
Scottish Labour – The Acceptable Alternative?

Reflections on 2024 and looking ahead to 2026

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"UNDERSTANDING THE SCOTTISH LABOUR VOTER"



Who we are – Scottish Election Study

- Long-running survey of voting age adults in Scotland
 - Funded by the UKRI Economic and Social Research Council
 - Continuity in our team going back to 2007
- Collaboration between multiple institutions across the UK, based at Edinburgh
- We surveyed **2,472 Scottish residents** before and just after the 2024 election
 - Retention: **82%**, with 2,027 responding to post-election wave
 - Accuracy: Average error in final vote share was just **0.38%**
- We also run the Scoop (Scottish Opinion Monitor), cross-section of ~1,200 fielded 3x annually (watch this space: in the field soon...)
- Details, including resources for schools, at www.scottishelections.ac.uk

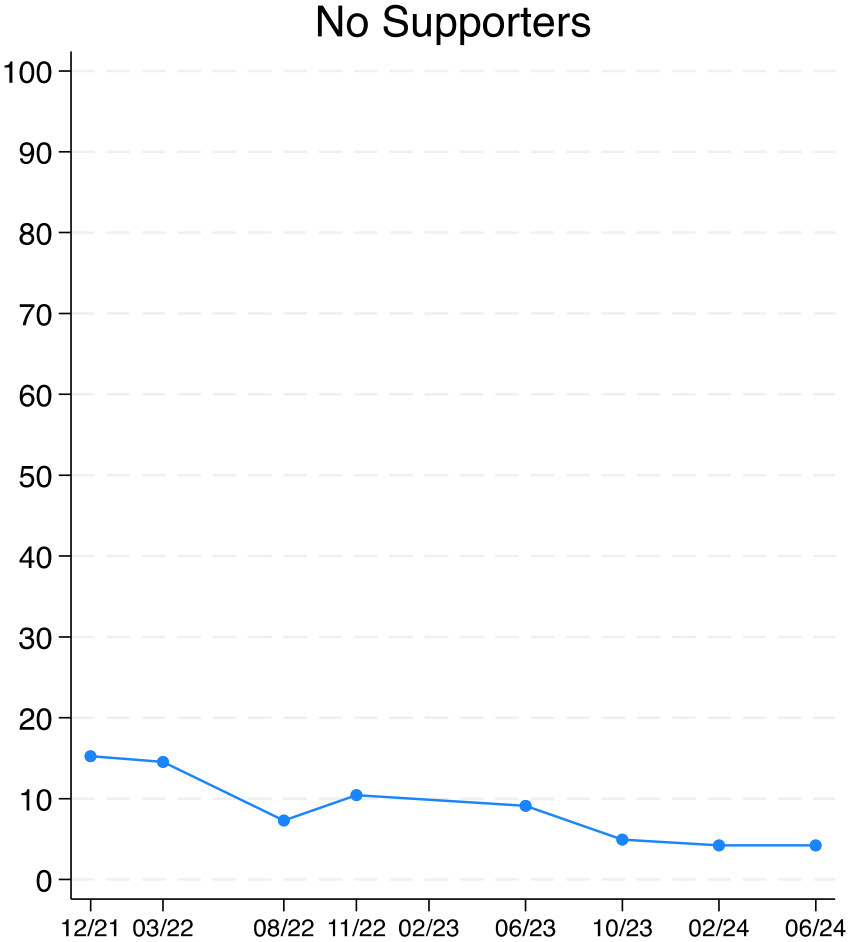
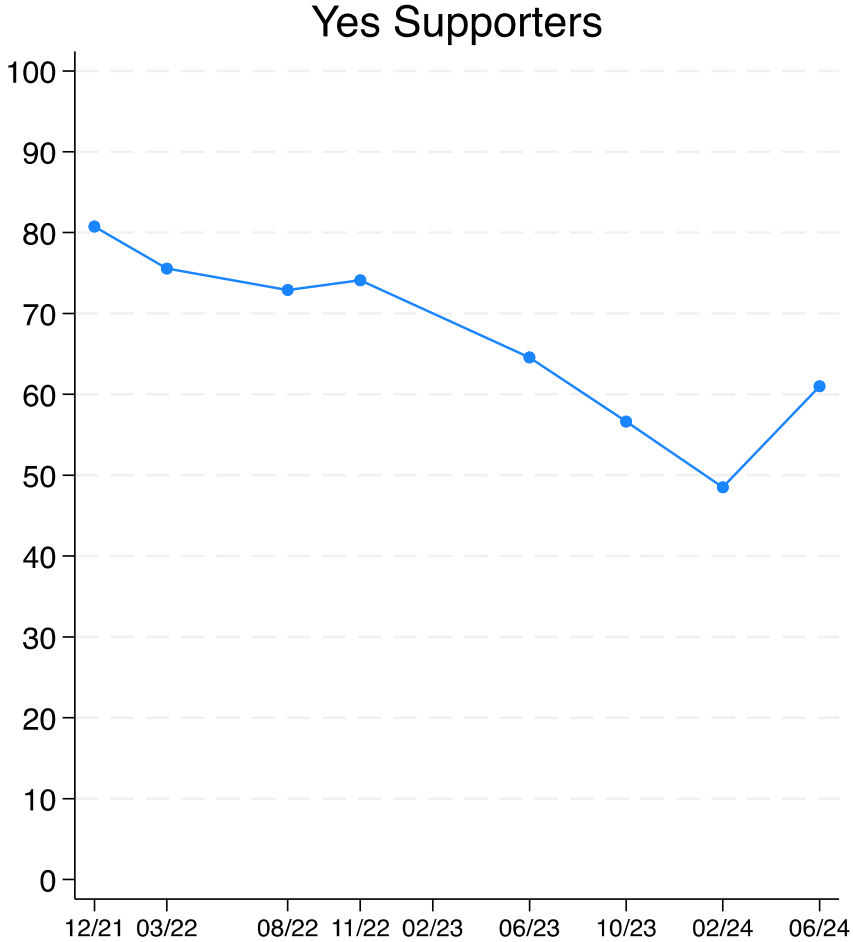


The electoral context in 2024

Collapse in evaluations of Scottish Govt. among Yes supporters



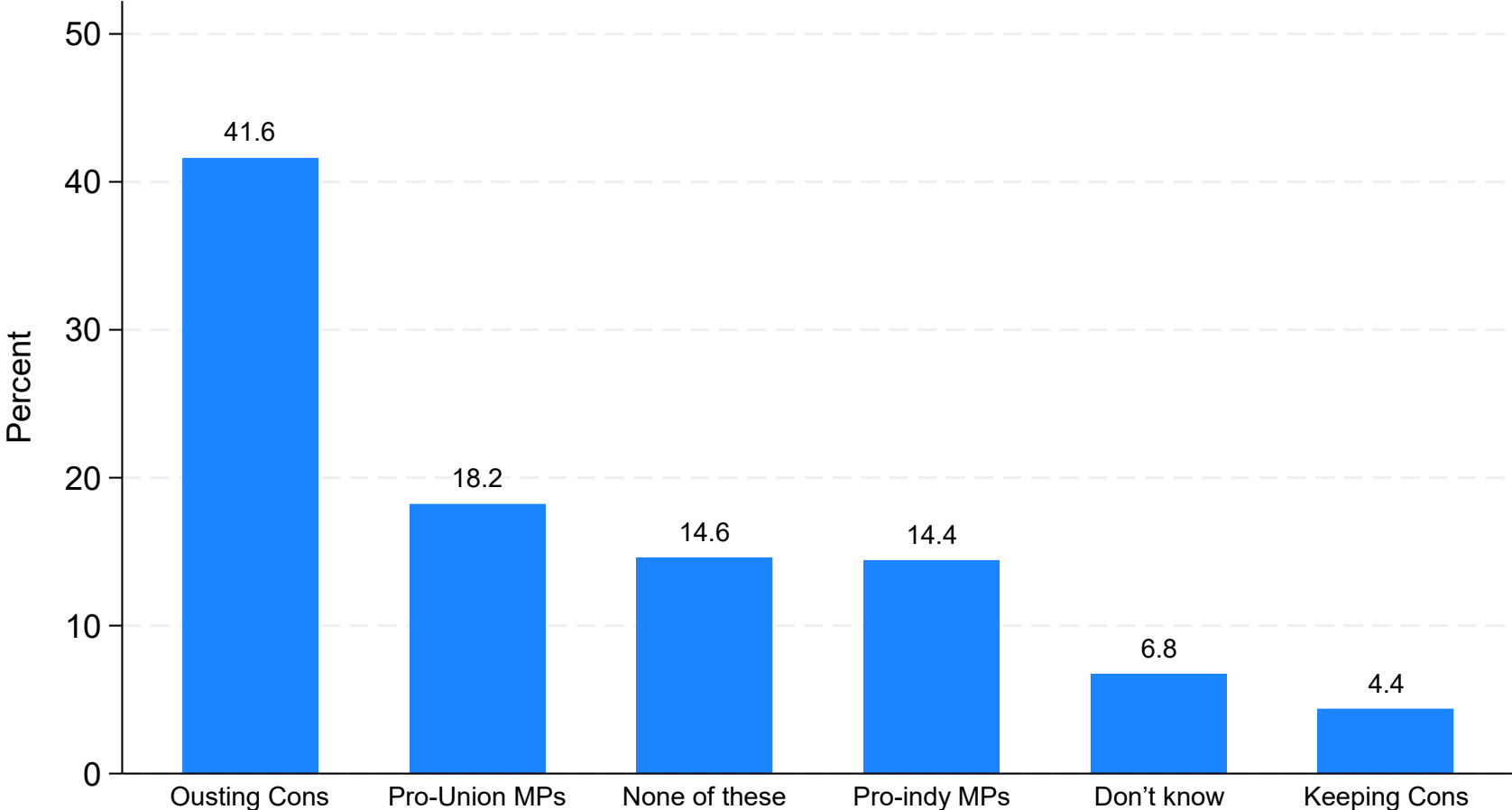
Scottish Government Performance - Total Good



Scots wanted rid of the Conservatives



Scottish voter priorities for GE2024



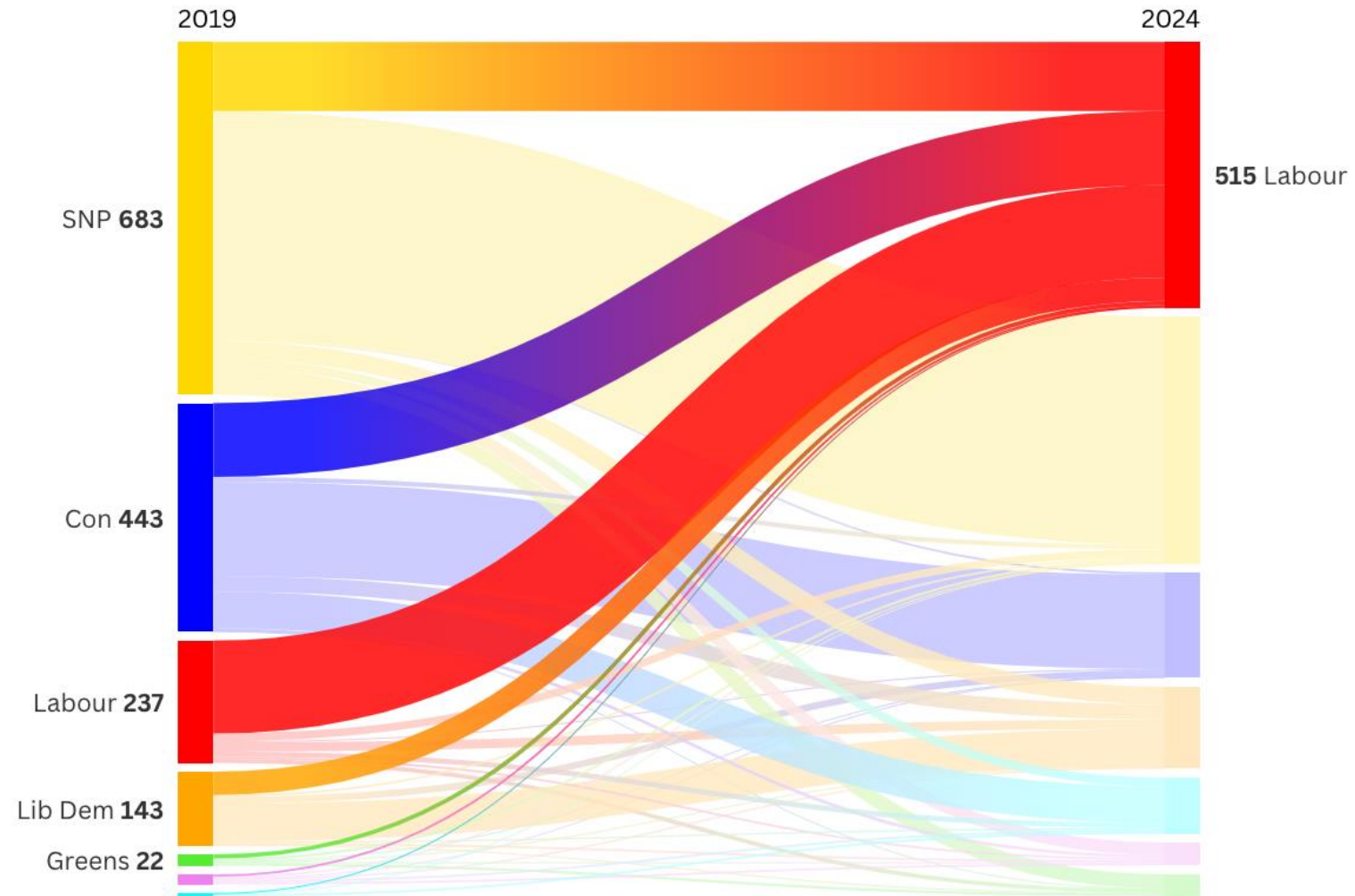


Understanding the results

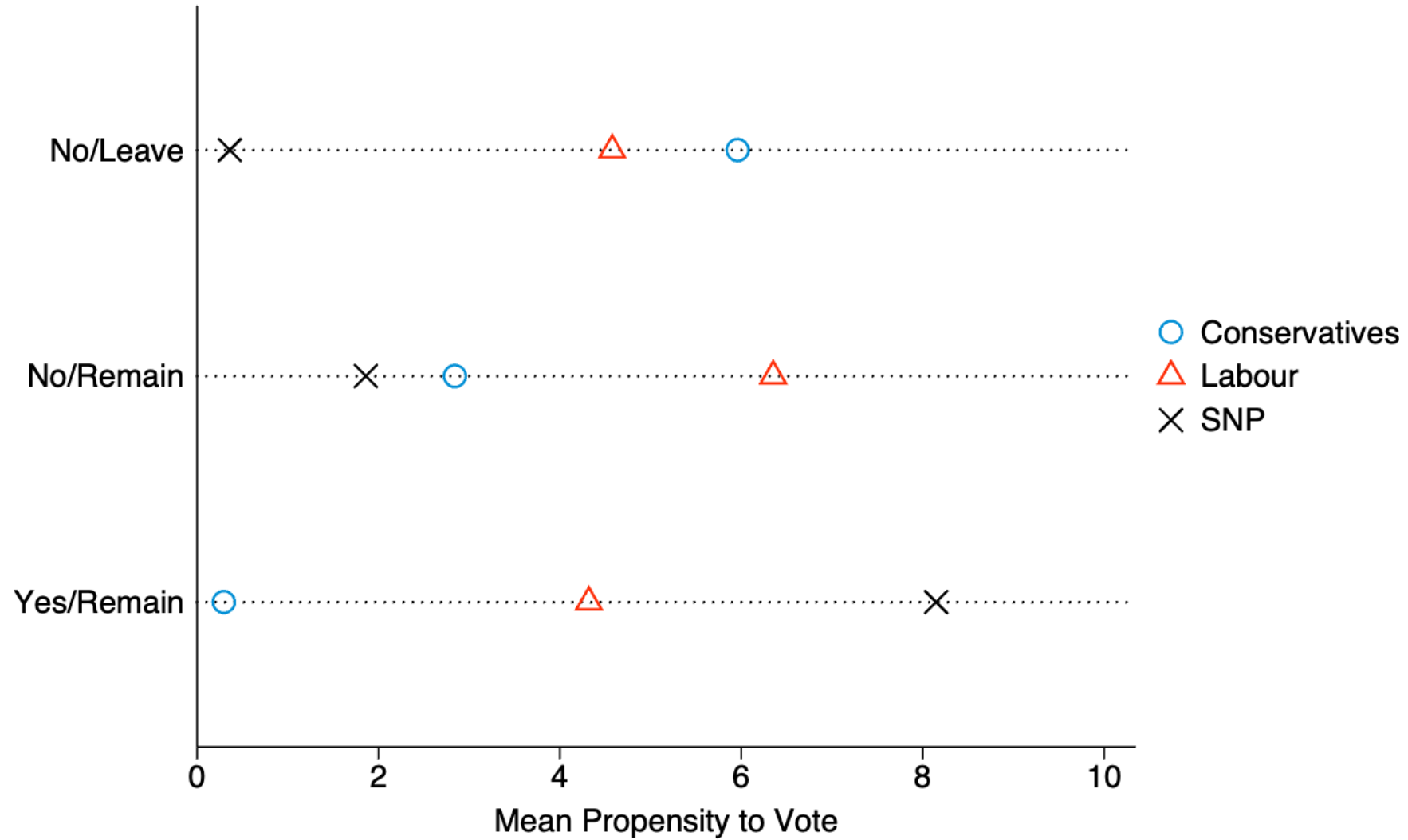
Switching to Scottish Labour

General Election Vote Switching

Scottish Election Study 2024 / n=2,473 / Unweighted data

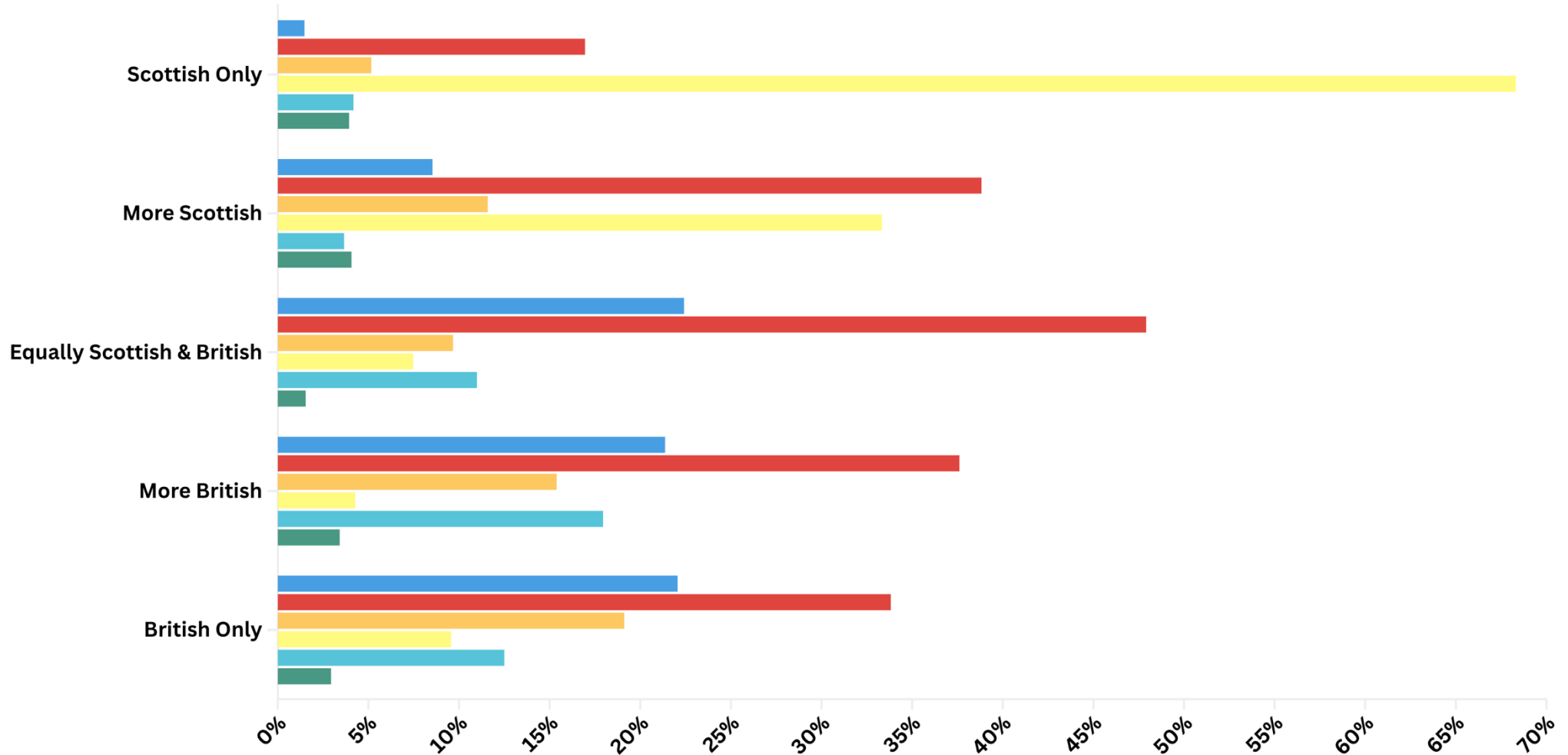


An acceptable alternative across constitutional lines?



Labour performed well across national identities

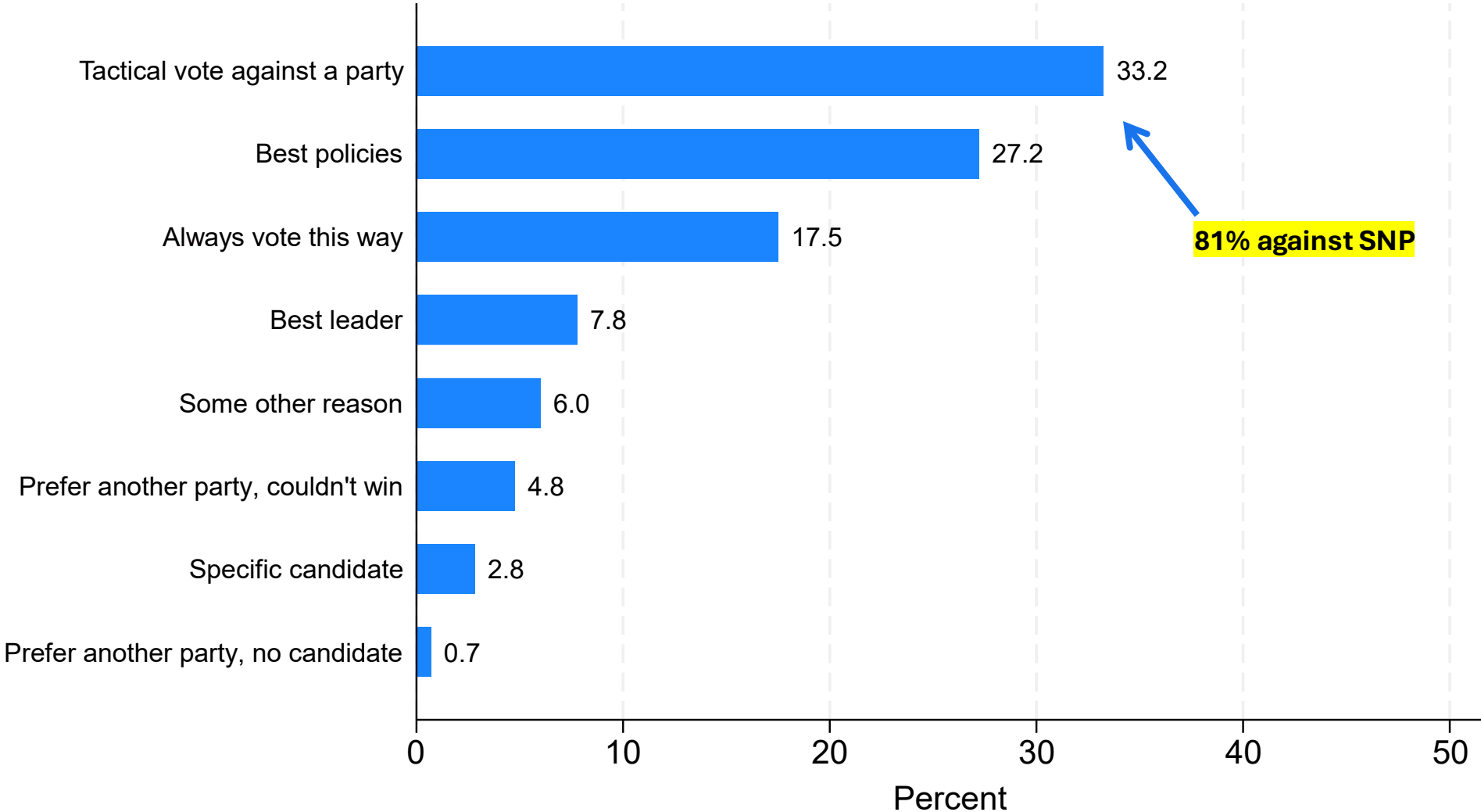
Conservatives Labour Liberal Democrats SNP Reform Green



But high share of transactional voters



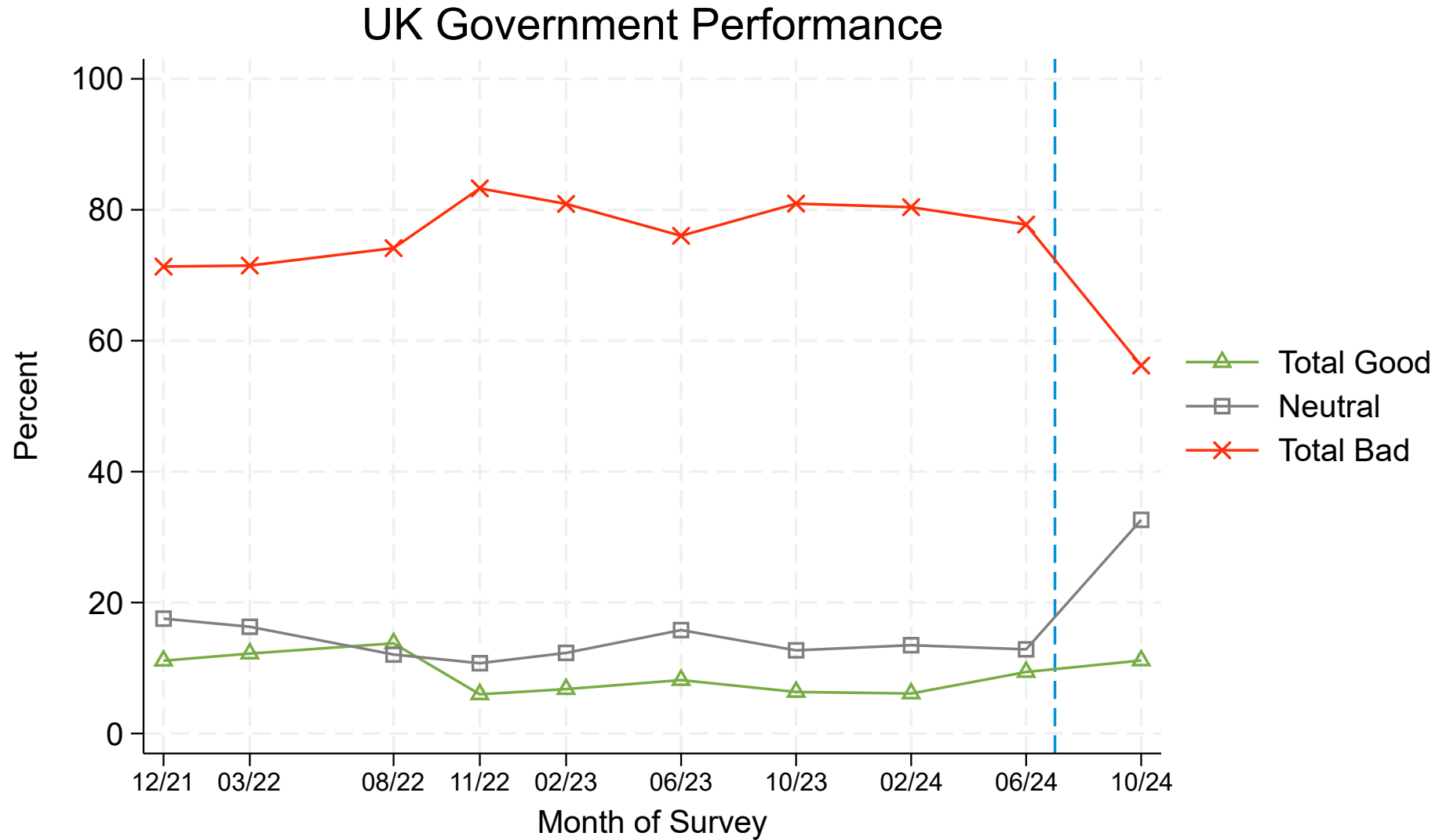
Reasons for voting Labour in 2024





Looking ahead

No Gretna honeymoon for Labour in government



2026 vote intention among **stable*** voters

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	SNP
Conservative	92 (82)	5 (6)	0 (4)	0 (0)
Labour	0 (0)	62 (64)	9 (9)	1 (2)
Lib Dem	0 (1)	4 (6)	82 (78)	1 (2)
SNP	0 (1)	2 (2)	0 (0)	84 (71)
Reform	1 (5)	5 (7)	0 (4)	0 (2)
Scottish Greens	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)	8 (15)
Don't know	5 (5)	11 (10)	5 (4)	5 (3)

*Those who voted for these parties in both 2021 and 2024

2026 vote intention among 2024 Labour voters

	From Con	From SNP	<u>Stable Lab</u>
Con	37 (33)	0 (0)	5 (6)
Lab	34 (28)	50 (49)	62 (64)
LD	7 (10)	0 (2)	4 (6)
SNP	2 (0)	25 (23)	2 (2)
Reform	4 (18)	0 (0)	5 (7)
Green	0 (0)	2 (6)	1 (0)
DK	15 (10)	22 (18)	11 (10)

Understanding switchers as path dependency

- Look at voter characteristics independent from vote choice (ie exclude party evaluations, leader assessments)
 - Demographics/socio-ec: age, uni, middle class, born in England
 - Identities: RTI, previous support for party

Labour 2 SNP switchers	Labour 2 Con switchers
More likely to leave if: Scottish identity > British identity Having supported SNP before	More likely to leave if Have supported Con before
Less likely to leave if: Have university degree	Less likely to leave if: Have university degree

Which issues explain stability & switching?

- Lab 2 SNP switching not explained by caring more about typical valence or competence issues (constitutional issues , economy, education, health)
- They do care more (than loyal Labour voters) about
 - Environment, immigration, crime and housing
- For the most part the same is true of Lab 2 Con switchers
 - Care more about immigration than loyal Labour voters
- Put another way, immigration issue is prompting some leakiness in support in both directions

Conclusions

- UKGE 2024
 - Anti-incumbent environment and this transferred across levels
 - Labour seen as the acceptable change option to a portion of previous SNP and Conservative voters but this has already eroded
- SP 2026 looks like reconsolidation on the Yes side and further fragmentation on the No side
 - Current switching from Lab24 explained by voters returning 'home'
 - All UK-wide parties hampered by the dynamics of multilevel politics
 - Reform drawing most support from Conservatives, battle is for “middle Scotland”



[Slides available here](#)

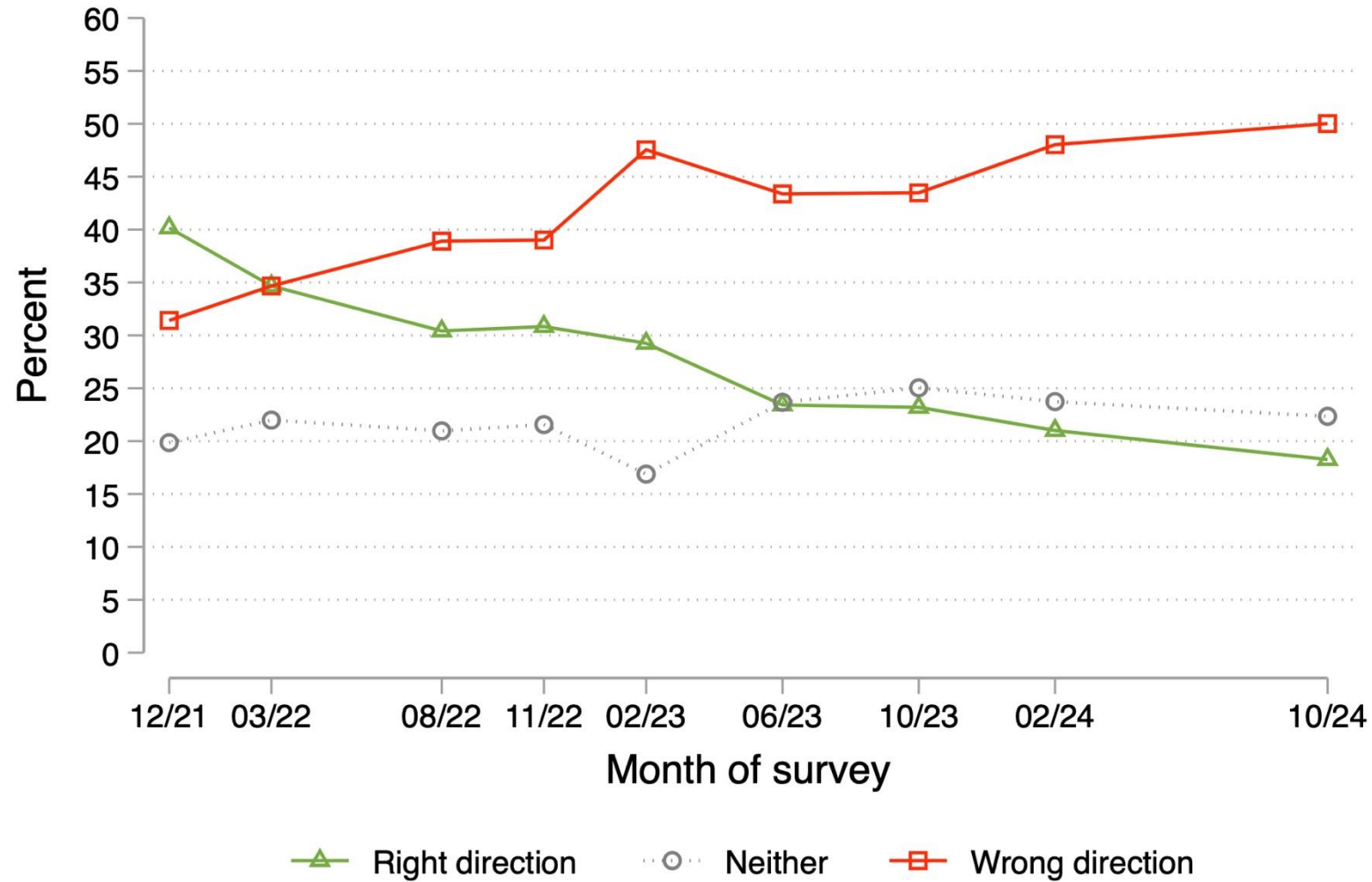
Questions for Michael, Libby and the audience...

- Does the SNP have a permanent structural advantage at Holyrood that helps them evade costs of governing?
 - Perception of no Westminster “boss” to answer *to* or *for*
 - UK Governments appear to attract more blame
 - Labour clearly not immune from the same dynamic that damaged the Tories
- Is there *anything* UK-wide Scottish parties can do?
 - Residual SNP advantage on “standing up for Scotland” - baked in from the start?
 - Ideological proximity to the SNP - Do floating voters believe Scottish Labour would make a difference at all on challenging valence issues like cost of living, NHS, education?
 - Is it credible to promise both tax cuts and service improvements?
 - If not, what are the key points of differentiation?
 - e.g. Focus on growth via planning, nuclear, O&G?
 - Can No. 10 work with Scottish Labour for a “retail” offer? Work *with* rather than *stand up to*?



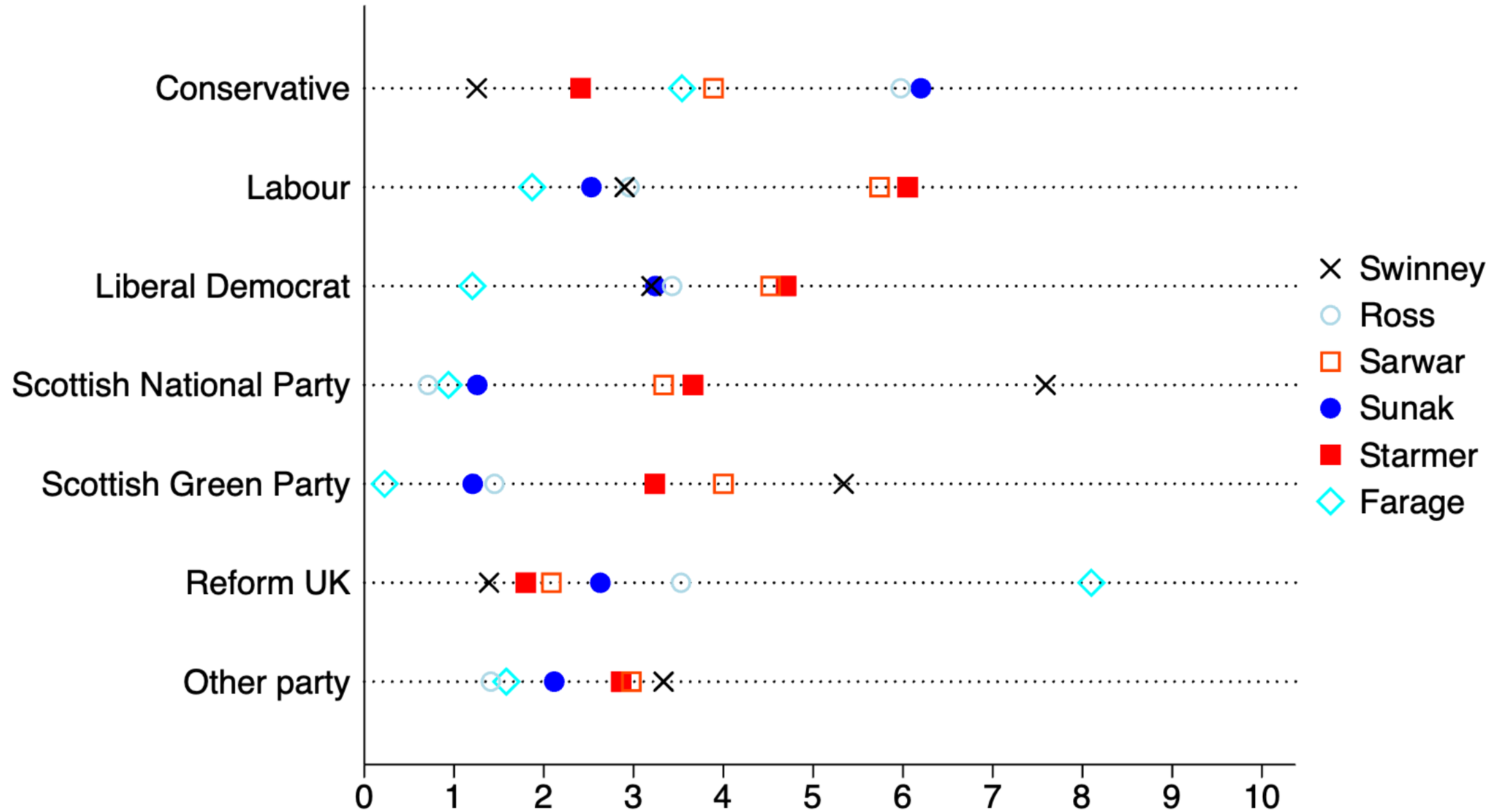
Extra data

Scotland's direction

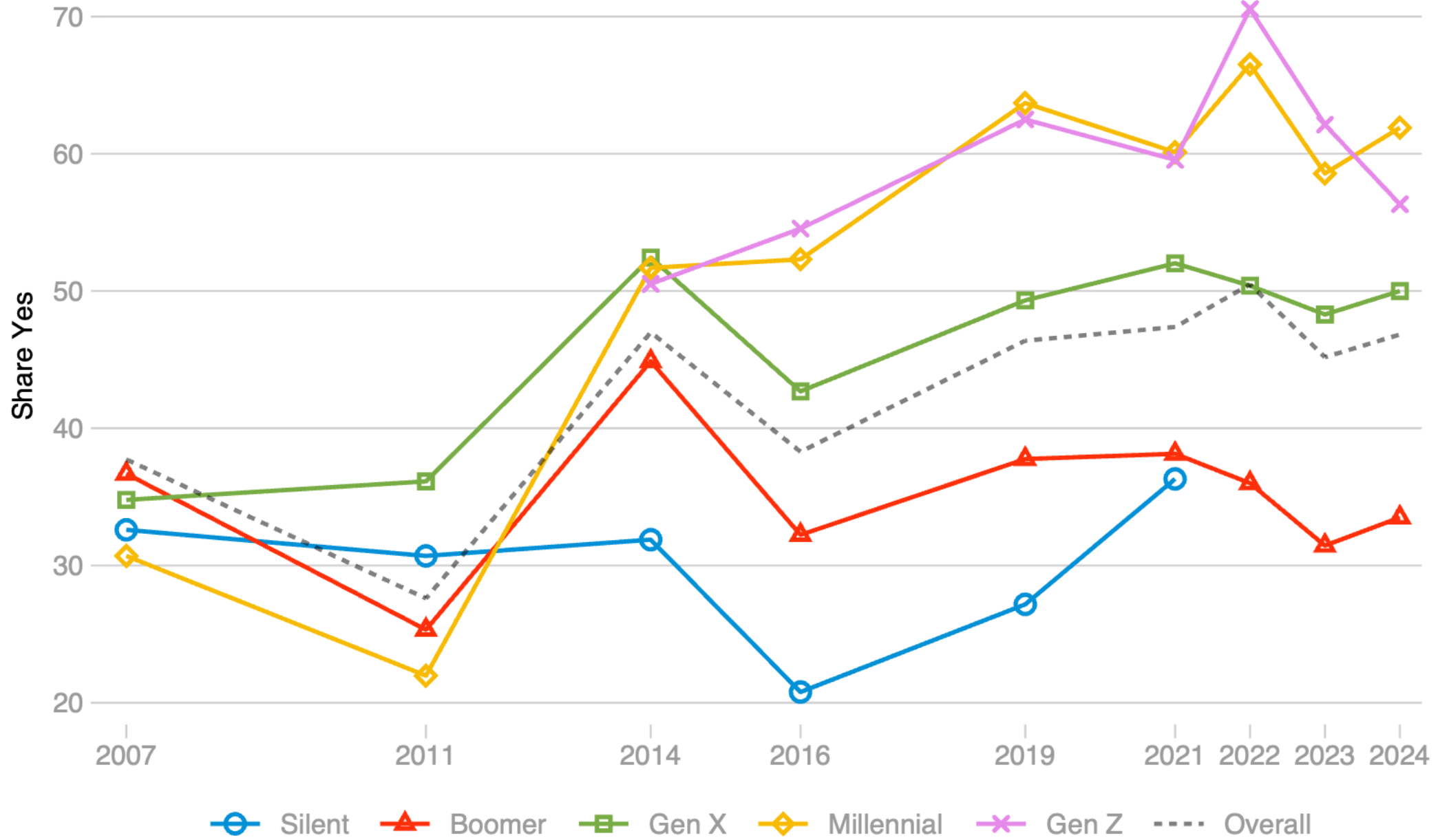


Scottish Opinion Monitor (Scoop) by Scottish Election Study
Representative cross-sections of 1,200-1,300 Scots between Dec 2021 and Oct 2024
Scoop did not run in June 2024 due to UK General Election

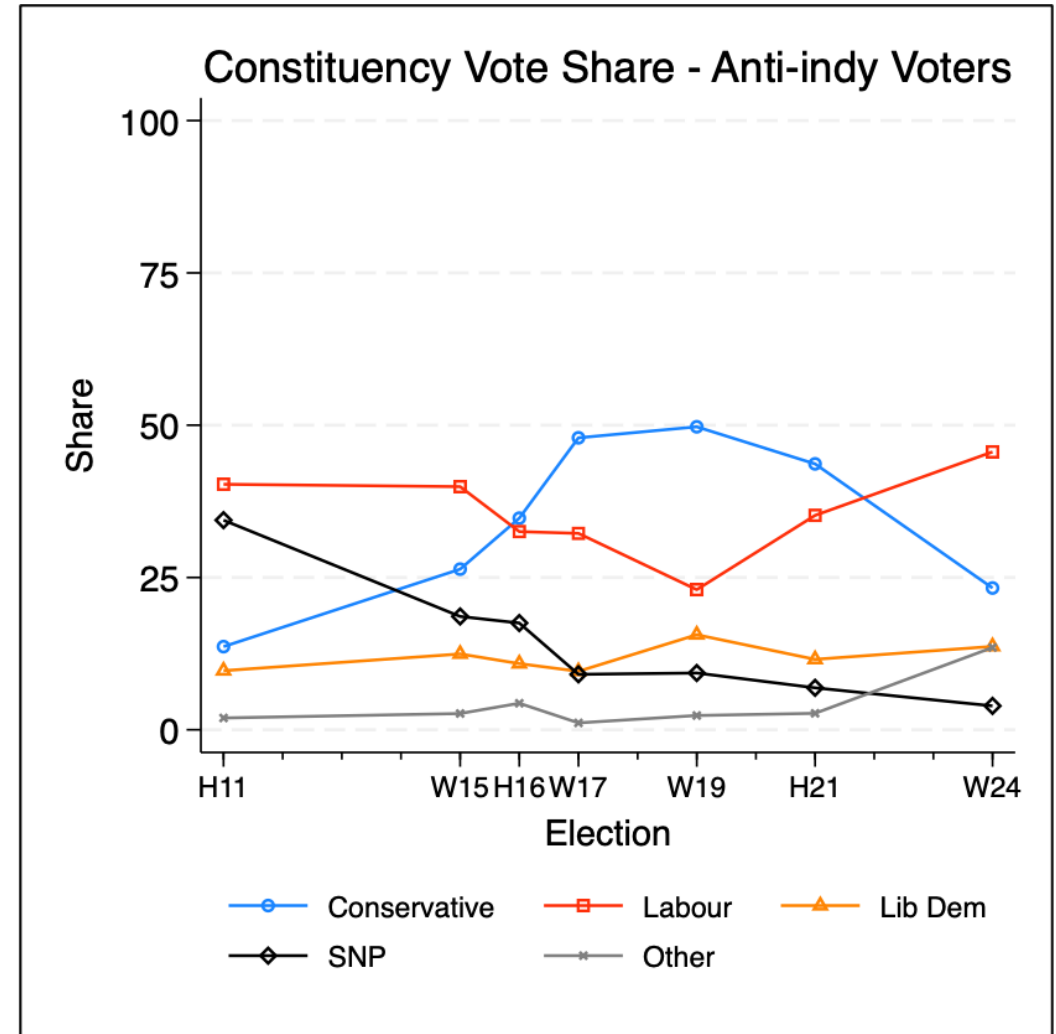
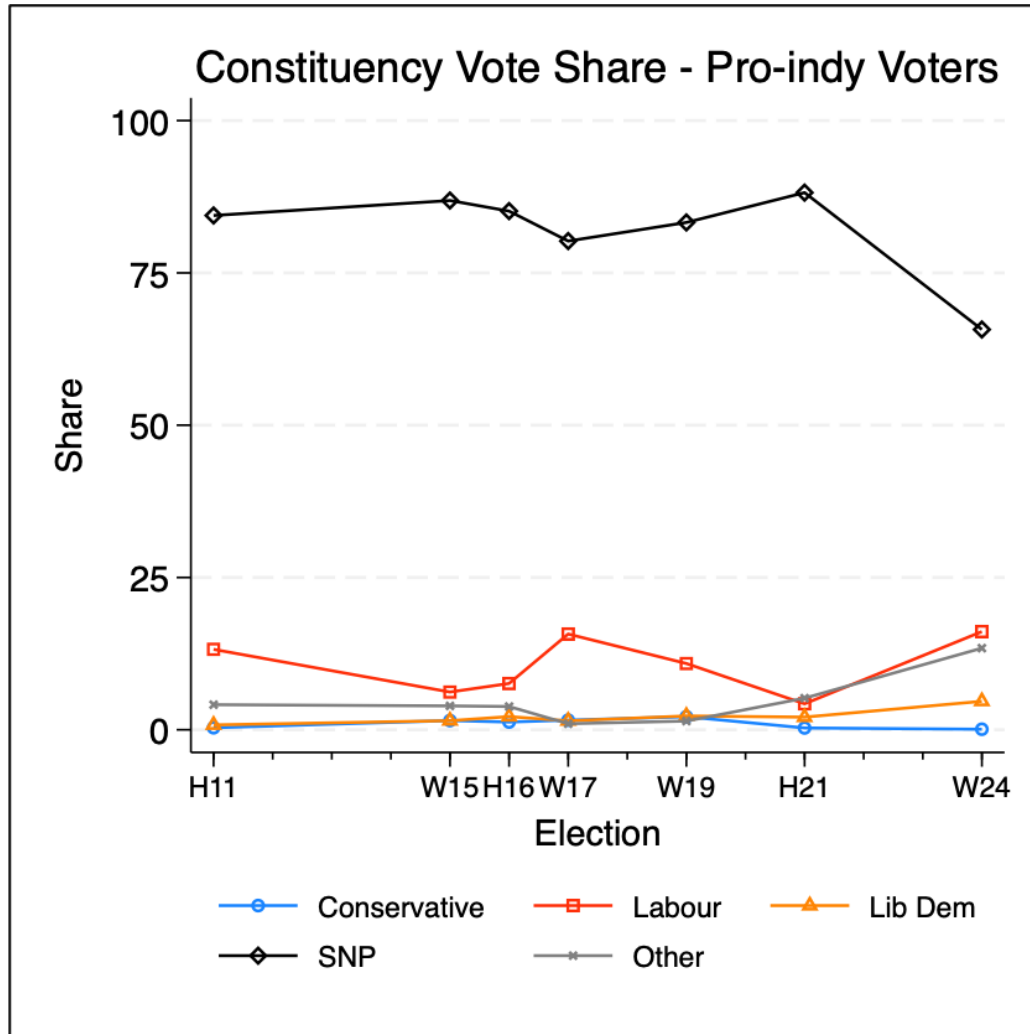
Mean Leader Favourability by Vote Choice



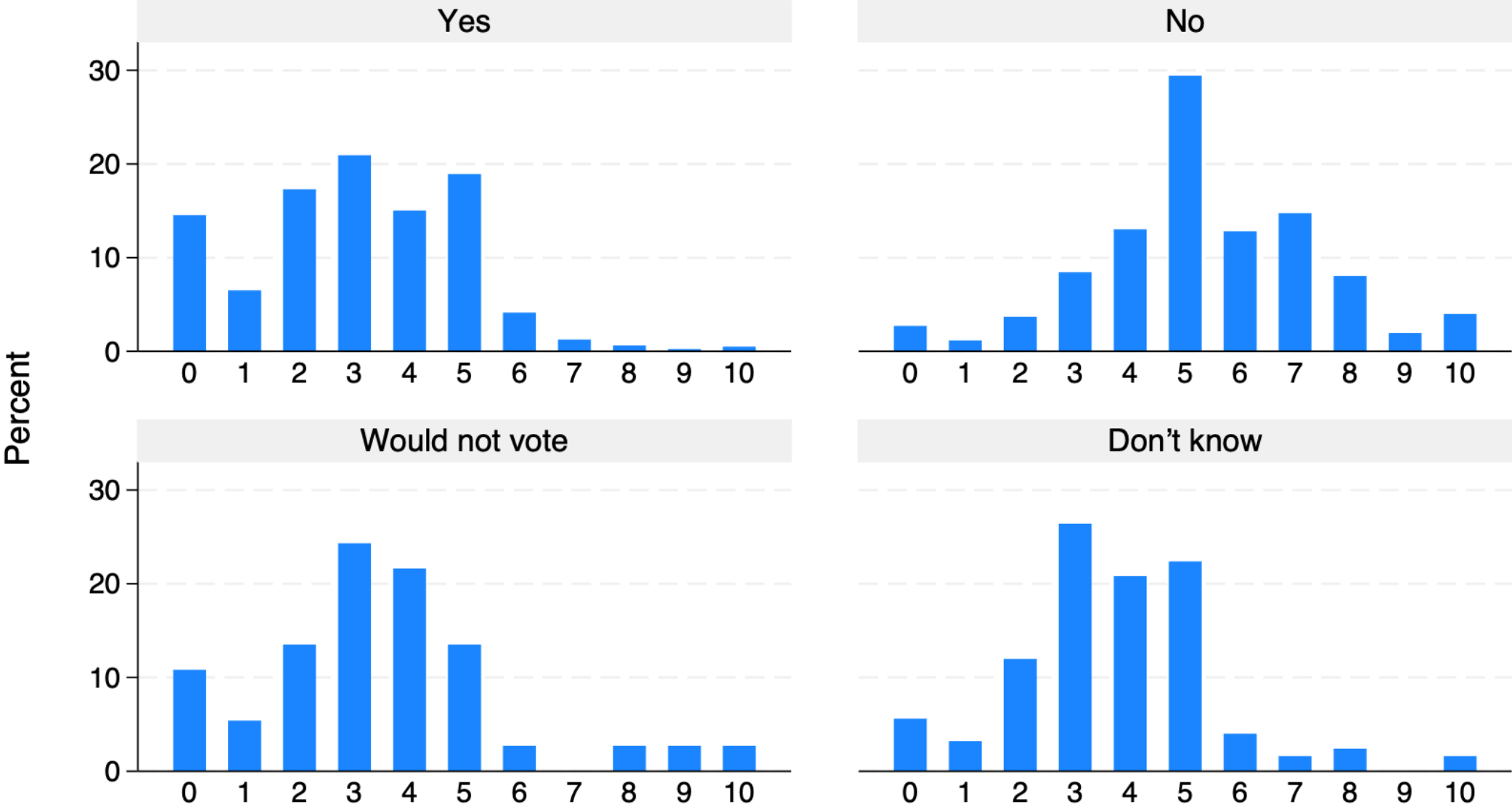
Indy Support by Generation



Constituency vote share since 2011 by constitutional preference



Left-Right by Indy Vote Intention





Scottish Election Study May 2021 vs. Scottish Opinion Monitor June 2023