, there are now no Scottish National Party (SNP) MPs representing Fife at the national level. The SNP saw significant defeats across Scotland in the 2024 General Election, losing 80% of their Westminster seats, with political commentators suggesting that Scottish Independence is no longer a high priority for many Scottish voters (Carrell, 2024). This shift away from the SNP is reflected in the success of the Labour party in Fife in the most recent election. Therefore, Fife voters at the 2024 General Election largely reflected nation-wide voting patterns.

Wendy Chamberlain, a Liberal Democrat from North East Fife, is the only current MP who was not newly elected in 2024, having been in Parliament since 2019. She is the Chief Whip for the Liberal Democrats meaning her Westminster behaviour and voting patterns are in line with the party's national agenda (House of Commons, 2025). However, she has indicated her personal interest in health and social care. In the previous Parliament, she sponsored a successful Private Members Bill known as the Carer's Leave Act. The act allows for contingencies for workers who have care responsibilities. It was made into law in 2023 (UK Parliament, 2023).

Chamberlain is not the only Fife MP who has placed an emphasis on social care and health as a key agenda. Melanie Ward, the Labour MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, highlights her belief in supporting families who have to care for people with disabilities or Special Educational Needs on her website (Ward, 2024). Additionally, Richard Baker—Labour MP for Glenrothes and Mid Fife—mentioned his work with a disability charity during his Maiden Speech in Parliament (Hansard HC Deb., 23 July 2024). Social care and disability support emerges as a key priority for several Fife MPs.

In many cases there is divergence in the priorities of Fife MPs and the committees and roles they occupy. However, it is notable that two former Fife MPs placed a particular emphasis on foreign affairs during their parliamentary career. Stephen Gethins, the SNP MP for North East Fife from 2015 to 2019, was selected for the Foreign Affairs Committee twice. This role dominated most of his parliamentary activities and upon losing the 2019 election, he became a Professor of International Relations at the University of St Andrews (University of St Andrews, 2025). Additionally, Peter Grant, the SNP MP for Glenrothes from 2015-2024, was a strong anti-Brexit figure. He sat on several European centered committees as well as serving as the SNP spokesperson on Leaving the EU during the Brexit negotiation process (House of Commons, 2024). As both were heavily involved in foreign affairs during the Brexit referendum and subsequent debates on leaving, there was an emphasis on Brexit in both of their parliamentary actions. Both of these MPs represented the SNP which is formally committed to the reintegration of the UK, and more specifically Scotland, with the European Union (SNP, 2025). Therefore, this commitment to foreign affairs can be seen as the MPs both demonstrating their own and their parties national policy, rather than any clear relation to Fife.

In regards to economic policy, Glenrothes and Mid Fife MP Richard Baker tabled a debate on Shipyard's potential for economic growth. In his opening speech, Mr Baker drew attention to the threatened closure of the Methil shipyard in his constituency. Throughout the debate he argued how shipyards, including ones in Fife, have significant economic promise (Hansard HC Deb., 18 March 2025). Action such as this demonstrates how in Parliament, Fife MPs can advocate for the economic successes and struggles of the region on a UK wide platform.

There are not necessarily always consistencies between behaviours of different MPs as they represent different parties and sit on a wide range of committees. However, there is correlation in how both social care and Brexit have emerged as dominant priorities for multiple Fife politicians. As the Westminster system relies on a party system, individual voting patterns are hard to infer significant connections from. Yet looking at the committees, bills and debates that Fife MPs focus on, limited conclusions of their priorities can be determined. We will now move on to a literature review of political trends in Fife.

## **5.0 Global Trends in Regional vs National Political Priorities**

Investigating political priorities in Fife, Scotland and the United Kingdom more broadly is highly useful in its own right, but may also be employed in a global context to navigate the reasons as to why political priorities generally might diverge regionally from national trends. Andrés Rodríguez-Pose and Nicholas Gill's paper attempting to answer the question, 'Is there a global link between regional disparities and devolution?', is an excellent place to begin this more

global investigation. David McGrane, Loleen Berdahl and Scott Bell also provide a refined analysis of an example beyond the United Kingdom, examining alternative reasons for urban and rural political priorities in Canada.

**Increased Legitimacy of Regional Actors:** Rodríguez-Pose and Gill's paper mentions the "increasing legitimacy of regional actors" (Rodríguez-Pose, Gill, 2003). As regions gain legitimacy, they are more likely to develop and pursue their own distinct political priorities that may not always align with national objectives.

**Decentralization of Resources and Authority:** Devolution involves the "decentralization of resources and authority" (Rodríguez-Pose & Gill, 2003). This process has occurred on two levels in Scotland: firstly, in the decentralisation of power from Westminster to Holyrood, and secondly, in the decisions made regionally within Scottish constituencies. When regions have greater control over their own resources and decision-making processes, they can prioritise issues and policies differently than the national government. This autonomy can lead to a divergence in political agendas. Rodríguez-Pose and Gill exemplify Mexico to elicit the importance of political changes in allowing regional political actors to demand change that diverges from national tendencies. In the context of Mexico, the source mentions that "recent political changes that have resulted in far greater democratic representation for regional interests, have also underpinned substantial moves towards increasing the flexibility, autonomy and financial independence of the Mexican states" (Rodríguez-Pose, Gill, 2003). This indicates that political reforms leading to stronger regional representation can empower regions to push for their specific political priorities, potentially from those at the national level, resulting in increasing divergence in political preferences and demands. The election of opposition candidates at the state level in Mexico further solidified their role as "champions of decentralization" (Rodríguez-Pose, Gill, 2003), suggesting a politically driven divergence in priorities.

While discussed in the context of economic efficiency, the argument that "subnational governmental units possess greater knowledge of local markets and social conditions, affords them the opportunity to target policy spending more effectively than the central government" (Rodríguez-Pose, Gill, 2003) implies that local political agendas may be able to adapt more quickly to regional or localised concerns than national ones. This allows for the possibility then that at any one time, particularly in the periods between general elections, there may be vastly different political preferences regionally that do not align with the national governing party.

McGrane, Berdahl, and Bell's analysis of urban and rural political preferences in Canada may also be applied to the case of diverging political priorities in Fife and 13

and the UK. When looking at 'old ideology' (McGrane, Berdahl, Bell, 2016), referring to class conflict, economic issues, wealth redistribution through the welfare state, inner city residents tend towards the left of centre than the national average, while suburban, small urban, and rural residents tend to be to the right. When we consider Fife as a broad region comprising three cities and many smaller towns and villages, this divide can be observed to an extent. The region's three cities, Kirkcaldy, Glenrothes and Dunfermline, are represented locally and nationally by majority left-wing or left-leaning elected representatives. Voting leans further towards the centre and right when examining areas such as North East Fife, which comprises many smaller towns and villages, adhering to McGrane, Berdahl and Bell's theory.

Overall, across the world, various reasons exist for regional political preferences diverging from national trends. Devolution, as a key political concern in Scotland in recent years, has demonstrably impacted regional and national political priorities globally, and thus can be expected to continue to affect Scottish political preferences as the issue of independence remains at the forefront of the Scottish National Party's agenda. Essentially, what can be understood from these two pieces of global political analysis is that devolution empowers regional political actors, responds to regional political pressures and changes, and can shift the balance of political influence in favour of certain regions. These factors can lead to regional political priorities that are distinct from and potentially in conflict with national political objectives.

## **Conclusion**

This project sought to understand whether political priorities in Fife displayed divergence from UK wide trends. We identified several issues as core to the UK political debate in the last decade. These included Scottish independence, Brexit, immigration, health and social care and the economy. These issues are not the only areas that impact voters and officials behaviour but they were identified as some of the most significant.

Analysis of data and surveys showed that Fife voters placed a stronger emphasis on education and healthcare than voters at the Scottish and UK level did, indicating that these are areas of particular priority for them. However, analysis still demonstrated that education and healthcare, along with the economy, were considered the most important issues for voters on all levels. This suggests that political figures should prioritise them in policy.

Research conducted on how political actors and policy have functioned within Fife, suggests that the region has shifted away from the SNP and Scottish Independence as a priority since the referendum in 2014. The region has shown a greater interest in alleviating poverty and anti-Brexit sentiment rather than debates on Scottish nationalism. Within the Scottish Parliament, the majority representation of SNP politicians on the national level and Conservatives on the constituency level demonstrates the range of priorities voters in Fife display depending on the area. On the Westminster level, the elections of MPs has

largely reflected how Scotland has voted in general elections with Labour experiencing greater success in the most recent election. Fife MPs have engaged with a wide range of issues but most specifically social care and foreign affairs, however their behaviour is largely shaped by national party priorities rather than Fife-specific issues.

While there is general correlation between national and Fife priorities the prevalence of Scottish independence has shaped regional politics. The dominance of the SNP in the region and Scotland through most of the last 10 years reflects how regional issues can have an impact on the national agenda.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Surveys Used

SURVEY DATE	REGION(S) DATA OBTAINED FROM SURVEY	SURVEY SOURCE	QUESTION(S) ASKED	RESPONSES GIVEN
2015	Fife	Fife Council: Fife People's Panel	Community perceptions of what is a major issue in the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NHS/Hospitals/Health care</li> <li>- Funding for Public Services</li> <li>- Increasing Elderly Population</li> <li>- Economy</li> <li>- Education/Schools</li> <li>- Unemployment</li> <li>- Pensions and Benefits</li> <li>- Cost of Living (including food, petrol prices)</li> <li>- Access to Suitable Housing</li> <li>- Crime/Antisocial Behavior</li> <li>- Low Pay/Fair Wages</li> <li>- Poverty/Inequality</li> <li>- Town Centres</li> <li>- Local Lifestyles - e.g. alcohol/drug abuse</li> <li>- Quality of Public Services</li> <li>- Quality of Local Area/Environment</li> <li>- Access to Local Services</li> <li>- Migration/Changing Population</li> <li>- Defence/Terrorism</li> <li>- Climate Change - flooding etc.</li> <li>- Rural Issues</li> </ul>

SURVEY DATA	REGION(S) DATA OBTAINED FROM SURVEY	SURVEY SOURCE	QUESTION(S) ASKED	RESPONSES GIVEN
	United Kingdom, Scotland <i>*average of all surveys conducted in this year</i>	YouGov	Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- Immigration &amp; Asylum</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Family life &amp; childcare</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- The environment</li> <li>- Britain leaving the EU</li> <li>- Transport</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Defence and security</li> </ul>
June, 2017	Fife	Fife Council: Fife People's Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The topics listed below are relevant throughout the UK, but we would like to know how much an issue you think they are in Fife.</li> <li>- Please enter the number of the issue in the list which you feel is most important in Fife today.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NHS/Hospitals/Healthcare</li> <li>- Funding for Public Services</li> <li>- Increasing Elderly Population</li> <li>- Economy</li> <li>- Education/Schools</li> <li>- Unemployment</li> <li>- Pensions and Benefits</li> <li>- Cost of Living (including food, petrol prices)</li> <li>- Access to Suitable Housing</li> <li>- Crime/Antisocial Behavior</li> <li>- Low Pay/Fair Wages</li> <li>- Poverty/Inequality</li> <li>- Town Centres</li> <li>- Local Lifestyles - e.g. alcohol/drug abuse</li> <li>- Quality of Public Services</li> <li>- Quality of Local Area/Environment</li> <li>- Access to Local Services</li> <li>- Migration/Changing Population</li> <li>- Defence/Terrorism</li> <li>- Climate Change - flooding etc.</li> <li>- Rural Issues</li> </ul>

SURVEY DATE	REGION(S) OBTAINED FROM SURVEY	SURVEY SOURCE	QUESTION(S) ASKED	RESPONSES GIVEN
	United Kingdom, Scotland *average of all surveys conducted in this month	YouGov	Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- Immigration &amp; Asylum</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Family life &amp; childcare</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- The environment</li> <li>- Britain leaving the EU</li> <li>- Transport</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Defence and security</li> </ul>
6-10 November 2020	Fife, Scotland	YouGov	Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing Scotland at this time? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Britain leaving the EU</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Scottish Independence</li> <li>- The environment</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- Immigration &amp; Asylum</li> <li>- Welfare Benefits</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- Family life &amp; childcare</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Defence and security</li> <li>- Transport</li> </ul>

Survey Date	Region(s) Data Obtained from Survey	Survey Source	Question(s) Asked	Responses Given
15 Nov 2020	United Kingdom	YouGov	Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- Immigration &amp; Asylum</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Family life &amp; childcare</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- The environment</li> <li>- Britain leaving the EU</li> <li>- Transport</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Defence and security</li> </ul>
26-29 June, 2023	Fife, Scotland	YouGov	Which of the following do you think should be the main priorities for the Scottish government? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Climate Change and the environment</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- Social care</li> <li>- Whether or not Scotland becomes independent</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Transport</li> </ul>

Survey Date	Region(s) Obtained from Survey	Survey Source	Question(s) Asked	Responses Given
2024	Fife	Fife Council: Fife People's Panel	Community perceptions of what is a major issue in the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NHS/Hospitals/Healthcare</li> <li>- Funding for Public Services</li> <li>-Increasing Elderly Population</li> <li>- Economy</li> <li>- Education/Schools</li> <li>- Unemployment</li> <li>- Cost of Living (including food, petrol prices)</li> <li>- Access to Suitable Housing</li> <li>- Crime/Antisocial Behavior</li> <li>- Low Pay/Fair Wages</li> <li>- Poverty/Inequality</li> <li>- Town Centres</li> <li>- Local Lifestyles - e.g. alcohol/drug abuse</li> <li>- Quality of Public Services</li> <li>- Quality of Local Area/Environment</li> <li>- Access to Local Services</li> <li>- Migration/Changing Population</li> <li>- Defence/Terrorism</li> <li>- Climate Change - flooding etc.</li> <li>- Rural Issues</li> </ul>

Survey Date	Region(s) Data Obtained from Survey	Survey Source	Question(s) Asked	Responses Given
	United Kingdom, Scotland <i>*average of all surveys conducted in this year</i>	YouGov	Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- Immigration &amp; Asylum</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Family life &amp; childcare</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- The environment</li> <li>- Britain leaving the EU</li> <li>- Transport</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Defence and security</li> </ul>
13-17 May, 2024	Fife, Scotland	YouGov	Which of the following do you think should be the main priorities for the Scottish government? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Climate Change and the environment</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- Social care</li> <li>- Whether or not Scotland becomes independent</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Transport</li> </ul>

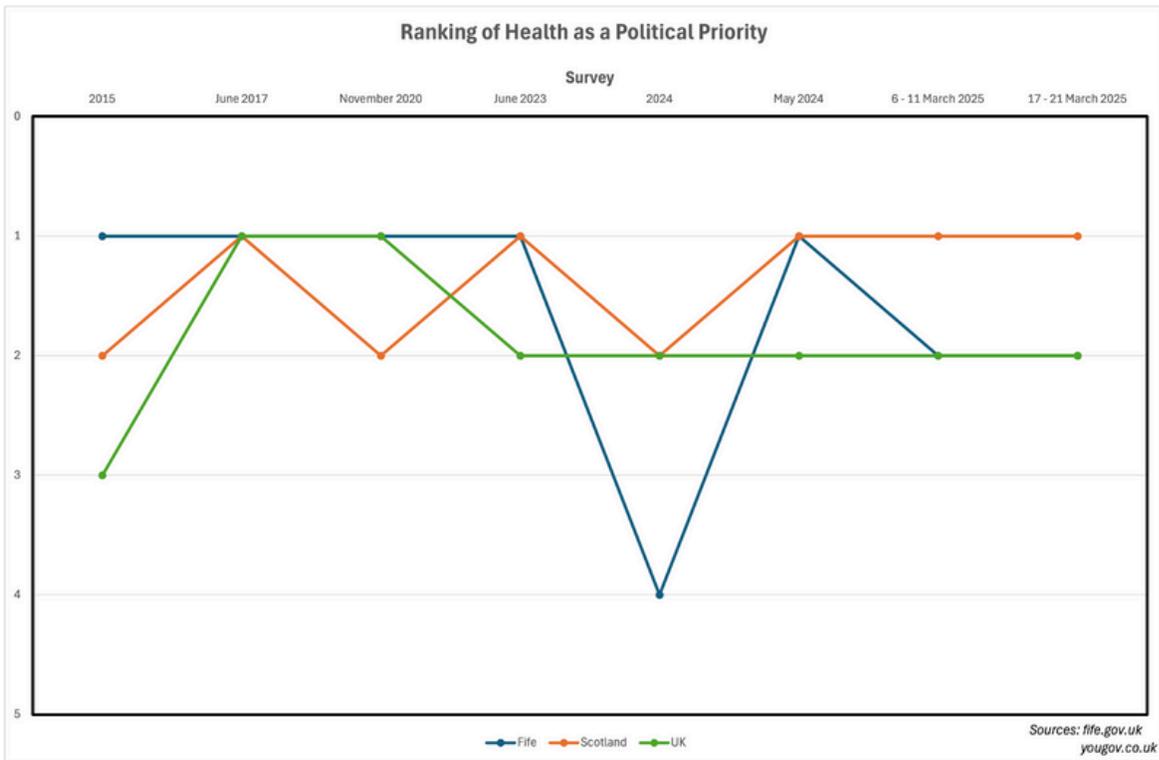
Survey Date	Region(s) Data Obtained from Survey	Survey Source	Question(s) Asked	Responses Given
20 May 2024	United Kingdom	YouGov	Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- Immigration &amp; Asylum</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Family life &amp; childcare</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- The environment</li> <li>- Britain leaving the EU</li> <li>- Transport</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Defence and security</li> </ul>
6-11 March 2025	Fife, Scotland	YouGov	Which of the following do you think should be the main priorities for the Scottish government? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Climate Change and the environment</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- Social care</li> <li>- Whether or not Scotland becomes independent</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Transport</li> </ul>

Survey Date	Region(s) Data Obtained from Survey	Survey Source	Question(s) Asked	Responses Given
17 Mar 2025	United Kingdom	YouGov	Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- Immigration &amp; Asylum</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Family life &amp; childcare</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- The environment</li> <li>- Britain leaving the EU</li> <li>- Transport</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Defence and security</li> </ul>
17-21 March 2025	Fife, Scotland	YouGov	Which of the following do you think should be the main priorities for the Scottish government? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Climate Change and the environment</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- Social care</li> <li>- Whether or not Scotland becomes independent</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Transport</li> </ul>

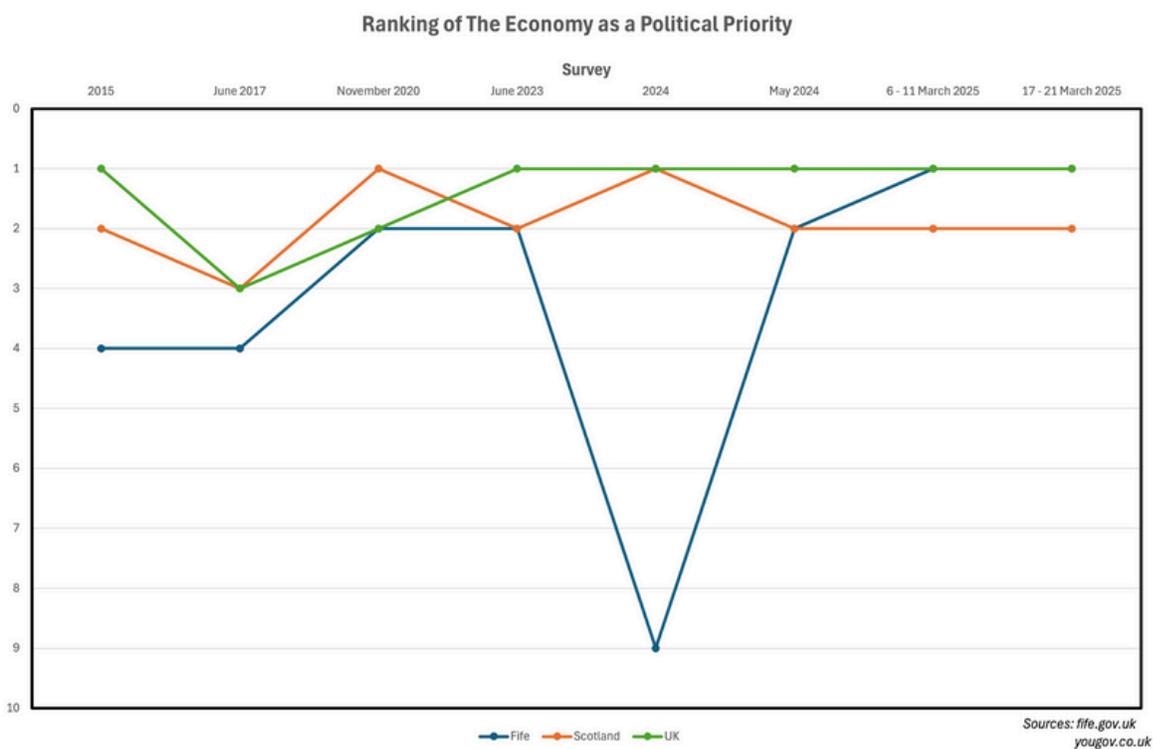
Survey Date	Region(s) Data Obtained from Survey	Survey Source	Question(s) Asked	Responses Given
24 Mar 2025	United Kingdom	YouGov	Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health</li> <li>- Immigration &amp; Asylum</li> <li>- Crime</li> <li>- The economy</li> <li>- Tax</li> <li>- Pensions</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Family life &amp; childcare</li> <li>- Housing</li> <li>- The environment</li> <li>- Britain leaving the EU</li> <li>- Transport</li> <li>- Welfare benefits</li> <li>- Defence and security</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2: Charts of Issues Ranked as a Political Priority

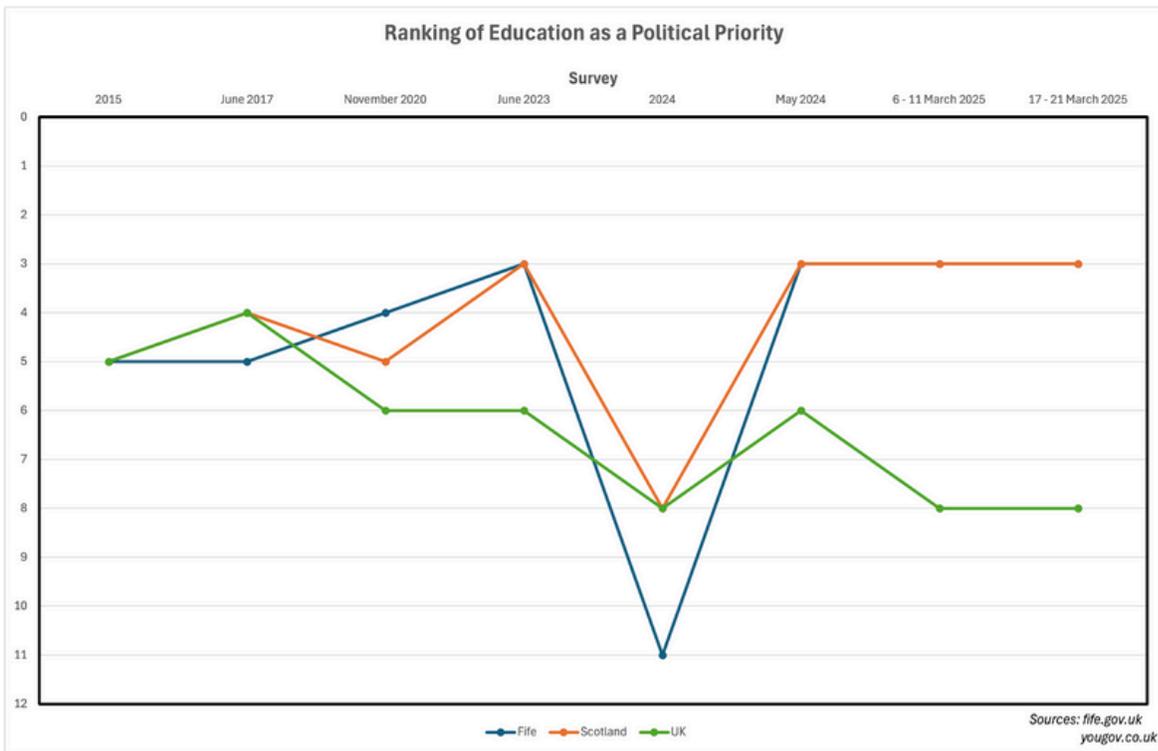
### 2.1: Ranking of Health as a Political Priority



### 2.2: Ranking of the Economy as a Political Priority

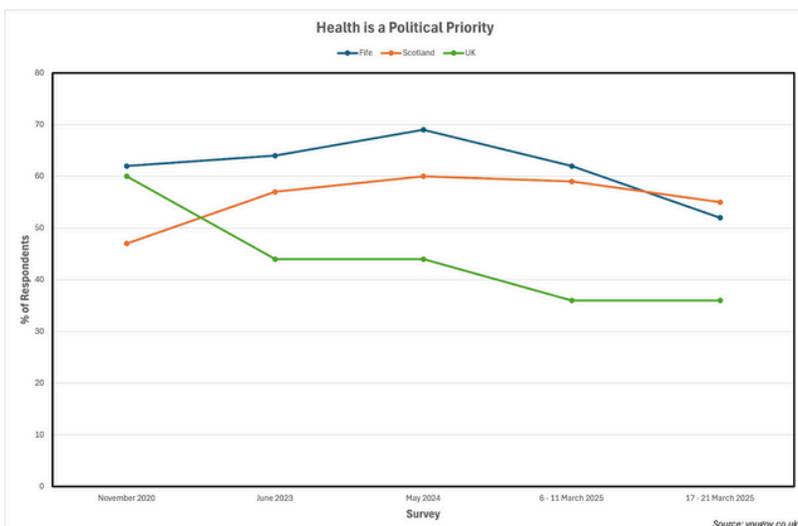


## Appendix 2.3: Ranking of Education as a Political Priority



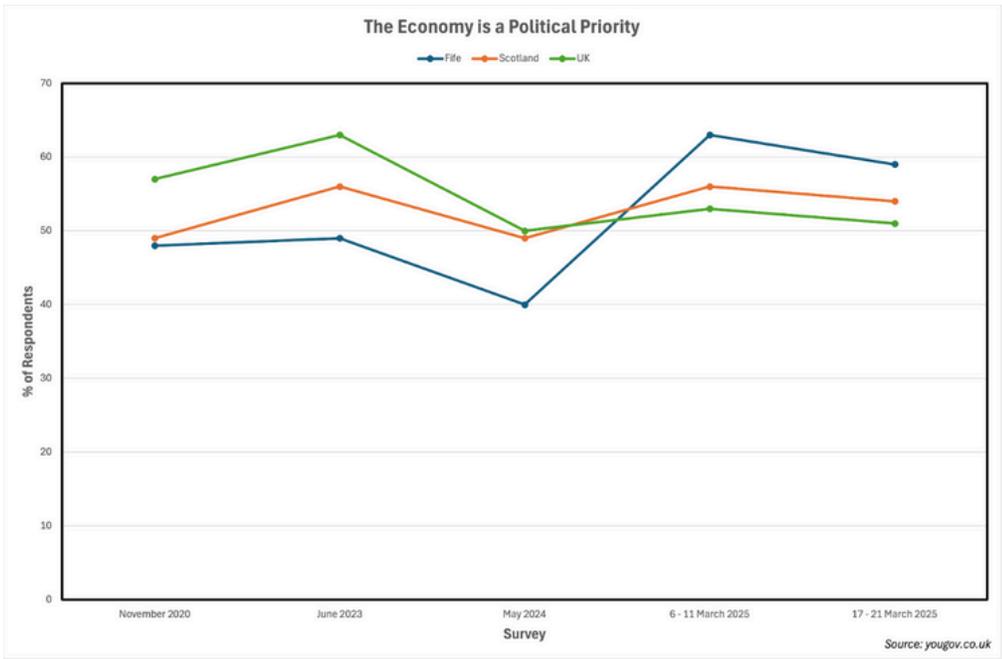
## Appendix 3: Charts of Issues as a Political Priority in Terms of Percentage of Respondents

### 3.1 Health is a Political Priority



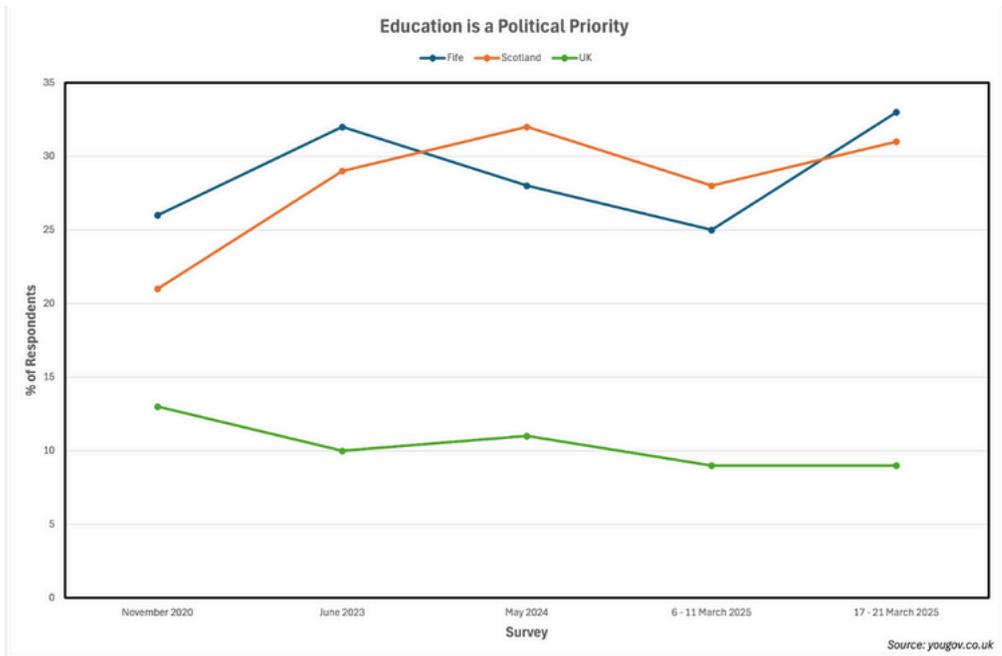
Deviations		
Survey	Fife to Scotland	Fife to UK
November 2020	15	2
June 2023	7	20
May 2024	9	25
6 - 11 March 2025	3	26
17 - 21 March 2025	-3	16
<b>Average Deviations</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>17.8</b>

### 3.2: The Economy is a Political Priority

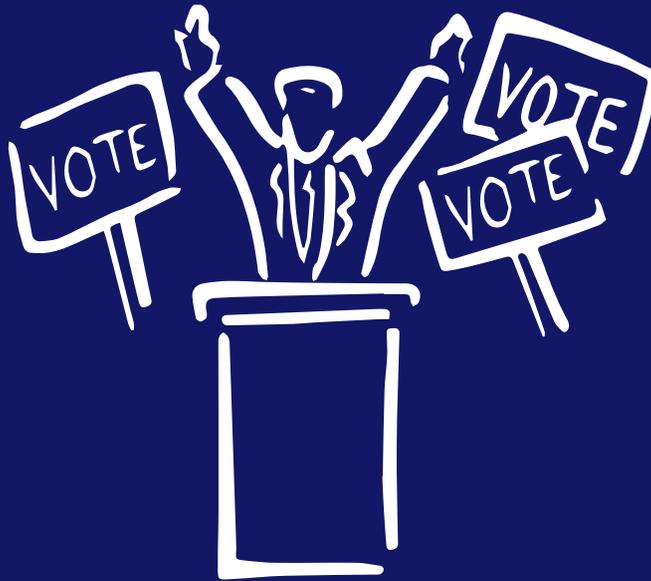


Deviations		
Survey	Fife to Scotland	Fife to UK
November 2020	-1	-9
June 2023	-7	-14
May 2024	-9	-10
6 - 11 March 2025	7	10
17 - 21 March 2025	5	8
<b>Average Deviations</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-3</b>

### 3.3: Education is a Political Priority



Deviations		
Survey	Fife to Scotland	Fife to UK
November 2020	5	13
June 2023	3	22
May 2024	-4	17
6 - 11 March 2025	-3	16
17 - 21 March 2025	2	24
<b>Average Deviations</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>18.4</b>



**The Political Institute  
of Action Research**

*The Political Institute of Action Research at the University of St Andrews*  
April 2025