

Land Reform: What Scotland Wants: The Results of Scotland's *Big Land Question*

Report by The Diffley Partnership
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Summary

Land reform is a longstanding issue in Scotland, rooted in the country's distinctive history of land ownership and concentrated estate control.

As political parties prepare for the 2026 Holyrood election, there is growing interest in understanding what the people of Scotland think about ownership and the role of government in shaping the country's land system.

The Big Land Question is the largest ever independent exploration of public attitudes about land reform in Scotland. Carried out over eight months, it has uncovered public interest and support for changes in how Scotland's land is owned and managed, with calls for power to be shifted away from large estates in favour of policies that prioritise local communities, wildlife and the environment.

The methodology was designed to capture both a breadth and depth of perspectives. It included a representative survey of over 2,000 Scottish residents, through an established polling framework, plus expert-moderated focus groups and stakeholder roundtables.

This approach provided robust data on public opinion, which is complemented by nuanced qualitative insights to help inform policy.

Consistent patterns emerged across the wide range of engagement, with calls for:

- **an end to hidden land ownership**, people want transparency about who owns what land
- **large landowners to be held more accountable** for the way their land is managed
- **limits on how much land can be owned** by one person or company, to prevent increased concentration of land ownership
- **communities given real power** over land decisions that affect them
- **land reform policies** that help deliver more local jobs and housing
- **some form of land tax** to fund these transformative changes

Participants expressed concerns that the "invisible power" of large landowners is the underlying cause of government inaction. They see this as causing a "vicious circle", and noted the complexity of legal and financial frameworks and the cost of land as some of the key barriers to land reform.

The Big Land Question found that Scottish residents see land reform as an important cross-cutting issue; and one that underpins other economic and social problems. The research identified a strong appetite for fair rules and more accountability for landowners.

The Scottish Parliament and other policymakers should consider the findings of **The Big Land Question** and seek to embed land reform into a vision for Scotland's future that prioritises people, wildlife and the environment.

1. Introduction

Background

Land reform is a longstanding and evolving issue in Scotland, rooted in the country's distinctive history of land ownership and concentrated estate control. With just a small percentage of the population owning large tracts of land, questions about equity, access and accountability continue to shape the national conversation. While progress has been made through legislative reform and support for community ownership, many challenges remain — particularly around transparency, environmental responsibility and the public interest in how land is owned and used.

The Scottish Government has signalled its intention to make land reform a continued priority. As parties prepare for the 2026 Holyrood election, there is growing political interest in understanding what the public think about land, ownership and the role of government in shaping the future of Scotland's land system.

Against this backdrop, **The Big Land Question** was commissioned by [REVIVE](#) to explore attitudes to land reform among the public, key stakeholders and communities across Scotland.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used to gather evidence from a broad cross-section of the Scottish public. The research comprised four key components:

1. Public Survey

A nationally representative online survey was conducted with **2,041 adults in Scotland** between 3–8 October 2024, using the ScotPulse panel. The questionnaire [Appendix A] explored knowledge of land reform, views on ownership, support for interventions, and attitudes to subsidies. Responses were weighted by age and gender to reflect the Scottish population.

2. Public Consultation

An open consultation [Appendix B] received **1,390 responses**, collected via an online form and interactive video portal. The consultation featured on Diffley Partnership's website, with the interactive video portal hosted by Production Attic. It included closed questions on land reform policy options and an open text field for qualitative comments. Respondents included individuals and organisations from across Scotland.

3. Online Panel – Survey and Focus Groups

This strand engaged a smaller group of participants in deeper discussion.

There was strong appetite to join the BLQ online panel, as 825 of the 2,041 public survey participants expressed interest in doing so. Diffley Partnership reviewed the details of those interested and built the panel using random sampling, with care taken to ensure variation in age, sex, social class, levels of interest in land reform and geographic location. There were 155 members in the panel at the end of June 2025.

Online panel activities included:

- A short online survey, receiving responses from **92 panel members**, which explored attitudes to land ownership, animal welfare, and political trust.
- A series of **three focus groups** with a total of 19 participants, held between February and June 2025. Each group explored different dimensions of land reform:
 - Focus Group 1: Views on ownership and barriers to reform
 - Focus Group 2: Reactions to emerging findings and priority areas
 - Focus Group 3: Long-term vision, responsibilities, and principles

Facilitators used tailored discussion guides [Appendix C] for each session. Sessions were facilitated via Zoom and recorded upon consent from participants. Following this, transcripts were produced and thematically analysed. Each focus group participant received an incentive payment by bank transfer as thanks for their time.

4. Stakeholder roundtable

A roundtable was convened with land reform stakeholders, including representatives from community groups, environmental NGOs, landowners and sectoral experts. REVIVE shared an initial list of stakeholders to invite; Diffley Partnership liaised with REVIVE to gather named contacts where necessary. Those invited were issued a link to an online poll to determine the most popular date and time. Diffley Partnership then sent the relevant joining details to those available for the preferred date.

The roundtable was held on 26th June in a hybrid format, with participants joining online (via MS Teams) and in-person at Diffley Partnership's office. A total of **9** stakeholders took part.

The session utilised a tailored discussion guide [Appendix D] and explored stakeholder reflections on the results, as well as opportunities, challenges and policy priorities for the future of land reform in Scotland.

Limitations

Several limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings:

- **Public survey awareness:** Most survey participants had limited prior knowledge of land reform, which may have affected the depth of their responses.
- **Consultation sample:** Like public consultations undertaken by government, this consultation was self-selecting and not representative of the general population. Responses may reflect the views of those more engaged or with direct interest in land issues.
- **Panel sample size:** The panel survey and focus groups involved a small number of participants and cannot be generalised to the wider population. However, they provide valuable depth and context.
- **Complexity of land reform:** Land reform is a technical and multi-layered issue. Care was taken to ensure questions were accessible, but simplification may have affected nuance in some responses.

Presentation and interpretation of findings

Quantitative

Survey findings indicate the prevalence of views and experiences surrounding land reform, in answer to survey questions. Where percentages do not sum to 100%, this is due to rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' or 'N/A' categories, or multiple answers. Aggregate percentages (e.g. 'satisfied'/'not satisfied') are calculated from the absolute values. Therefore, aggregate percentages may differ from the sum of the individual scores due to rounding of percentage totals. Throughout the report, an asterisk (*) denotes any value of less than half a percent and a dash (-) denotes zero. For questions where the number of people is less than 30, the number of times a response has been selected (N) rather than the percentage is given.

Answers to open-ended questions are analysed and reported thematically. This data is qualitative in nature and therefore it is not appropriate to draw conclusions from this type of data about the prevalence of particular views or experiences but rather to indicate range of different views expressed.

Qualitative

Following the focus groups and roundtable, we generated transcriptions from the audio recordings and conducted thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an analytic approach in qualitative research, where the researcher identifies the themes that emerge out of data.

It is an iterative process, typically using the topics and questions in project discussion guides as the foundation and identifying and building subthemes as they emerge. It is especially useful when applied to questions about people's experiences or understandings.

The three focus groups offered in-depth conversations with participants from across Scotland. Researchers produced a summary of findings after each focus group and used these to outline the key themes arising from the three groups in this report [Chapter 4.2]. Researchers also reviewed transcripts and notes from the stakeholder roundtable to draw out key themes and findings [Chapter 5].

Quotations have been included to illustrate participant views. In line with qualitative reporting practices, phrases such as 'many', 'several' or 'some' are used to indicate the volume of responses in relation to the particular points or themes discussed. Here, 'many' or 'most' can be understood as the majority of respondents, 'several' or 'some' as a smaller subset of respondents, and 'a few' as a minority of respondents.

Report structure

The remainder of this report is organised as follows:

- **Chapter 2:** What the Scottish Public Thinks (Findings from the nationally representative public survey),
- **Chapter 3:** The Big Land Question: Open Consultation,
- **Chapter 4:** The Big Land Question: Online Panel,
- **Chapter 5:** Stakeholder Roundtable,
- **Appendices:** Supporting materials, including questionnaires and discussion guides.

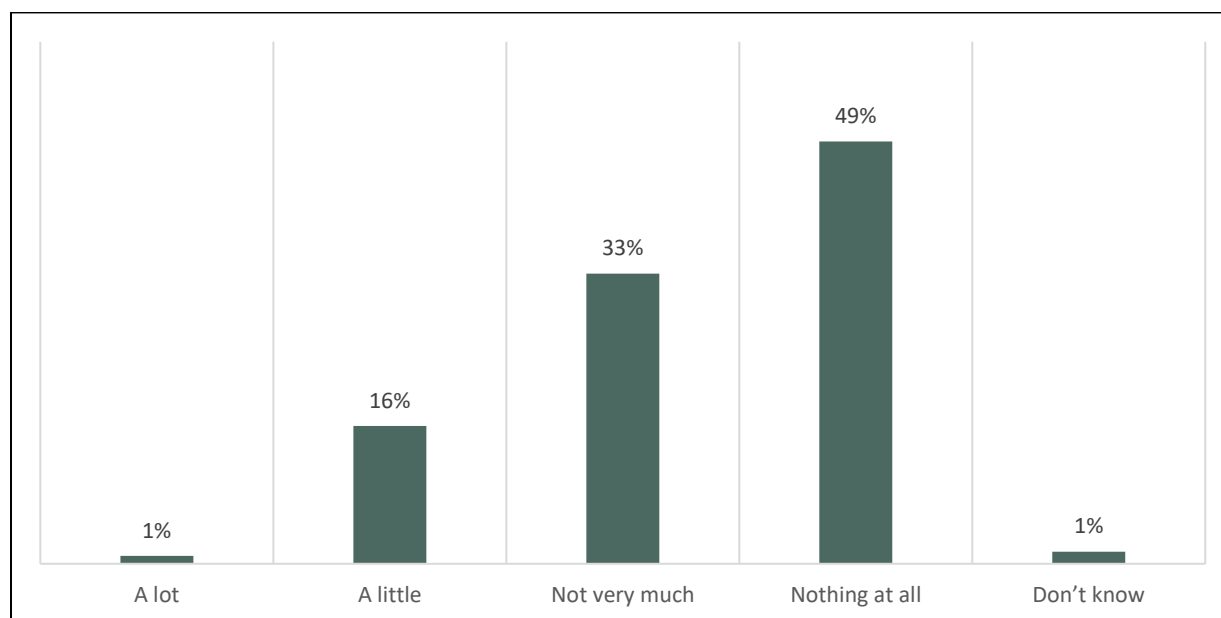
2. What the Scottish Public Thinks

This chapter presents findings from the nationally representative public survey of adults across Scotland, conducted in October 2024. The survey explored public awareness, attitudes and preferences relating to land reform.

2.1 Awareness and Engagement

Despite growing political focus on land reform, public awareness remains low. When asked how much they knew about the Scottish Government's plans, just 1% of respondents knew a lot while 49% knew nothing at all. Only 17% of respondents had any meaningful knowledge (at least a little knowledge) of land reform.

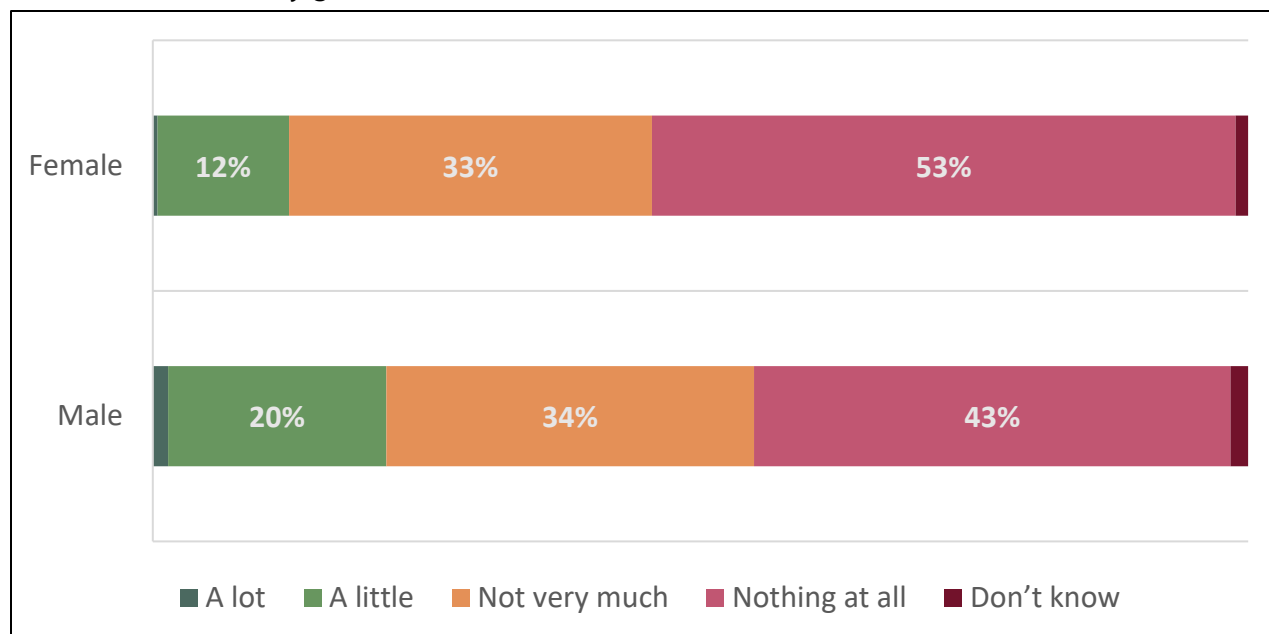
Figure 2.1: How much, if anything, do you know about the Scottish Government's plans for land reform in Scotland?



Base: Public survey (2,041)

Awareness of land reform is low across both genders, but men are slightly more likely than women to report knowing “a lot” or “a fair amount.” This gender gap may reflect broader patterns in engagement with political or environmental issues, and suggests a need to tailor communication approaches to ensure that women are equally informed and empowered to participate in reform discussions.

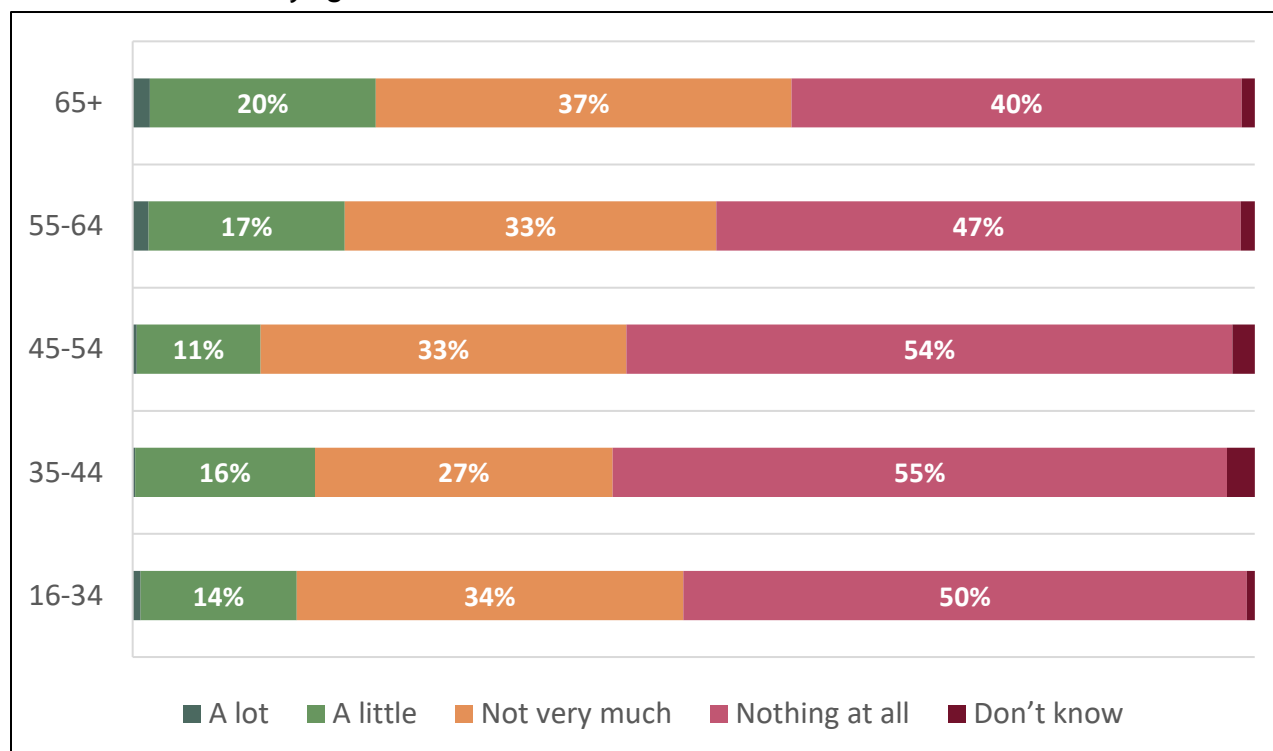
Figure 2.2: How much, if anything, do you know about the Scottish Government's plans for land reform in Scotland?, by gender



Base: Public survey (2,041)

Awareness increases with age, with older respondents significantly more likely to report familiarity with land reform. This could reflect exposure to prior reform efforts or differing levels of political engagement. The findings indicate that younger audiences may require more targeted engagement to build foundational understanding and support.

Figure 2.3: How much, if anything, do you know about the Scottish Government’s plans for land reform in Scotland?, by age

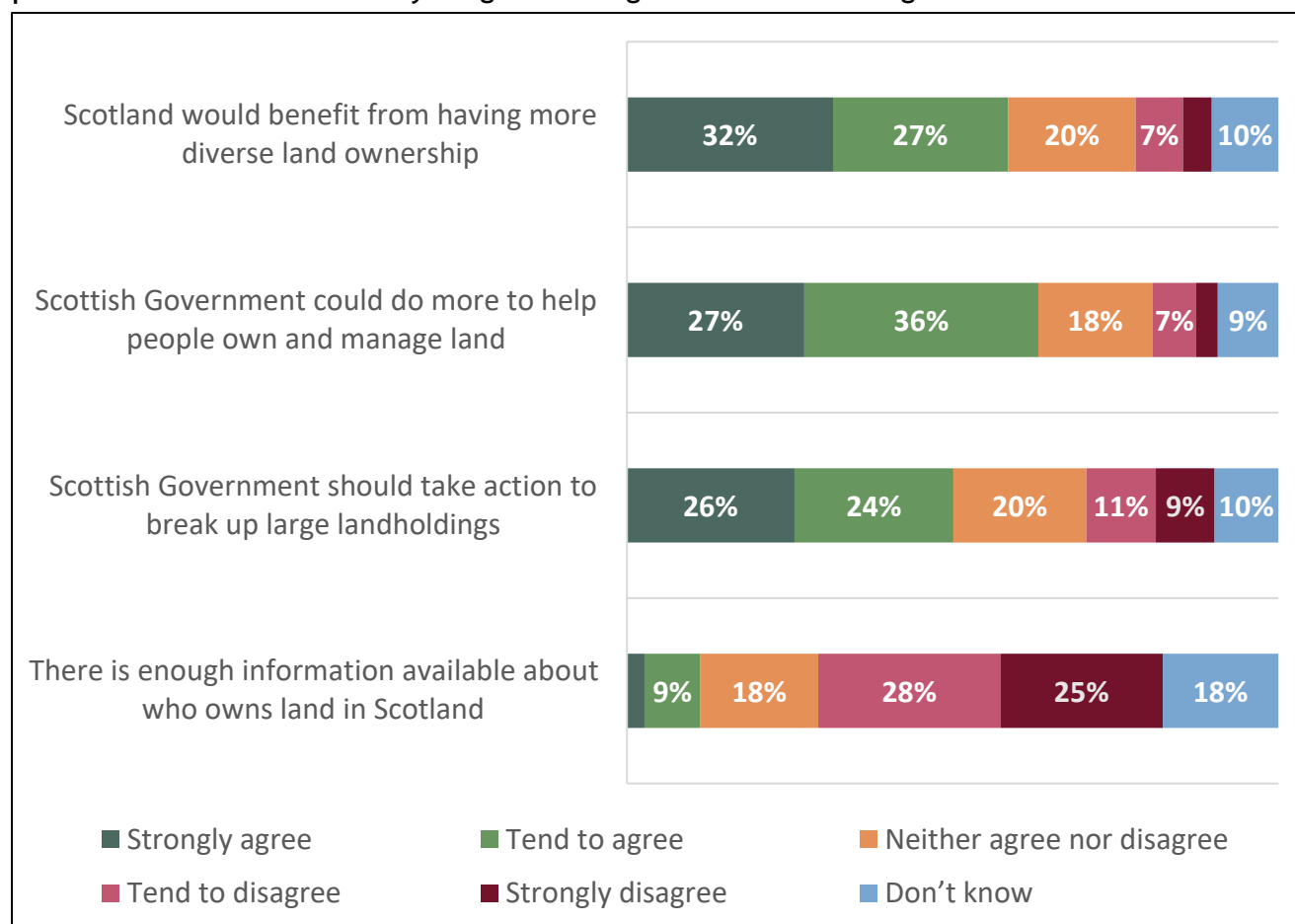


Base: Public survey (2,041)

2.2 Attitudes to Land Ownership

There was strong backing for reforming ownership patterns. More than half (59%) agreed that Scotland would benefit from more diverse land ownership, 50% supported government action to break up large landholdings while two thirds (63%) felt more should be done to help people own and manage land. Only 11% agreed that enough information is available about who owns land — while 53% disagreed.

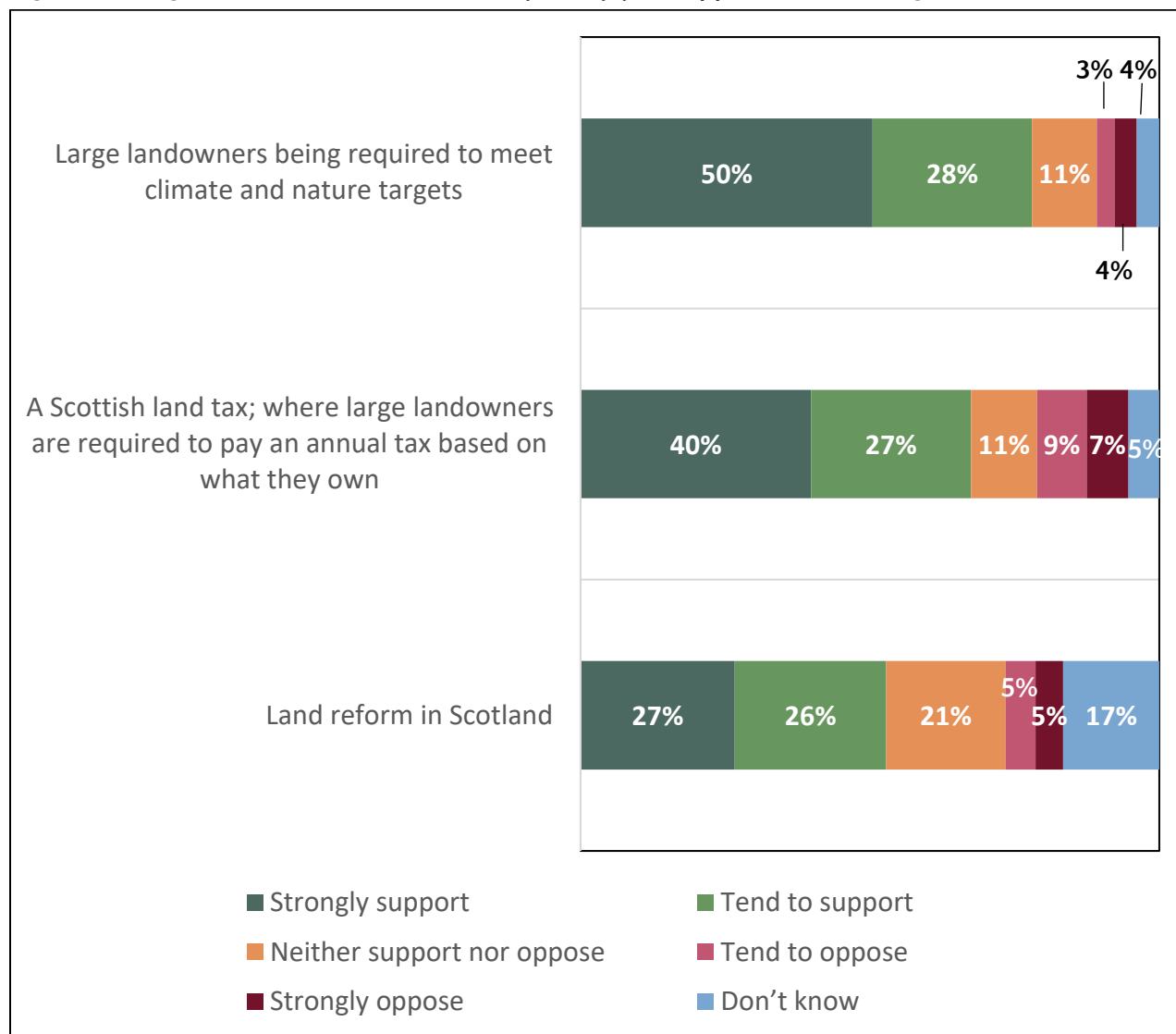
Figure 2.4: 5.4 million people live in Scotland, but just 433 people own over half of Scotland's private land. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:



Base: Public survey (2,037)

When presented with potential reforms, public support was strikingly high. 78% supported requiring large landowners to meet climate and nature targets. 67% supported a land tax for large landowners and more than half (53%) supported land reform in general.

Figure 2.5: In general, to what extent would you say you support the following:

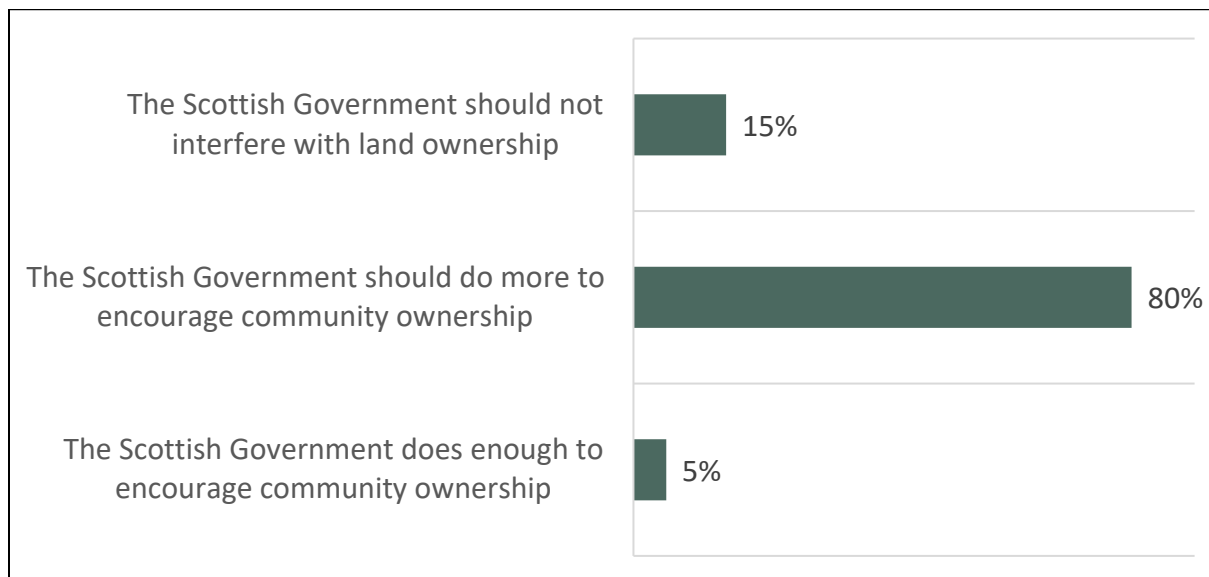


Base: Public survey (2,037)

2.3 Community Land Ownership

A large majority (80%) of respondents said the Scottish Government should do more to encourage community ownership. Only 5% felt the Government is already doing enough, while 15% said it should not interfere with land ownership at all.

Figure 2.6: 2.7% of land in Scotland is under community ownership. This means that the local community own and manage the land and buildings on it. Which of these comes closest to your view



Base: Public survey (2,024)

2.4 Summary

The Scottish public are clear in their priorities; they want land reform, they want fair rules and real responsibilities, and they want communities to benefit, not just owners.

The gap between low awareness and high support signals a major opportunity: to build understanding, nurture demand, and deliver change that reflects the values of fairness, sustainability and local control.

3. The Big Land Question: Open Consultation

The Big Land Question consultation received **1,390 responses**, gathered through an online form and an interactive video portal. Respondents included individuals and organisations from across Scotland, with views spanning the political spectrum and a wide range of perspectives on land ownership and reform.

Responses included both closed questions (quantitative) and an open free-text field, allowing participants to explain their views in their own words. The analysis below draws out key patterns in both formats. The age profile of respondents is included in Table 3.1 below. The consultation attracted responses across all age groups, though older age groups (particularly 55–64 and 65+) were overrepresented. This should be considered when interpreting the findings, as it may skew the results toward the priorities and perspectives of older demographics.

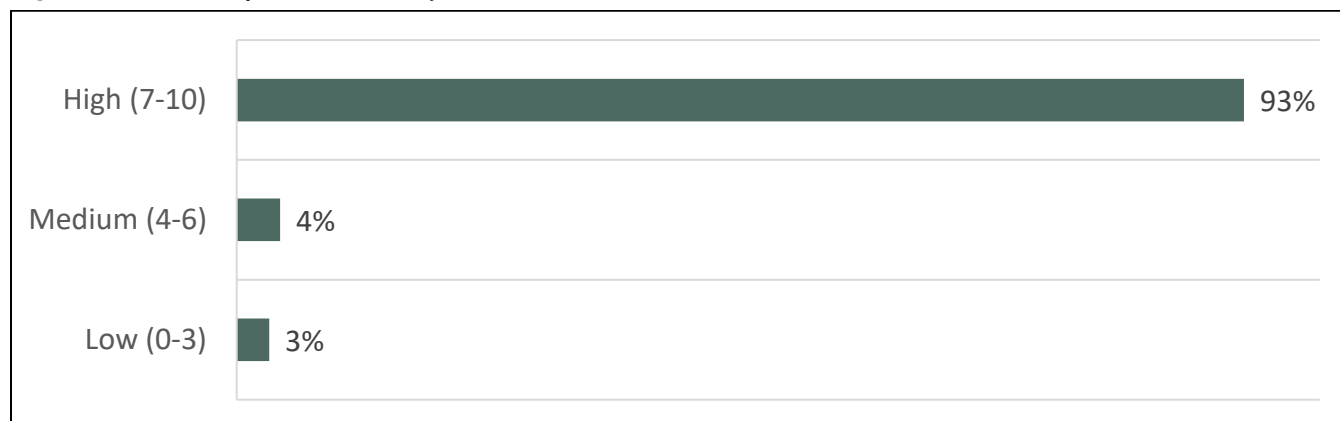
Table 3.1: Consultation responses, by age

Age bands	N	%
16–34	52	4
35–44	64	5
45–54	151	11
55–64	334	24
65+	752	54
Unknown	36	3
Total	1,389	100

Respondents to the open consultation were also asked who they would vote for if there was a Holyrood election today. These results, as well as breakdowns of responses to the consultation questions by voting intention, are set out in Section 3.7.

To begin, respondents were asked how important it is that the next Scottish Government delivers land reform. Overall, the vast majority (93%) of respondents stated that it was a high importance (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: How important is it to you that the next Scottish Government delivers land reform?

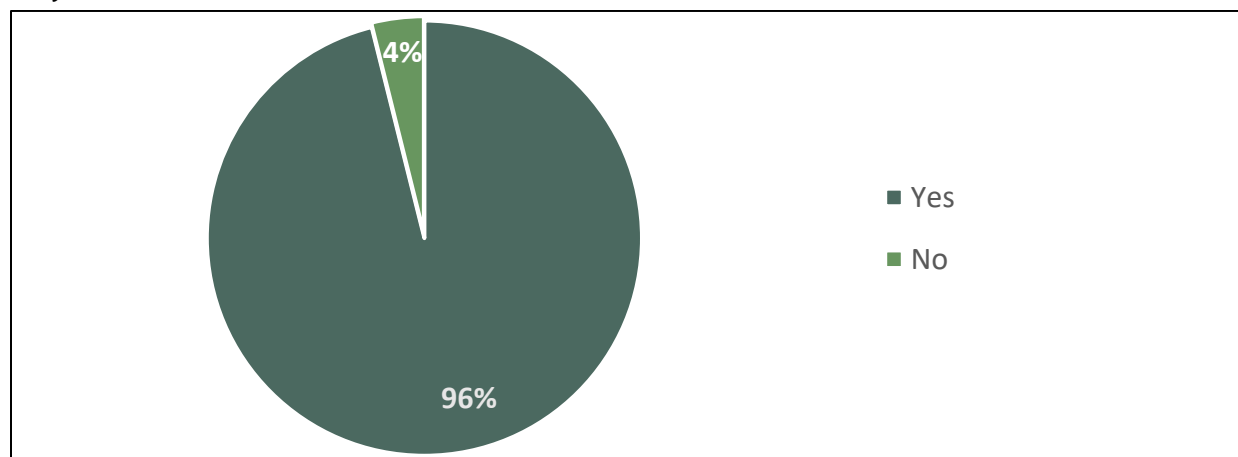


Base: Public consultation (1,378)

3.1 Land Ownership

When considering if there should be more restrictions on who can own large areas of land and how much they can own, the vast majority (96%) believed that yes, there should be (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Should there be more restrictions on who can own large areas of land and how much they can own?



Base: Public consultation (1,386)

Those respondents that believed there should be more restrictions on who can own large areas of land were then asked the extent to which they agreed with ways this could be achieved (Figure 3.3).

There was strong support for a range of potential land reform conditions and powers.

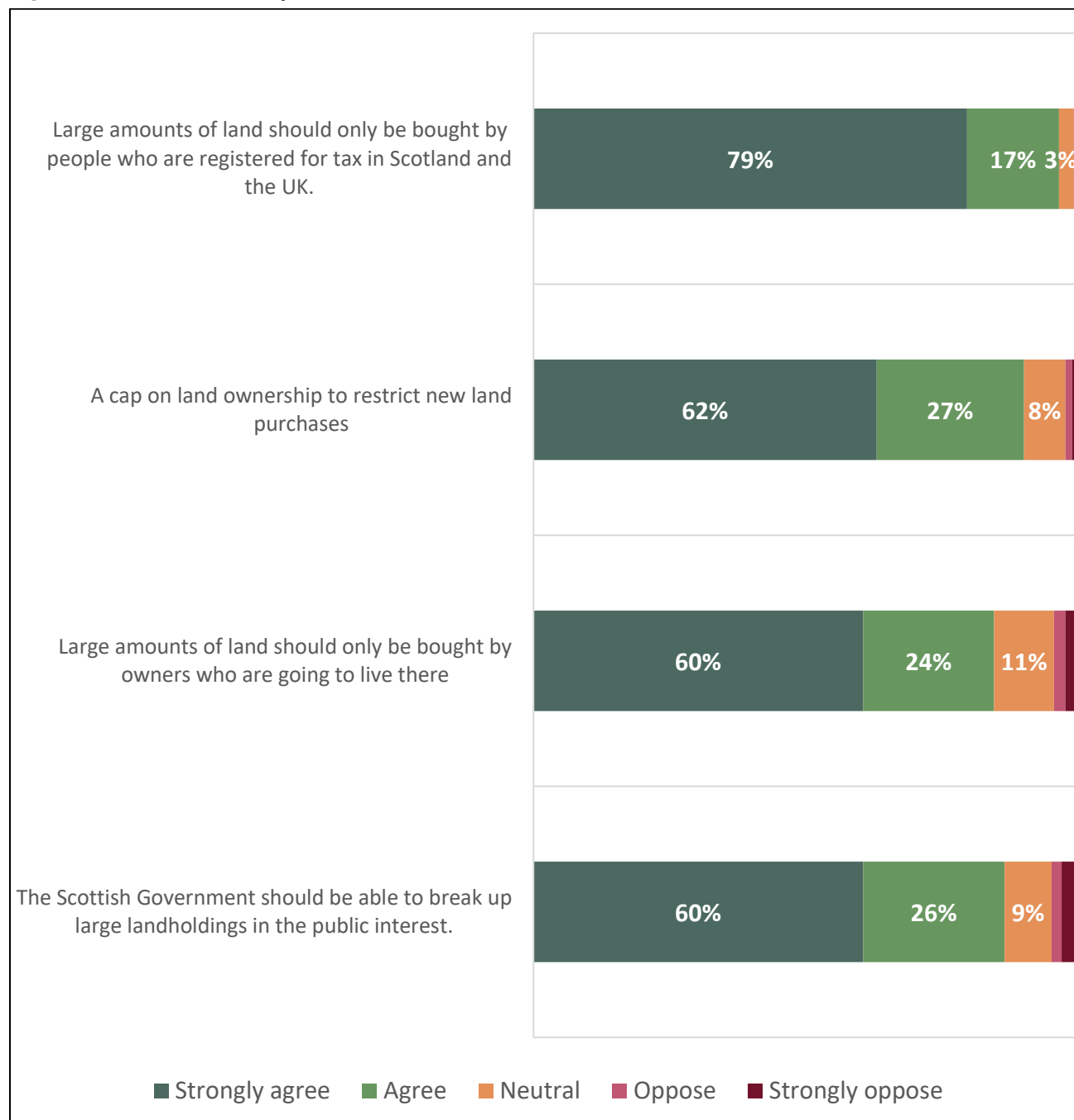
Overall, 79% strongly agreed that large amounts of land should only be bought by people who are registered for tax in Scotland and the UK, with an additional 17% agreeing. Just 1% opposed this measure. A proposal to cap land ownership to restrict new purchases received 62% strong agreement and 27% agreement, with only 4% opposed.

Again, three in five (60%) strongly agreed and a further quarter (24%) agreed that large amounts of land should only be bought by people who plan to live there, while 11% were neutral and only 5% opposed.

Similarly, the proposal that the Scottish Government should be able to break up large landholdings in the public interest was supported by 60% strongly agreeing and 26% agreeing, with minimal opposition (5%).

Overall, each policy tested had over 85% support when combining strong and moderate agreement, indicating a high level of appetite for more active government intervention in land ownership in Scotland.

Figure 3.3: Land ownership restrictions

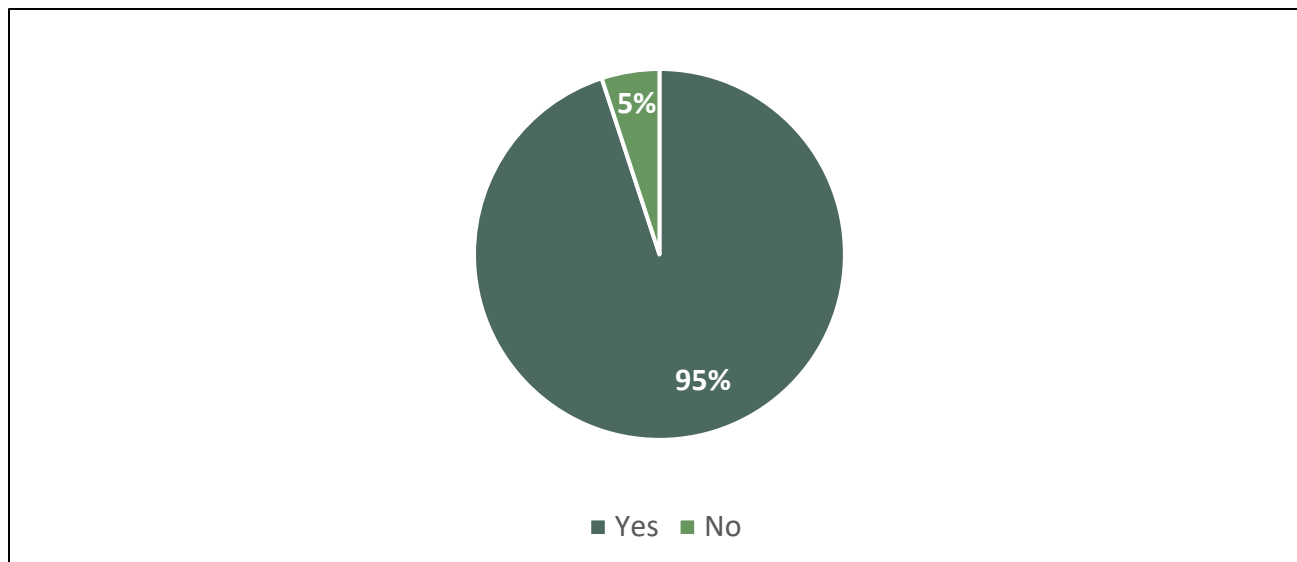


Base: Public consultation (1,359)

3.2 Taxation and large landowners

The vast majority (95%) of respondents to the open consultation were supportive of taxation for large landowners (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Should large landowners be taxed for the land they own?



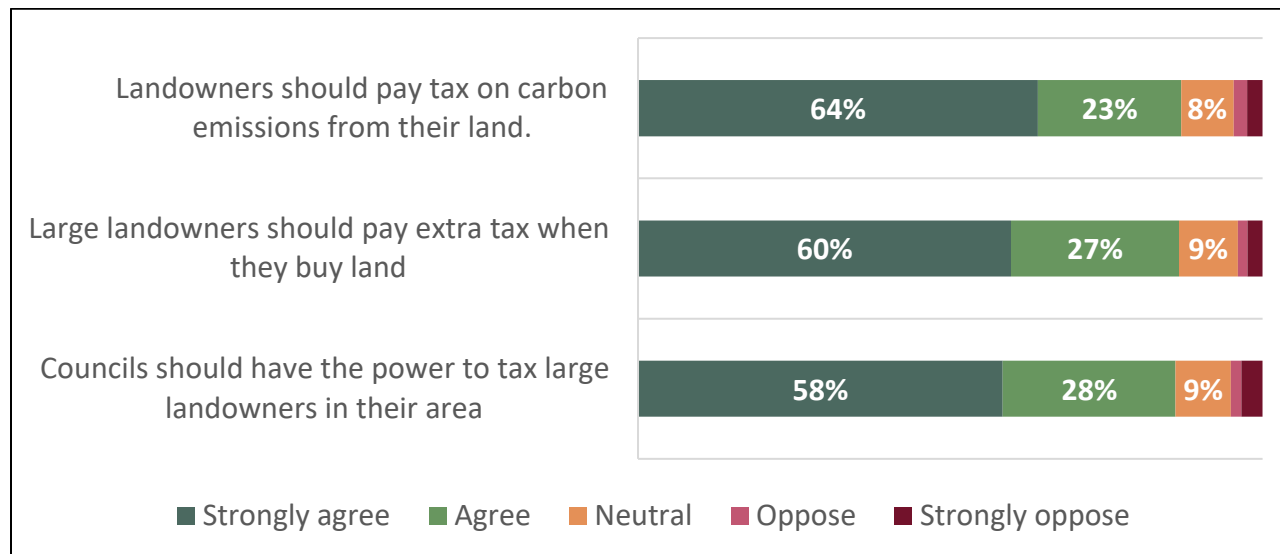
Base: Public consultation (1,368)

Those respondents that believed large landowners should be taxed for the land they own were then asked about ways this could be achieved (Figure 3.5).

There was strong support for a range of levers for taxation. This includes two thirds of respondents strongly agreeing that landowners should pay tax on carbon emissions from their land (64%), while a further quarter (23%) agree. In total, 87% of respondents agreed that large landowners should pay extra tax when they buy land; this included 60% strong agreement and 27% agreement. Fewer respondents strongly agreed that councils should have the power to tax large landowners in their area, however agreement remains high at 86% of all respondents.

In summary, each taxation lever had agreement from over 86% of respondents when combining strong and moderate agreement.

Figure 3.5: Taxation of landowners

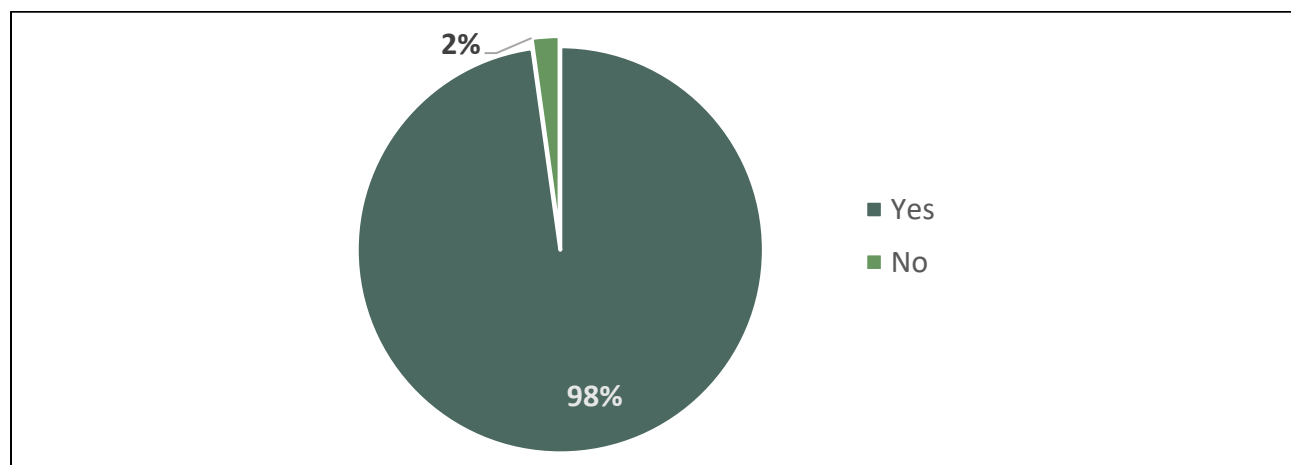


Base: Public consultation (1,335)

3.3 The Environment and large landowners

Remarkably, 98% of respondents agreed that large landowners should have new responsibilities to protect and restore the environment (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: Should large landowners have new responsibilities to protect and restore the environment?

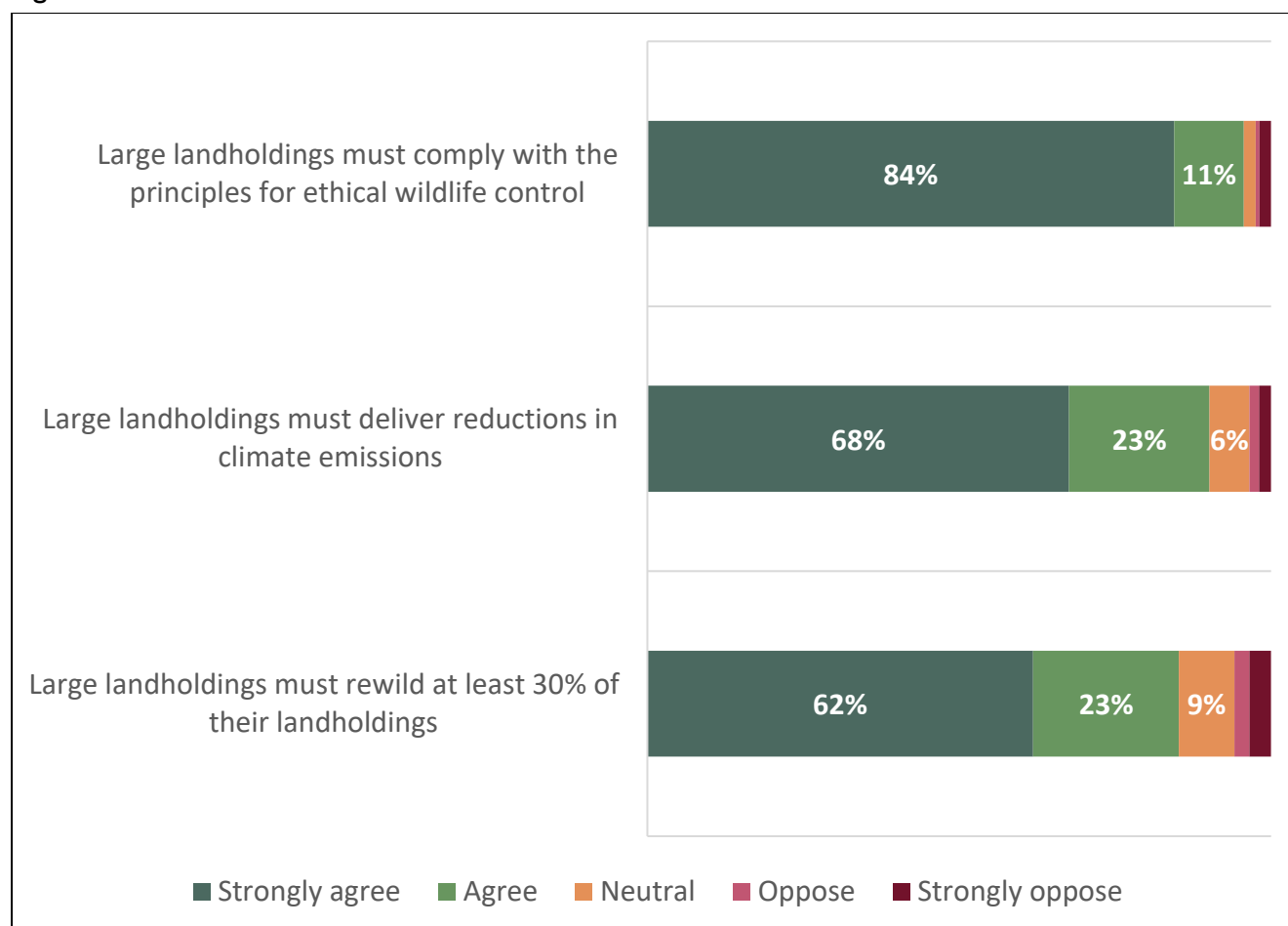


Base: Public consultation (1,335)

The vast majority (95%) of respondents agreed that large landholdings must comply with the principles for ethical wildlife control, this included 84% of strong agreement (Figure 3.7). While 91% also agreed that large landholding must deliver reductions in climate emissions, only 68% strongly agreed. This is similar for 'large landholdings must rewild at least 30% of their landholdings' where 85% of respondents agree overall, while only 62% strongly agree.

This shows that the priority for respondents is the compliance with principles for ethical wildlife control.

Figure 3.7: Landowners and the environment

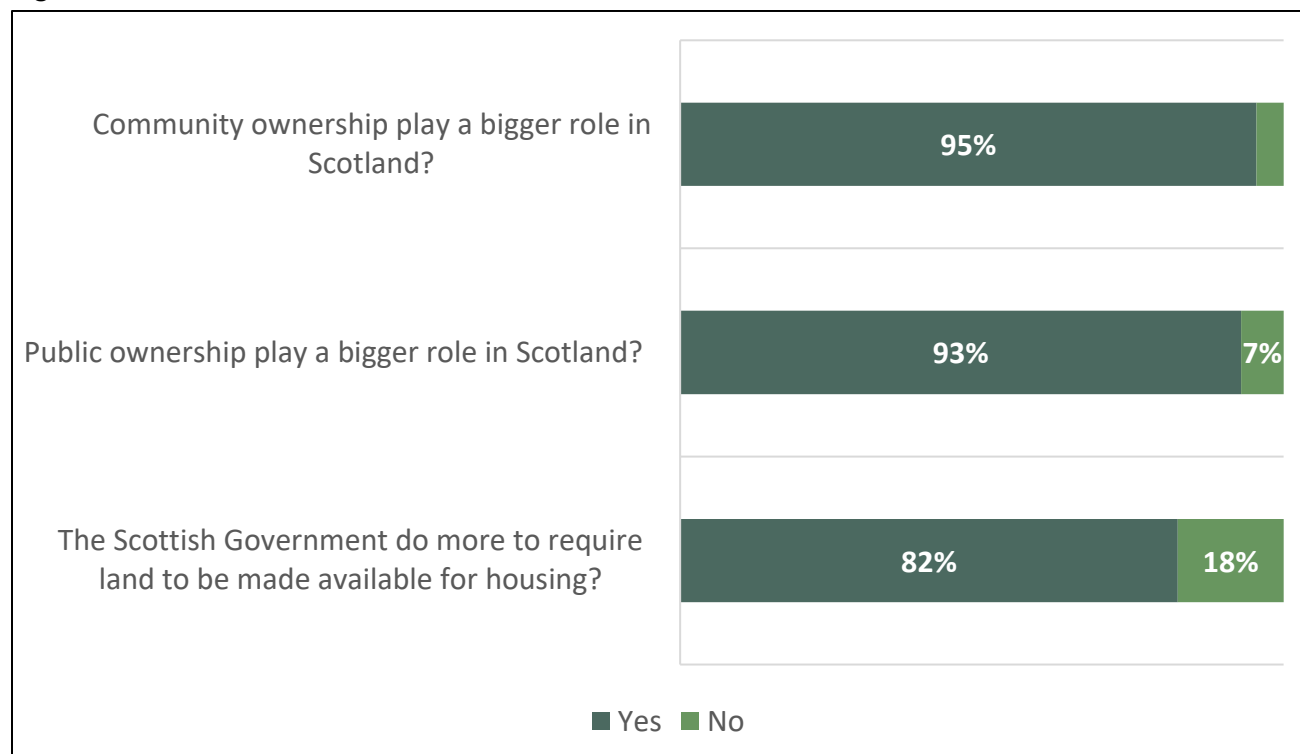


Base: Public consultation (1,335)

3.4 Ownership models

When asked about preferred models of land ownership, participants showed strongest support for a mixed system, with public and community ownership both scoring highly (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8: Should [statement]?



Base: Public consultation (1,352)

3.5 Vision for Land Reform

Respondents were then given the opportunity to share their vision for land reform in Scotland through an open text box. The following themes arose within these comments, and are expanded on within the remainder of this chapter:

- Community empowerment and local control
- Fairness and equity in land ownership
- Environmental responsibility and climate action
- Public interest and use of land
- Government role and accountability

Theme 1: Community Empowerment and Local Control

A strong current running through many responses was the call for greater local control and empowerment of communities in land use decisions. Respondents frequently argued that land reform should enable communities to take charge of local assets, support sustainability, and improve accountability.

“Communities should be empowered to manage the land around them. They know what’s best and will act in the public interest.”

“Too much land is controlled by absentee landlords. Locals should be given first refusal when land changes hands.”

Some also expressed frustration at perceived obstacles to community buyouts, calling for simpler and better-funded mechanisms.

Theme 2: Fairness and Equity in Land Ownership

Many responses stressed a desire for fairer and more transparent ownership models, arguing that concentrated ownership is unjust and outdated.

“It’s not fair that so few people own so much land. We need a fairer system that reflects modern values.”

“Break up the estates. These vast landholdings are a legacy of feudalism and colonialism.”

There was support for imposing limits on how much land any one entity can own, and calls to prioritise social benefit over private profit.

Theme 3: Environmental Responsibility and Climate Action

A significant number of respondents viewed land reform as a key tool in achieving environmental goals — from rewilding to carbon sequestration.

“Owners should be legally required to restore peatlands and woodlands.”

“If you benefit from land, you should also be responsible for nature.”

There was consistent support for tying subsidies and ownership rights to environmental outcomes, suggesting land reform could accelerate climate action.

Theme 4: Public Interest and Use of Land

People expressed strong views that land should serve the public good, especially in areas like affordable housing, food production, and public access.

“Too much land lies idle or is managed for the benefit of the few. That needs to change.”

“Housing should be the priority, not grouse shooting.”

This theme overlapped with critiques of speculative land ownership and repeated calls for land to be made available for community housing projects and public services.

Theme 5: Government Role and Accountability

Several respondents focused on the Scottish Government’s role; some praising efforts, others urging bolder action or more follow-through on reform commitments.

“The Government must be brave. Tinkering won’t fix this.”

“We’ve had consultations before. We need actual change, not just words.”

Some questioned whether political will was strong enough to challenge vested interests, while others called for clearer enforcement powers and long-term commitment.

3.6 Summary

The Big Land Question consultation received a significant number of responses (1,390) from individuals and organisations across Scotland. These views spanned the political spectrum, with a wide range of perspectives on land ownership and reform.

A vast majority felt that land reform should be high on political agendas, with 93% rating the delivery of land reform by the next Scottish Government as highly important

At the same time, there was strong appetite for more restrictions on who can own large areas of land and how much they can own, with robust support for a range of potential land reform conditions and powers. Overall, each of the policies tested – including that ‘large amounts of land should only be bought by people who are registered for tax in Scotland and the UK’ and ‘the Scottish Government should be able to break up large landholdings’ – had over 85% support when combining strong and moderate agreement.

Similarly, a large proportion of consultation respondents were supportive of taxation for large landowners, including through tax on carbon emissions for large landowners' land and the payment of extra tax when large landowners buy land. Each taxation lever had agreement from over 86% of respondents when combining strong and moderate agreement.

An overwhelming majority agreed that large landowners should have new responsibilities to protect and restore the environment, indicating that respondents see compliance with principles for ethical wildlife control as a key priority. Meanwhile, respondents showed strongest support for a mixed system of ownership, with public and community ownership both scoring highly.

Community empowerment and local control, fairness and equity in land ownership and environmental responsibility and climate action were key aspects in respondent's vision for land reform in Scotland. They also expressed strong views that land should serve the public good and felt that Scottish Government should take bolder actions towards real change.

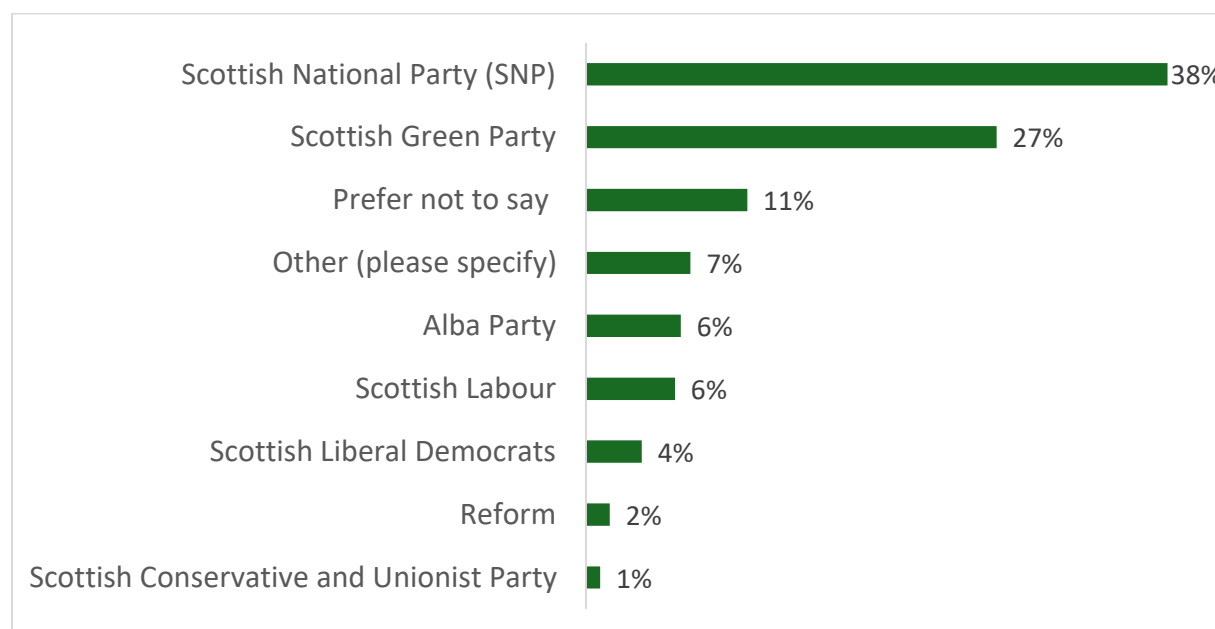
3.7 Breakdown of The Big Land Question: Open Consultation results by voting intention

Respondents to the open consultation were also asked who they would vote for if there was a Holyrood election today (Figure 3.9, below).

Over a third of respondents would vote for Scottish National Party (38%), while just over a quarter would vote for the Scottish Green Party (27%). While 11% of respondents did not want to reveal the party they would vote for, the remaining parties on the list received smaller levels of support.

Just 2% and 1% of respondents said they would vote for Reform or the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, respectively, and this small sample size should be borne in mind when reviewing the breakdowns. Many of those who selected 'Other' (7%) noted that they would be unsure who to vote for.

Figure 3.9: Voting intentions of respondents: Who would you vote for if there was a Holyrood election today?



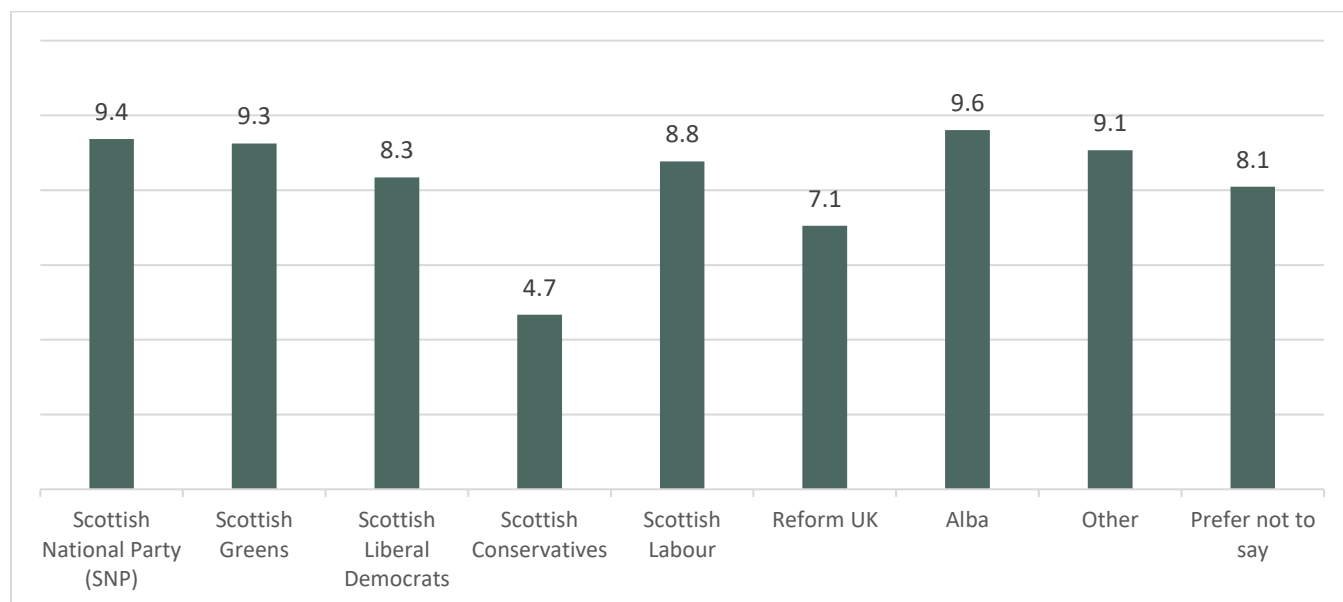
Base: 1,294

Perceived importance that the next Scottish Government delivers land reform

Overall, the vast majority (93%) of respondents stated that it was a high importance that the next Scottish Government delivers land reform.

Looking to mean scores (Figure 3.10), those who would vote for Alba, Scottish National Party, Scottish Greens or another party if there was a Holyrood election today were most likely to see the delivery of land reform by the next Scottish Government as very important (with mean scores over 9). Those who would vote for Scottish Labour (mean score 8.8) and Scottish Liberal Democrats (mean score 8.3) also saw this as important, as did those who did not wish to disclose the party they would vote for (mean score 8.1). Respondents who would vote for Reform UK saw land reform as moderately important (mean score of 7.1), while potential Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party voters were less likely to rate this as important. However, the small sample size of those who would vote for Reform and Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party (see Figure 3.10) should be borne in mind.

Figure 3.10: Mean by voting intention – On a scale from 0-10, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important, how important is it to you that the next Scottish Government delivers land reform?

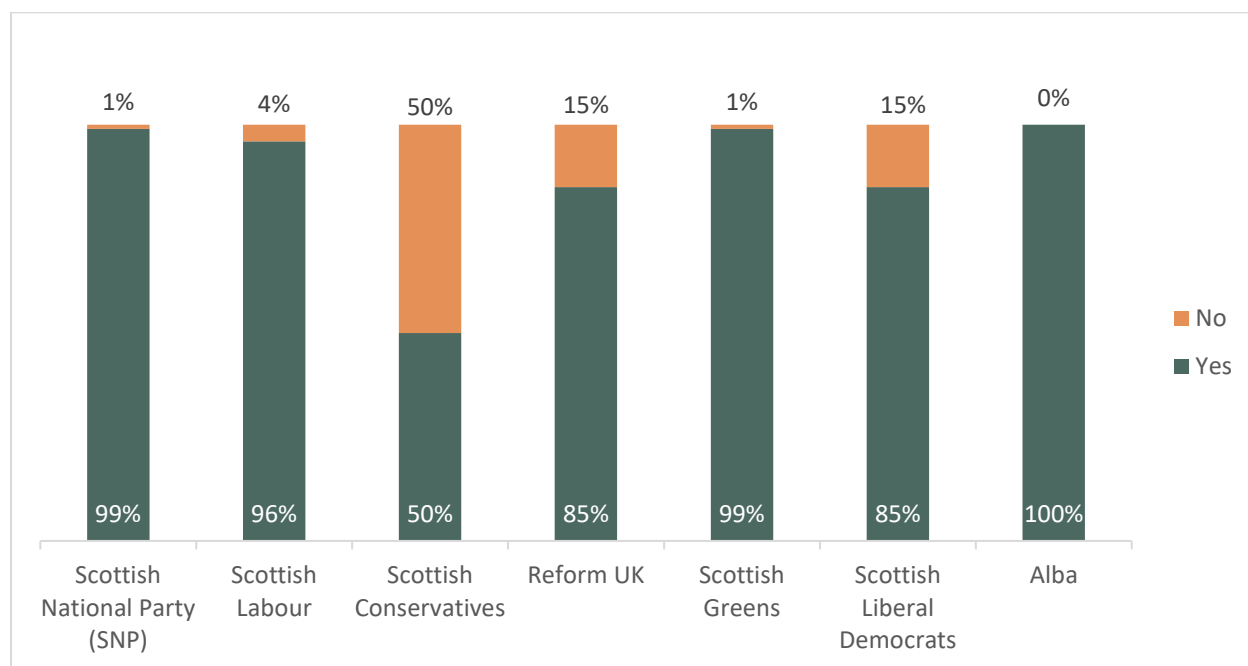


Base: 1,294

Land Ownership

When considering if there should be more restrictions on who can own large areas of land and how much they can own, the vast majority (96%) believed that yes, there should be. All (100%) respondents who said they would vote for Alba if there was a Holyrood election today, and almost all of those would vote for Scottish National Party or Scottish Greens (99%), agreed with having more such restrictions (Figure 3.11). The concept of having more restrictions on who can own large areas of land and how much they can own was also popular with those who would vote for Scottish Labour (96%). The same percentage (85%) of potential Reform UK and Scottish Liberal Democrats voters supported further restrictions.

Figure 3.11: Breakdown by voting intention – Should there be more restrictions on who can own large areas of land and how much they can own?

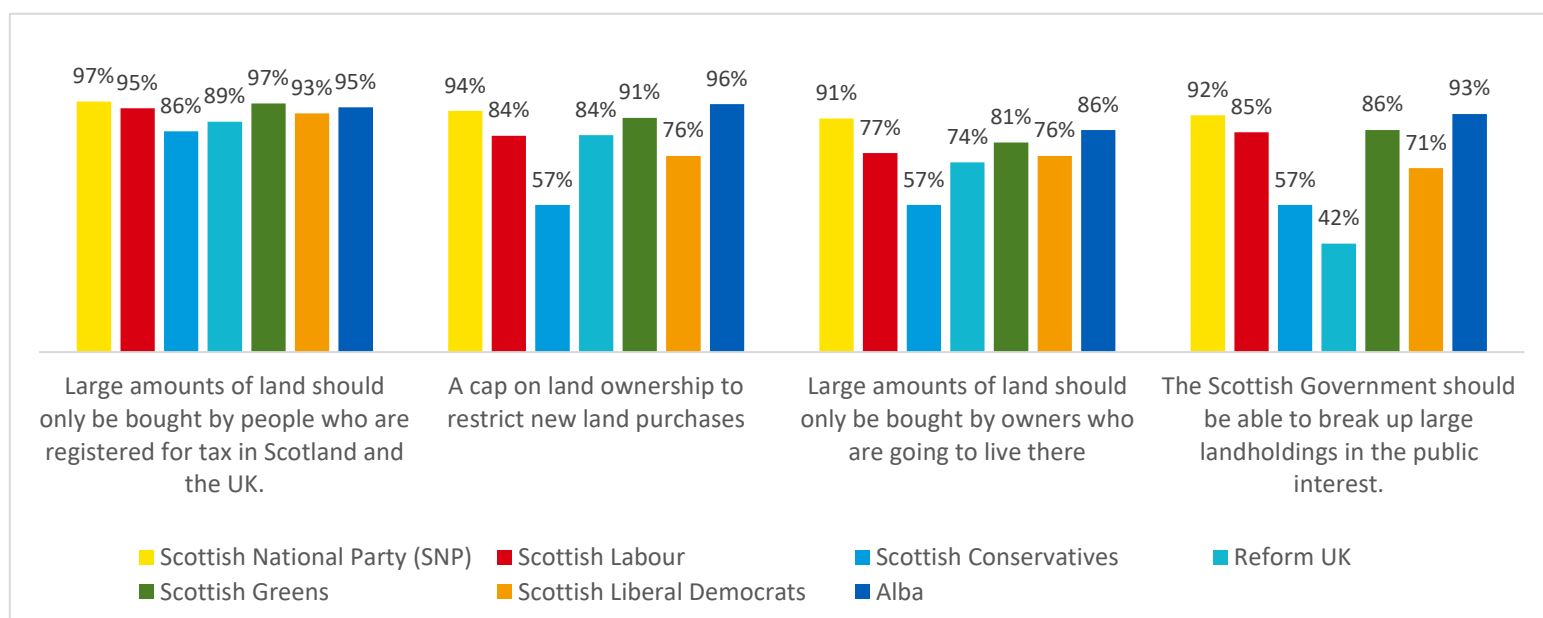


Base: 1,294

Those respondents that believed there should be more restrictions on who can own large areas of land were then asked the extent to which they agreed with ways this could be achieved. There was strong support for a range of potential land reform conditions and powers.

As seen in Figure 3.12, potential Scottish National Party and Scottish Greens voters were most likely to either strongly or somewhat agree that large amounts of land should only be bought by people who are registered for tax in Scotland and the UK. Those who would vote for the Alba party if there was a Holyrood election today were most likely to support a cap on land ownership to restrict new land purchases, while possible Scottish National Party voters were considerably more likely to agree that large amounts of land should only be bought by owners who are going to live there. Similar numbers of respondents who would vote for Alba (93%) or Scottish National Party (92%) agreed that the Scottish Government should be able to break up large landholdings in the public interest.

Figure 3.12: Breakdown by voting intention – Percentage who strongly agree or somewhat agree with each statement

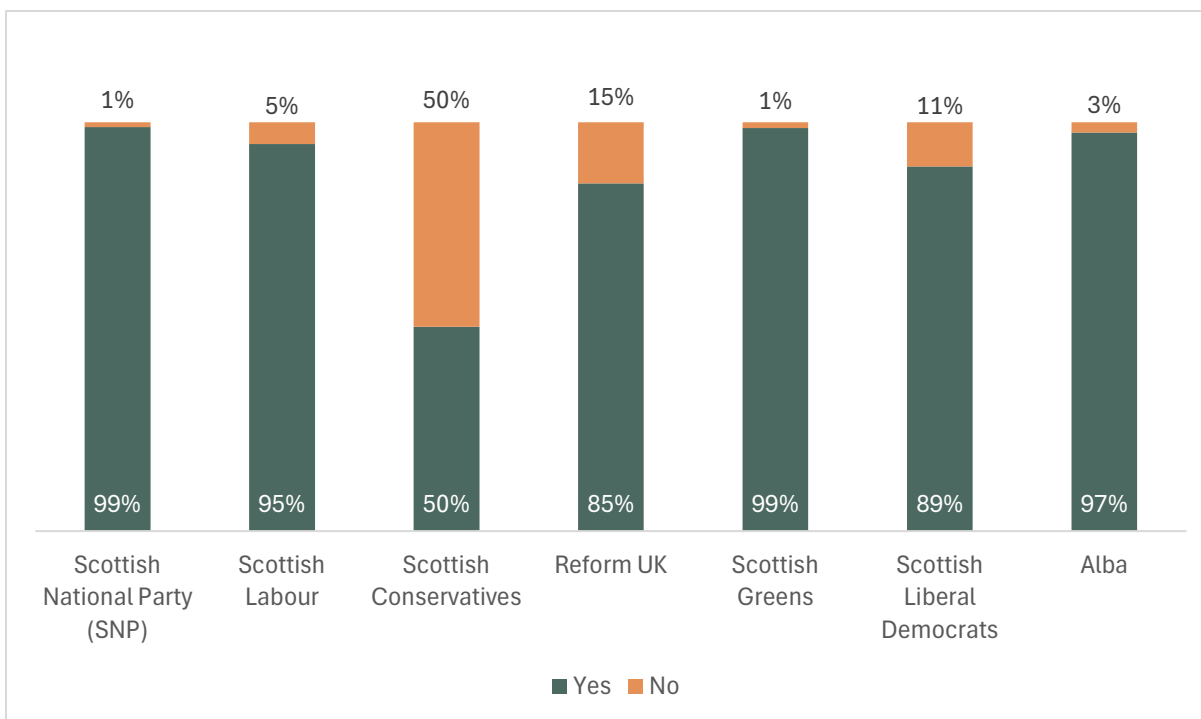


Base: 1,294

Taxation and large landowners

The vast majority (95%) of respondents to the open consultation were supportive of taxation for large landowners. As seen in Figure 3.13, this support was highest among respondents who would vote for Scottish National Party and Scottish Greens (99% respectively), with broadly strong support from potential Scottish Labour (95%) and Alba (97%) voters.

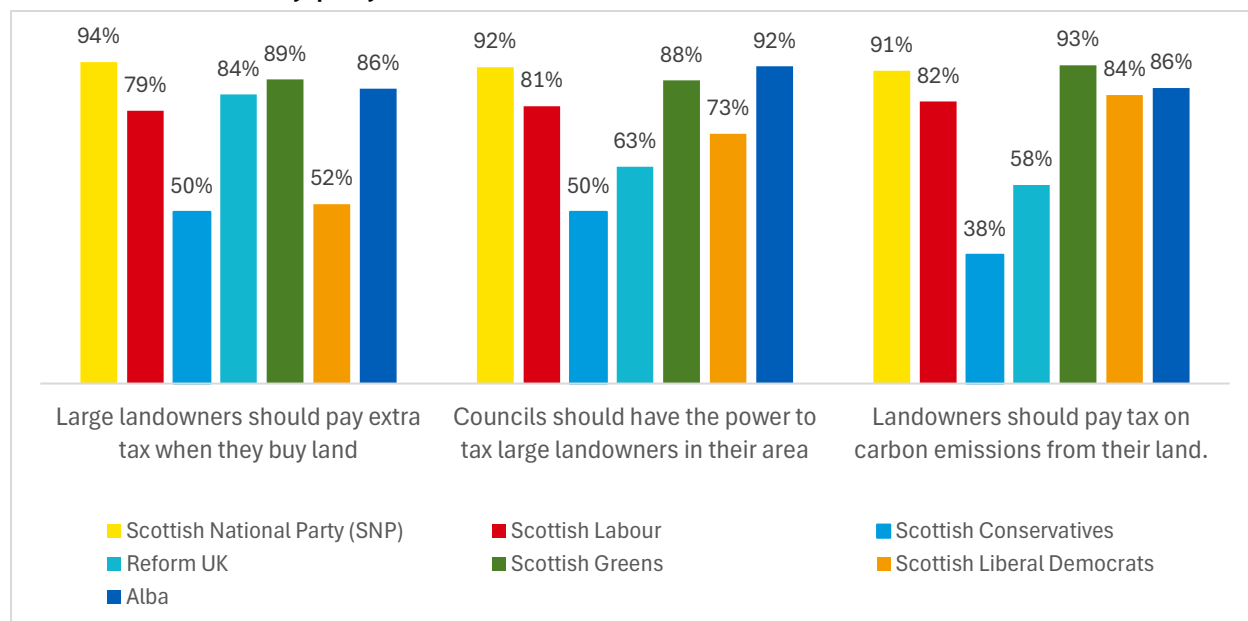
Figure 3.13: Breakdown by voting intention – Should large landowners be taxed for the land they own?



Base: 1,294

Those respondents that believed large landowners should be taxed for the land they own were then asked about ways this could be achieved. There was strong support for a range of levers for taxation. Those who would vote for Scottish National Party were most supportive of the idea that large landowners should pay extra tax when they buy land (94%) (see Figure 3.14). The same number of potential Scottish National Party and Alba party (92%) voters either strongly or somewhat supported councils having the power to tax large landowners in their area. Meanwhile, those who would vote for the Green party were most in agreement that landowners should pay tax on carbon emissions on their land.

Figure 3.14: Breakdown by voting intention – Percentage who strongly agree or somewhat agree with each statement by party

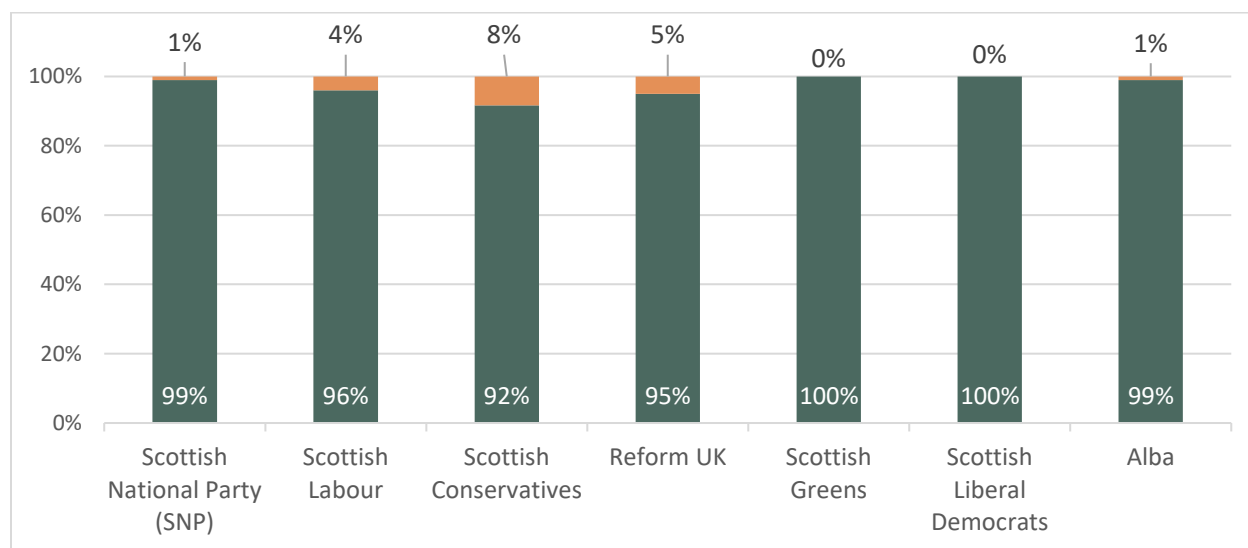


Base: 1,294

The Environment and large landowners

Remarkably, 98% of respondents agreed that large landowners should have new responsibilities to protect and restore the environment. All (100%) respondents who said they would vote for Scottish Greens or Scottish Liberal Democrats if there was a Holyrood election today, and almost all of those would vote for Scottish National Party or Alba (99%) agreed with having more such restrictions (Figure 3.15).

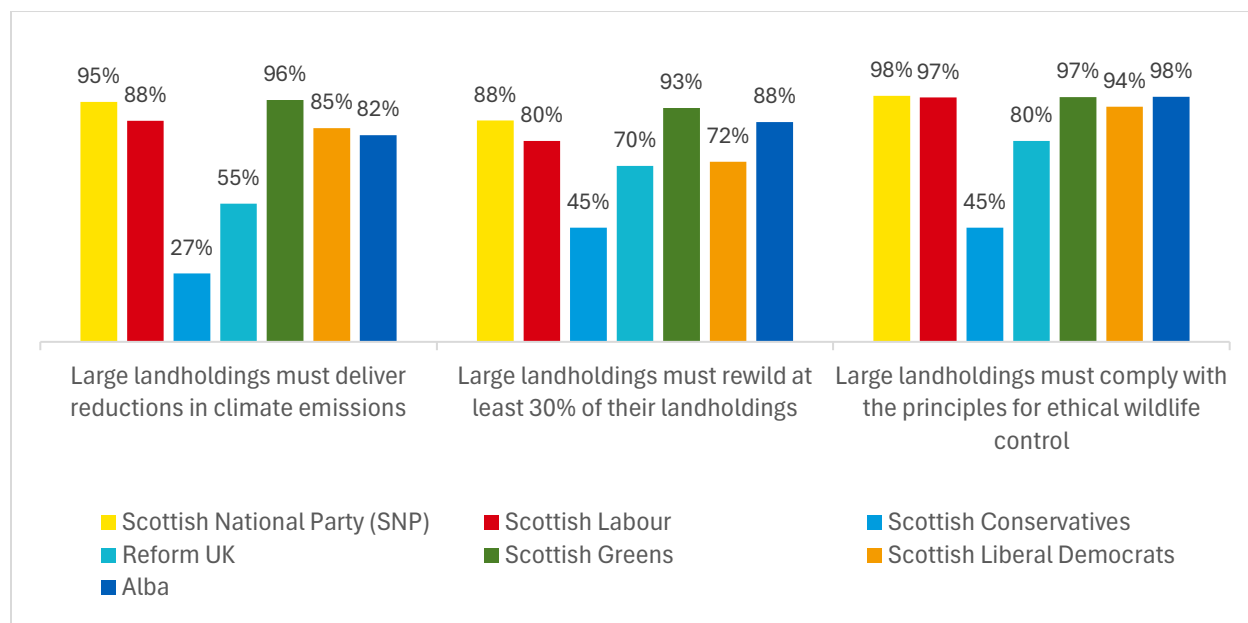
Figure 3.15: Breakdown by voting intention – Should large landowners have new responsibilities to protect and restore the environment?



Base: 1,294

Meanwhile, those who would vote for Scottish Greens (96%) or the Scottish National Party (95%) agreed considerably more with the idea that large landholdings must deliver reductions in climate emissions (see Figure 3.16). Those who would vote for the Scottish Greens were most likely to agree that large landholdings must rewild at least 30% of their landholdings compared to respondents who would give their vote to other parties. Meanwhile, similarly high numbers of potential Alba and Scottish National Party voters (98% respectively) and Scottish Labour and Scottish Greens (97%) voters agreed that large landholdings must comply with the principles for ethical wildlife control.

Figure 3.16: Breakdown by voting intention – Percentage who strongly agree or somewhat agree with each statement by party

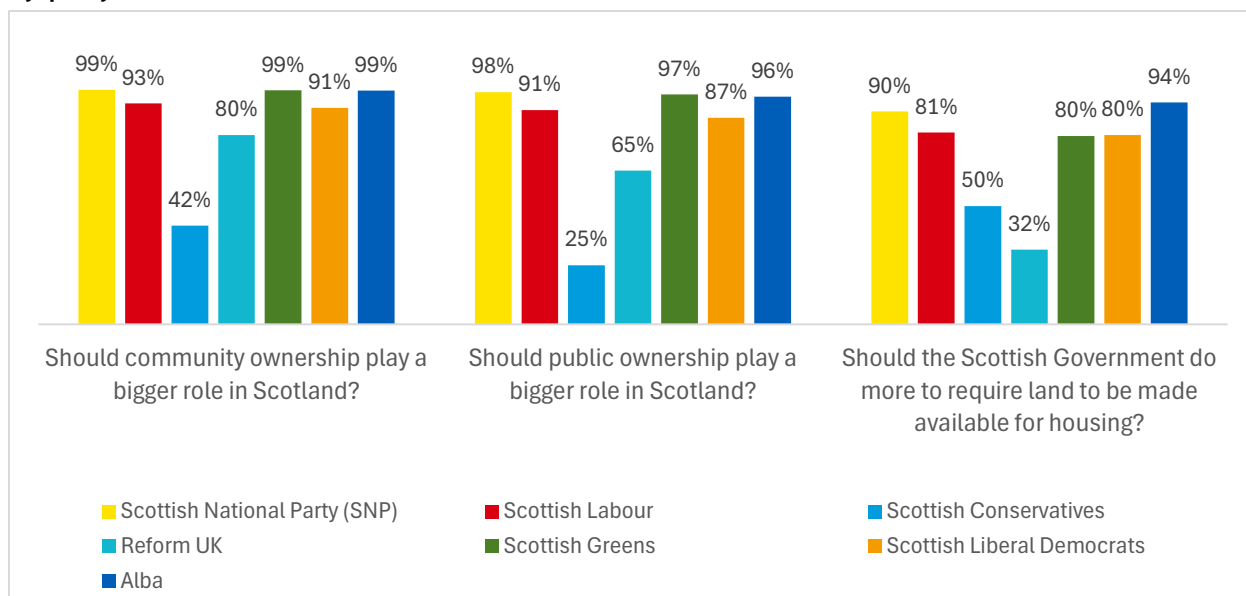


Base: 1,294

Ownership models

When asked about preferred models of land ownership, participants showed strongest support for a mixed system, with public and community ownership both scoring highly. Agreement that community ownership should play a bigger role in Scotland was highest among respondents who would vote for Scottish National Party, Scottish Greens and Alba (99%) (Figure 3.17). Potential Scottish National Party voters were most likely to agree that public ownership should play a bigger role in Scotland (98%), closely followed by Scottish Greens (97%) and Alba (96%) voters. Furthermore, a higher proportion of consultation respondents who would vote for Alba (94%) if there was a Holyrood election today felt that the Scottish Government should do more to require land to be made available for housing.

Figure 3.17: Breakdown by voting intention – Percentage who respondent ‘yes’ for each question by party



Base: 1,294

4. The Big Land Question: Online Panel

This section draws on insights from a mixed-methods strand involving members of the online panel. It includes a short survey with 92 respondents and a series of three in-depth focus groups exploring land reform in greater detail. The aim was to move beyond initial impressions to test ideas, reveal tensions, and explore ambitions for Scotland's land.

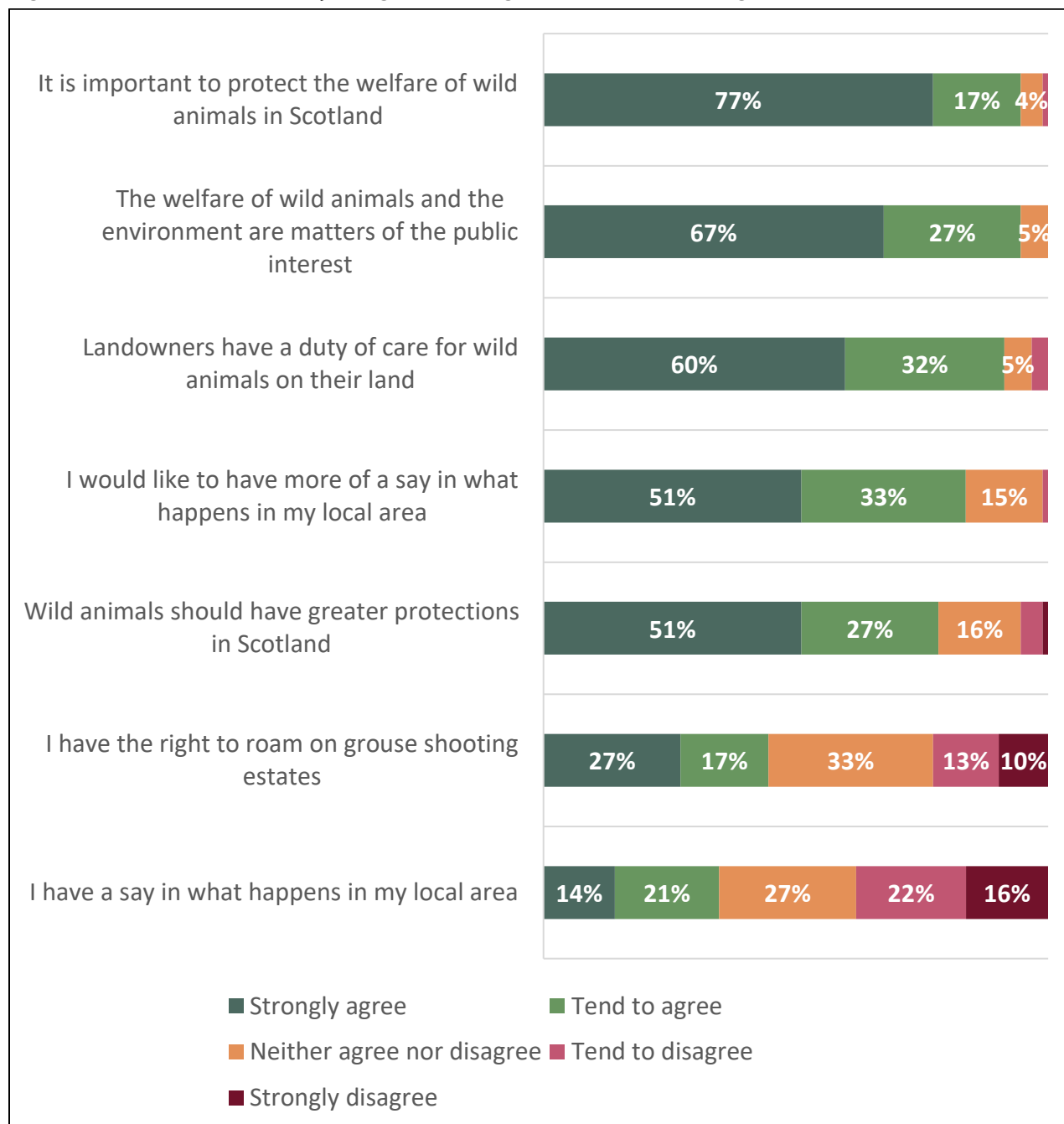
4.1 Survey Findings

While it was a smaller sample (n=92), the panel survey offered a snapshot of attitudes after participants had engaged more deeply with land reform. Several key patterns emerged:

Respondents expressed strong concern for animal welfare and a clear appetite for greater local involvement in land-related decisions [see Figure 4.1]. A large majority (77%) strongly agreed that it is important to protect the welfare of wild animals in Scotland, with a further 17% tending to agree. Just 2% disagreed with this statement. Similarly, 67% strongly agreed and 27% tended to agree that the welfare of wild animals and the environment are matters of public interest. There was also strong consensus that landowners have a duty of care for wild animals on their land, with 60% strongly agreeing and 32% tending to agree.

Half of respondents (51%) strongly agreed that they would like to have more say in what happens in their local area, and 33% said they tended to agree. Just 1% disagreed. There was also support for stronger protections for wild animals, with 51% strongly agreeing and 27% tending to agree, though 5% disagreed. On the issue of public access, 27% strongly agreed and 17% tended to agree that they have the right to roam on grouse shooting estates. However, one third (33%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 23% disagreed, indicating some uncertainty or ambivalence around this right. When asked whether they feel they currently have a say in what happens locally, just 14% strongly agreed and 21% tended to agree, while 38% disagreed. This suggests that while there is strong public interest in greater local voice, many feel excluded from current decision-making processes.

Figure 4.1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

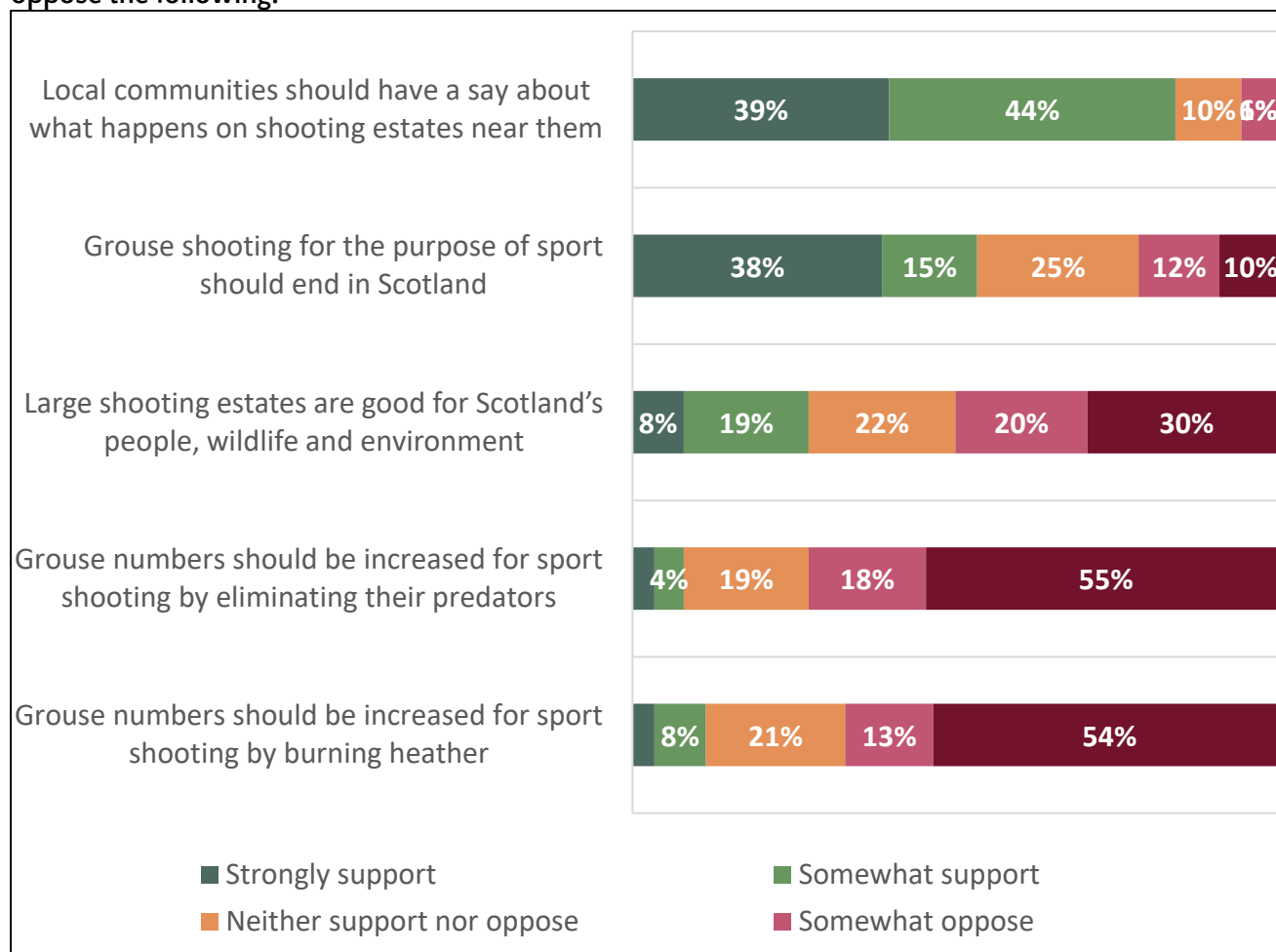


Base: Panel members (92)

There were mixed views in relation to grouse shooting practices, though most respondents were against this [Figure 4.2]. Just over half (53%) of respondents agreed that grouse shooting for the purpose of sport should end in Scotland, of which 38% strongly supported this. A majority (73%) were opposed to increasing grouse numbers for sport shooting by predator control,

Meanwhile, most respondents felt that local communities should have a say about what happens on shooting estates near them, with 83% in support for this overall.

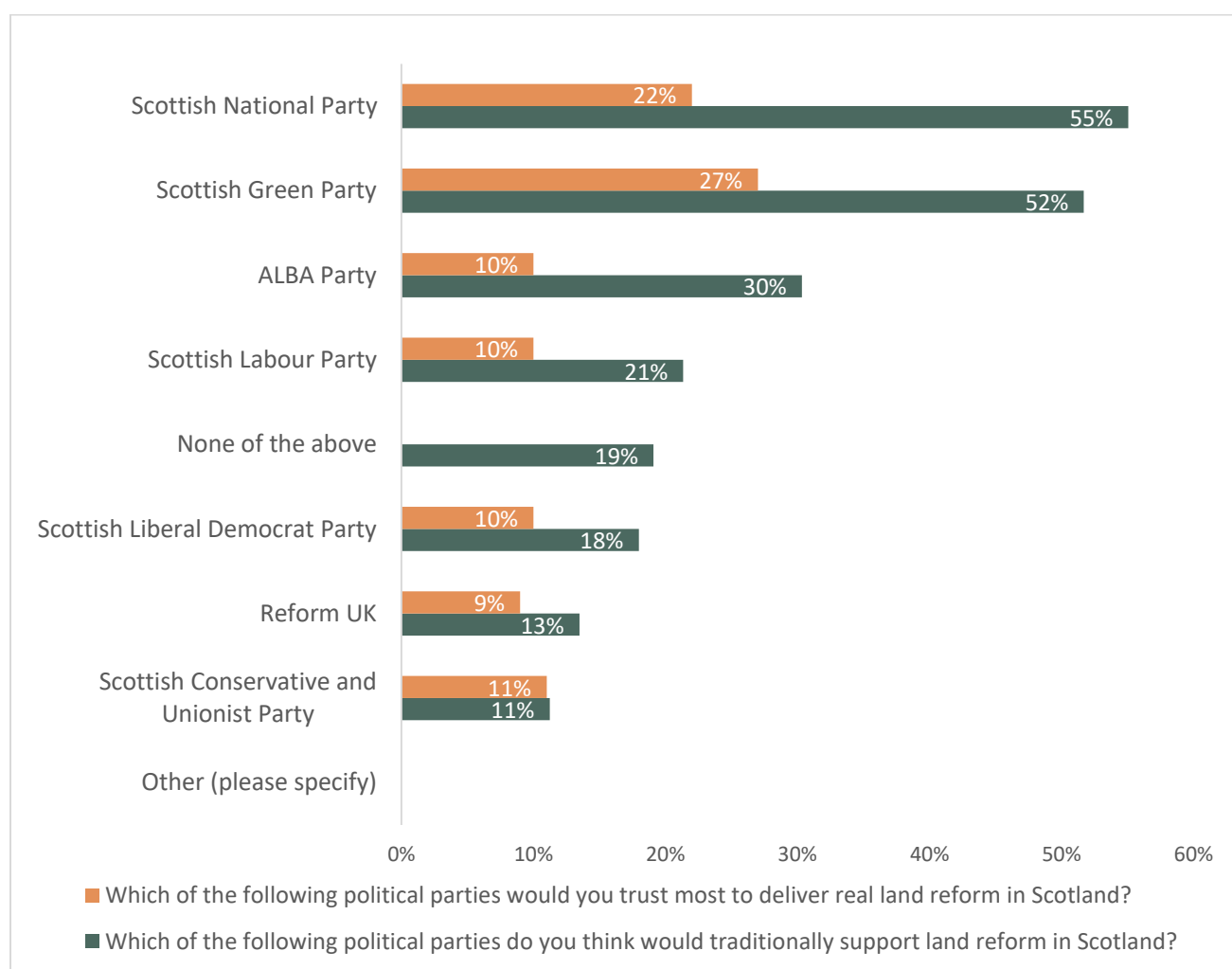
Figure 4.2: Grouse are one of Scotland's native wild birds. To what extent do you support or oppose the following:



Base: Panel members (92)

Political parties like the SNP and Greens were most commonly associated with land reform. However, levels of trust in these parties to deliver reform were notably lower suggesting a credibility gap (Figure 4.3)

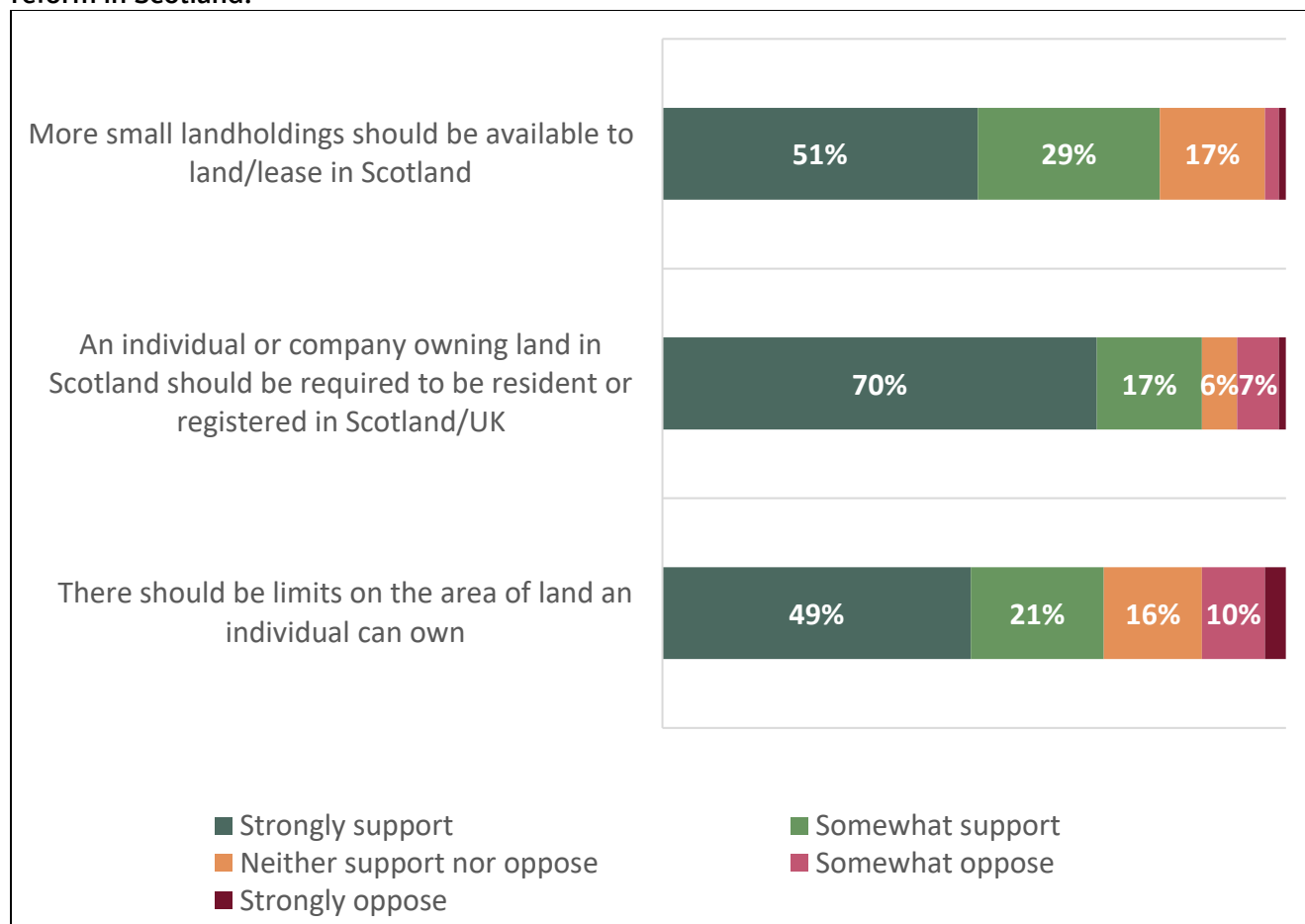
Figure 4.3 - Which of the following political parties would you trust most to deliver real land reform in Scotland AND Which of the following political parties do you think would traditionally support land reform in Scotland (combined):



Base: Panel members (92)

Respondents favoured widespread participation in land reform, with strong support for community organisations, the Scottish Parliament, and the general public having a say (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5: Finally, to what extent do you support or oppose the following statements about land reform in Scotland:



Base: Panel members (92)

4.2 Focus Group Findings

The three focus groups offered in-depth conversations with participants over three phases:

- Group 1: explored the motivations for, and barriers to, land reform.
- Group 2: reacted to findings from Group 1 and prioritised future uses.
- Group 3: discussed long-term vision, principles, and ideas for reform.

Summaries of the key themes and insights arising from each group are included below.

Focus Group 1

The first focus group explored participants' views on motivations for, and the barriers to, land reform. Participants were based across Scotland, including Edinburgh, Aberdeenshire, Glasgow and Cumbernauld.

The following word cloud (Figure 4.6.) is based on discussions in the first focus group. The most frequently mentioned words and phrases are shown in a larger font to demonstrate significance.

Figure 4.6: Frequently mentioned words and phrases during Focus Group 1



Perceptions of who owns Scotland's land

Participants discussed who they thought owns land in Scotland, including **Crown Estate**, **farmers** and the **Scottish Government**:

"Well, I'm aware that the Crown Estate owns large elements of the Scottish shore because I think there was a wind farm auctioned by the Scottish Government recently and it seemed they gave it away for pennies when it should have been worth millions. So I know the Crown Estate is a very large owner of shoreline, and obviously Scotland has a massive shoreline, but I'm not sure percentage wise, how much of the Crown Estate would then cover it. [...] And then my last one would obviously be a mixture of farming and the Scottish Government will own land".

One participant also thought that **Scottish Railways** "used to be" a large landowner – owning "land and bridges" around the tracks – and wondered if they had since "sold off a lot of the land for housing".

Another participant commented that the **current Duke of Buccleuch** is "the biggest landowner in Scotland".

Others were surprised to learn that the Duke owns approximately 220,000 acres of land across 13 different estates, more than 100 times the size of Glasgow Airport, with one calling it an "unfathomable amount":

"I wasn't surprised by like the sort of concept of one or a few people owning lots of land, but I'd never heard of this Duke fellow before. So, yeah, I think it's interesting just in the visualisation of the 100 times the size of Glasgow Airport. Like that's just an unfathomable amount. And, and I'm not even sure if I can think of how large that is. And it is just eye opening to understand just how much land that is just for one fella's estate".

Strong desire for local consideration and influence

Participants expressed that **local communities should have substantial influence in land use and ownership**, especially when land affects their environment and quality of life.

Reflecting on the statistics on land ownership and use shown during the focus group, participants underscored how **landowners can operate in an insular way**, by not using their land to contribute to the local economy or considering/engaging with others living on or around it. As indicated in the

below quote, participants wanted to see more a shared community purpose in terms of land use and management:

“I think there's a lack of responsibility currently, evidently from that slide, in how little it contributes to the economy and jobs of the local population surrounding it. So, I think that having less of this land being gated off from [communities] and I guess it's some responsibility to more of, not hierarchical, but a bit more flat, if that makes sense in some way. [Then] there's a bit more interaction with where it sits, the people on it, the people around it as some kind of community purpose. The thing that sits wrong with me is the isolated-ness of it when it is clearly something that everyone is essentially sharing in a real sense, not a legal sense necessarily”.

Indeed, one participant expressed a preference for increased public ownership of land:

“I think in terms of like a spectrum, I'd veer more towards, like, public ownership [of land] than private ownership”.

Responsibility for land

Land ownership was seen as a **shared responsibility, not just a private right**. Indeed, a few participants noted how ownership should be contingent on what the landowners plan to do with the land rather than the size of the mass:

“I wonder whether it's more about whether there's a consensus that their [landowners'] use of it [land] is of value, as opposed to just pure ownership. Because even, say there is this benevolent billionaire, if something would fall to the next heir ultimately you'd want to have some sort of ability to review the use and, I guess, public value coming from it”.

They felt that ownership should entail **duties** such as environmental care and public benefit. However, were concerns that large landowners, in particular, could either go about achieving sustainability in an unethical way, or find ways to ‘get around’ such responsibilities:

“And so, you know, really, really rich landowners get taxpayers money to plant trees because, see, the Scottish Government has set a target to plant a million trees. And the Duke of Buccleuch can go ‘Aye, I'll plant you half a million. Yep. Send a cheque over here’. It's just circular. The more land you've got, the more wealth follows you. Yet the value of planting 500,000 trees is really important”.

“Ideally, you know, sustainability is sort of considered. But yeah, in practice it's a lot more difficult. One thing I would think about is just sort of ensuring it's ethical. They're [landowners are] going to profit off of the land one way or another, then at least there's some sort of equality, equitability happening”.

Land reform as a root issue

Land reform was viewed not as a separate challenge but as a **central issue that underpins other economic and social problems** such as housing shortages, rural depopulation, and inequality. One participant offered the following, noting the issues caused by large swathes of land being owned by a small number of people. There was also a sense that these landowners can be uncooperative:

“A major issue of how things work in Scotland is because everything is so concentrated in the hands of the few. Like the reason why we have trouble building houses is because a lot of the land is owned by other people who don't want houses there. The reason why we don't raise as much money as we could is because landowners block any attempts to reform anything that may cost them money. The reason why we don't have as much jobs in rural areas is because the only jobs they [landowners] want are shooting jobs. The reason why people are leaving rural areas is because they have nowhere to live. They have to either hope their parents die, or they have to go and live in the South because they have nowhere to build houses”.

One participant mentioned an example of how a lack of maintenance of connected land could pose difficulties for others, such as in the case of selling property:

“For me, as much as possible, because if you live beside a piece of land, but you don't own it, but it's like millimetres from your fence, you know, and that land is left to rot or is used, you know, for dumping or it's, you know, it's neglected, then that is your community. [...] Even if you think about people's gardens, if your next door neighbour's garden is an absolute disgrace, it would be harder to sell your flat”.

They also talked about the concept of community benefits as an increasing requirement for developers when building new housing. Community benefits were seen as important in prompting consideration of communities and public good:

“And you often get that when a planner, a developer wants to build, you know, 100 new houses in a field in East Lothian. The developer has to build a school for the public good.

They have to build a roundabout, they need to check if they need an exit road from the main roads. So yeah, community benefit is the phrase that that springs to mind for me”.

Participants discussed how **both rural and urban areas face land-related challenges**. They observed issues with derelict or speculative land use in urban parts of Scotland. Indeed, one participant remarked how they had previously thought of land reform as a matter exclusive to rural areas, with the conversation prompting examples of derelict urban spaces:

“So I guess initially with land reform, I assumed it was rural, completely rural. But as we've discussed it, I'm now thinking about when you drive through any of our cities, there's all these, I think they call them brownfield sites or whatever, where somebody owns a piece of land and maybe had a garage or some form of business and they've gone out business and they just leave it. You'd think it would make sense for them to sell it to get it developed, but it doesn't seem to”.

Another participant saw the protection of green space in and around urban areas, including cities, as vital:

“Particularly, I think when you have housing crises and when you've got families having to live in smaller accommodations, having public spaces that are looked after and safe are hugely important”.

As mentioned throughout, rural areas were seen to struggle with depopulation, often tied to a lack of jobs in rural areas, as well as a lack of housing options.

Barriers

The first focus group closed with discussion on the perceived barriers to changing land ownership. As seen below, participants touched on financial, legal and structural barriers and perceptions:

- **Financial:** Participants felt that land is too expensive for communities to buy, even with government support schemes:

“What I've heard about is that community buyouts are almost impossible because land is so expensive now that even with the, I can't remember [the name of the fund], but that fund's total value doesn't have a chance in hell of getting most land because I think at the moment the rules are they'll give you one pound for every pound you raise. I guess like up to 1,000,000. But the vast majority of land as well is worth well over a million unless you can get something very small”.

- **Legal and structural:** There was a sense that powerful landowners resist reform and often benefit from legal protections and financial incentives:

“But yeah, for me, it feels like in terms of barriers to land reform, like anything that happens, I think always in the back of my mind I would just worry that sort of the rich would manage to find a loophole. And it is just something that it just feels like impossible to get ahead of in a way. And that's a bit it's great to think about a world in which land reform and sort of all these changes are possible, but it is a bit difficult to, you know, I feel like I'm playing chess against people that are seven steps ahead of me and know exactly what to do, if any bills will pass”.

- **Cultural/perceptions:** Participants believed that land reform is often invisible to the public, with one mentioning “invisible bits of power”. They felt it can be difficult to mobilise support around land reform due to its complexity and the dominance of elite narratives, and considered potential roadblocks to raising public awareness of land reform:

“If we tried to [raise awareness of land reform] through the public broadcast, it would be seen as ideological, political and would be extinguished. I think if it was just the information landscape, it would seem that it was like some sort of conspiracy or something. There would be a problem with even raising awareness, or trying to, of the importance of it. And that's the thing that I find so kind of interesting and about kind of land reform is that it's a really like invisible bits of power, which is really difficult to kind of describe or flesh out or, or like put in in understandable terms”.

Summary

Several participants found the amount of land owned by largest individual landowner in Scotland ‘unfathomable’ and ‘eye opening’. They underscored how such landowners, particularly large ones, can act in an insular way, and felt that local communities should have a say in how such land is used.

While they believed that landowners should be responsible in caring for the land and enabling public benefit, there were concerns that some could either go about achieving sustainability in an unethical way, or find ways to ‘get around’ such responsibilities.

Land reform was viewed not as a separate challenge but as a central issue that underpins other economic and social problems such as housing shortages, rural depopulation, and inequality. Urban areas were also seen to face land-related challenges, including dereliction.

Participants saw financial, legal and structural issues, as well as challenges relating to perceptions, as key barriers to changing land ownership.

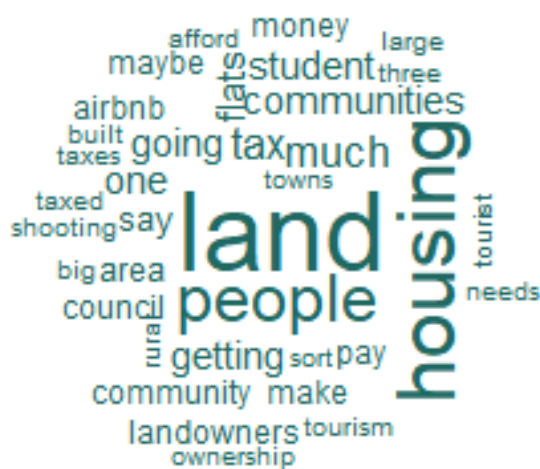
Focus Group 2

The second focus brought together a diverse group of participants from the online panel, many of whom admitted they engaged with the topic of land reform for the first time through the initial public survey. Participants were from a range of urban and rural areas, including Aberdeenshire, Renfrewshire, Dumfries, Edinburgh and East Dumbartonshire and Glasgow City.

This session explored initial reactions to land reform, barriers to progress and priorities for land use. The discussion was informed by a presentation summarising land ownership in Scotland and insights from Focus Group 1.

The following word cloud (Figure 4.7) is based on discussions in the second focus group. The most frequently mentioned words and phrases are shown in a larger font to demonstrate significance.

Figure 4.7: Frequently mentioned words and phrases during Focus Group 2



Engagement with land reform

Most participants had **limited prior knowledge of land reform** but expressed **curiosity** and a desire to understand its implications:

“I don't know much about the [land reform] area [...] but I think there's an alternative there, you know, because I understand that there are a lot of local Scottish people who need to earn a living. And I don't think that needs to be land owned by them, you know, very rich landowners and all that kind of thing”.

Some participants were aware of the unequal concentration of land ownership and expressed **concern about absentee and foreign landowners**:

“I'm just a bit concerned sometimes about massive landowners and what they are doing, as well as foreign landowners, absentee landowners and just, in general, things that maybe weren't the best always for local smaller independents having some say in what was going on”.

Reactions to current land ownership patterns

Participants were surprised by the scale of concentrated private land ownership and its limited contribution to the economy, housing, and jobs. While there was strong agreement that land should serve the broader community, not just private interests, participants were cognisant of the potential influence of lobby groups working on behalf of landowners.

“There has to be a will somewhere in government, local government, to actually say ‘No, we have to sort this out’ and we have to try not to allow, because I'd imagine that there'd be a lot of lobby groups that put a lot of pressure on government who represent the landowners who have the influence and power. [...] I think we have to have the will to do it [undertake land reform] and we have to be brave enough to do it and take on these large landed interests. So, yeah, I just find it, it's still quite shocking to realise how much is not really productively used. And yeah, I think it would benefit everyone if we had a bit more equality in that sense”.

Perceived barriers to land reform

Again, participants shared what they saw as key barriers to land reform. Such barriers related to power and influence, the cost of land, complexity and a lack of transparency and media framing.

- **Power and influence:** Many felt that the existing legal and political systems favour large landowners, making reform difficult:

“It feels like a vicious circle to me because obviously the law as it stands is highly influenced by the by those who are already landowners and because they have the power and they have the money, obviously. So in order to put laws in place to help the others and to shift the power a little bit, like, how can you actually go about it? How can you influence the people who have all the power to do something that they're not going to want to do? And there's no way you can just go and say 'This land is now mine just because I want it, so it's not yours anymore'”.

- **Cost of land:** High land prices were seen as a significant obstacle to community ownership:

“It's the cost of the land. And it might be its economic worth is [low], but the people who are selling the land might see actually its potential as much more. Therefore, you'll have to pay more for it”.

- **Complexity and lack of transparency:** The legal and financial frameworks were viewed as opaque and inaccessible to ordinary citizens, with some participants concerned about money raised from estates being held in offshore accounts:

So 78% of rural estates participate in country sports like shooting, which contribute 0.03% to the national economy [referencing slide shown during group]. And even with that, how much does that actually stay in Scotland in the sense that certainly some estates will have the money in offshore accounts or trust companies will have it somewhere else. So those from a local rural area, how much are they actually benefit from it if they can't get housing?”

“Transparency is very important, so we know exactly who owns the land, what they're doing with the money and how can the land be used better and a better and more beneficial ways for local communities in Scotland as a whole”.

- **Media framing:** Concerns were raised about negative portrayals of land reform in the media, which may deter public support:

“I remember a few years ago when there was talk of land reform, a lot of the media framed it as the Scottish Government trying to be like Mugabe, you know, when Mugabe land

grabbed in Zimbabwe. [...] So I think that's another thing that we have to consider is that, well, how does the media portray [land reform]? Because [the media] is where a lot of the general public get their information. So if you're creating it as a big contentious issue and it's something going to be detrimental if we change how we use the land, I think that's quite important, how it influences how people see land reform itself”.

Priorities for Land Use

Participants discussed the importance of balancing different priorities, including:

- **Economic activity and housing:** Some highlighted the potential for land reform to address rural depopulation and housing shortages, though there were concerns about infrastructure and the appropriateness of rural developments.
- **Community development:** There was strong support for using land to build vibrant communities, especially through local facilities and outdoor spaces, with participants drawing on local examples:

“So In Edinburgh, there's a lot of old abandoned bowling greens that are not being used anymore. There has been community based groups trying to get that land transferred over to the community as part of a community asset transfer and we've been trying to turn that into community gardens, community allotments. So I think I think that's another really good idea because then people learn about foods, because near me there's a place called the Forest Kindergarten. So they take primary school kids to it, it's near me in Corstorphine Hill. So it's a large forest area and they take them inside and they'll learn all about biodiversity and they'll learn how to grow vegetables. And we've got Gorgie City Farm in Edinburgh as well, although that's had a lot of financial problems there's a lot of people trying to save that because again, it's a very good way for people to come in contact with farm animals, which you might not necessarily be able to do if you can't go out of the city”.

- **Environmental sustainability and animal welfare:** Many expressed support for rewilding and encouraging further biodiversity in Scotland:

“So in terms of animals, I would like to see us getting back to more of what possibly Scotland used to have. That would also be along with some more of the Caledonian pine forests and allowing the animals the earth”.

“So there is usually a kind of push back because people understandably don't necessarily like change, but reintroducing a lot of these species have actually not really had a detrimental impact on the overall environment and some cases have actually been quite a positive impact on it. So yeah, there needs to be a sort of balance there, that there's some areas where we can rewild and there's some areas that obviously we can't. So we just have to find that balance”.

Indeed, one participant pointed to past efforts to rewild rural areas of Scotland and commented on the importance of eco-tourism:

“I'm interested in is wildlife and eco-tourism because I think Scotland has a plethora of attributes in that area and it's something that people are interested in. And I mean, for an example, in Mull, when they reintroduced sea eagles to Mull, there was a farming opposition because [there were concerns that] the sea eagles took lambs and they worked together and ended up okay 40 years later”.

Participants wanted land management to consider the welfare of both wild and farmed animals, noting issues around culling and land degradation.

However, there were differing views on wind energy, with some citing its negative impact on local environments and communities:

“Companies put them [wind turbines] up around here and then they all go. They [politicians] give money to these turbine companies. But this money is not being correctly used within the communities. The turbines will come more and more and be bigger and bigger. So we worry about all the wildlife that has been destroyed because of it as well”.

Community Ownership

Participants shared positive experiences of community land ownership, highlighting its role in protecting green spaces, fostering community pride, and enabling tailored local solutions. Indeed, one participant reflected on the benefits of community land in their local area, in creating space for residents – including children – to enjoy:

“I'm kind of fortunate to have lived in a village that got two pieces of community land and it's benefited the community massively. We're getting the kids out, getting them back into nature. So it would be good to see if land was more used for spaces like that, just to give kids another focus other than being on screens all the time. And we have a community

wood that is used for all sorts of activities and different things. And we've also purchased land for like sports fields. And they're also looking at trying to do like an allotment area as well. So I would really push for like if we could be used for more things like that to get other people involved"

However, **challenges** were noted, including the need for:

- Long-term leadership and effective governance.
- Ongoing support and oversight from local authorities.
- Greater awareness and education about how to pursue community buyouts.

Summary

There was widespread recognition that land reform is closely tied to broader societal goals such as housing, fairness, and environmental protection.

Participants called for clearer strategy and vision from government, along with improved transparency and community engagement.

Urban and rural perspectives differed in focus, but both agreed on the need for more equitable and locally responsive land use.

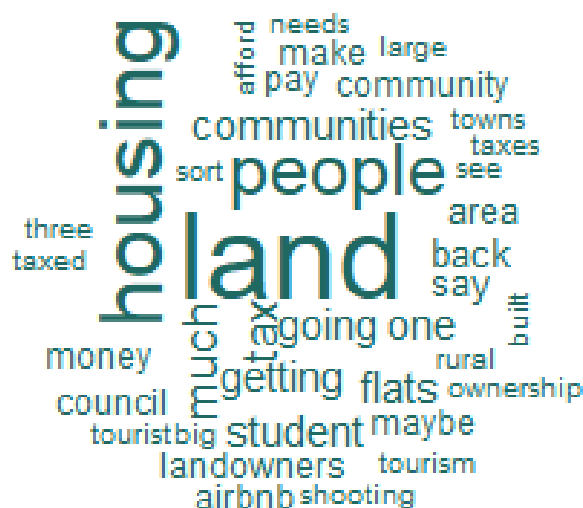
Focus Group 3

This focus group brought together participants from the online panel to discuss their ambitions for land reform in Scotland. Participants were based across urban and rural areas of Scotland, including Loch Lomond, Renfrewshire, North Lanarkshire, Edinburgh and Midlothian. They referred to their respective rural and urban experiences during discussions.

This session sought reactions to insights from the first two focus groups, and explored participants' vision for land reform in Scotland and what they saw as key principles and aims. Participants also discussed their thoughts on the availability of small landholdings and on owning large amounts of land.

The following word cloud (Figure 4.8) is based on discussions in the third focus group. The most frequently mentioned words and phrases are shown in a larger font to demonstrate significance.

Figure 4.8: Frequently mentioned words and phrases during Focus Group 3



Agreement with key insights from previous focus groups

Participants felt that the insights presented from the previous two focus groups **aligned with what they see as the general view of people in Scotland**. They sensed that those living in Scotland have some knowledge and interest in land reform but can find it confusing. They felt that while there is an overall desire of change, there are a variety of opinions and there is not a ‘one size fits all’ solution.

Participants also touched on the point that ‘housing and economic growth – address[ing] rural depopulation and boost[ing] access to affordable housing’ is an opportunity from land reform:

“I think that as well as land reform, we also need some sort of balance with house prices and things like that because we’re basically getting into a situation where people, especially from rural communities, are outbid, if you like, on the cost of housing. Even the cost of renting is getting to the stage, so they’re kind of being forced out of where they come from, because they can’t get the jobs that enable them to afford the high price of housing, which if there aren’t the well paid jobs there, we’re almost getting like I say, another Highland clearance that people are being forced into lower grade housing, perhaps not necessarily, but into more built up areas, which might not be their choice”.

Vision for land reform in Scotland

Participants said they **would like to see the land used for large estates broken up and handed over to the community**. They suggested that this land could then be used by communities to build houses and provide green spaces. They also discussed the potential for community energy projects, to give them more autonomy in local energy generation and reduce costs for consumers:

“Land given over to the community where it would be so the community can build houses, so that they don't have to leave. Because I know a lot of the issues in rural areas isn't just that there's unaffordable housing, there's no housing [...] Also, some land given over to just like community energy projects. Can they actually make money off of the land that they own as well as providing electricity and power for them? Because there's no excuse for the prices we pay up here. It's ridiculous”.

Participants **raised the issue of large landowners** before being prompted, adding that these individuals need to be more accountable, making sure that they support, and bring income into, the communities near their estate:

“I feel that landowners have a responsibility. I think they need to be held more accountable to if they're going to have these huge estates, to make sure that they support the communities and don't just have it for grouse shooting once a year or whatever for the select few. I think there has to be a responsibility from them to engage with the communities, support the communities and also bring some more wealth or income into the communities. And I think it is just this, so few have so much and give so little back”.

One participant suggested **having more opportunities for those wanting to become farmers to buy land**, particularly those whose family does not already own farmland or who cannot otherwise afford it:

“I was just going to say it'd be good to see it getting back to more farmers as well, even like kids of farmers who maybe want to start out, branch off their own business and maybe can't afford it”.

Another felt that “pressure from student housing and Airbnb takes away so much land”. They would like to see a **greater emphasis on land ownership in Scotland catering for tourism accommodation**, as they felt this would ‘free up’ other land for social housing, council housing, and private sector housing:

“Well in Edinburgh today there's like three or four different new applications for student flats and it's just heartbreaking because student flats are wealthy so they can outbid council housing and housing associations and even private house builders because student flats return at such a high level. And there's a second problem on the back of all of these applications is these student flats can be used as Airbnb and party flats when students aren't there i.e. Christmas or Easter. You know, students aren't the problem. It's when the flats are rented out at other times.

There's so much land that you could have housing, you know, tourist housing built [on] and instead it gets rammed into the centre of Edinburgh and probably individual pockets in the Highlands. There must be the ability to cash in on tourism. Tourism is this only economy that you can guarantee is going to continue to grow. And I would like to see far greater emphasis on the land ownership in Scotland catering for tourism accommodation and if they make a profit out of that, great, good on them. But at least it frees up other land for social housing, council housing, and private sector housing. I'd like to see a mix of all three getting built. I'm not precious on one or the other, but the pressure from student housing and Airbnb takes away so much land”.

Priorities for land reform in Scotland

Looking long-term, participants felt that land reform should **enrich the economy for everybody**. There was a general sense that land reform should help to **support and sustain communities** “out with the big towns and cities in Scotland and not just a few Airbnbs, etcetera”. Similarly, others saw cheaper housing, the reconstruction of communities and the creation of new communities as priorities.

Participants were also asked **whether land reform should focus on redistributing land, changing how it is used or improving access to land**. They **saw rationale behind all three**, noting that this would depend on the needs of each individual area.

There were some unprompted conversations on **penalties for large landowners** who do not support their community or ‘use their land properly’:

“So if they want to have their grouse shooting, they have to pay into the economy to allow them to do that. But maybe if they were to help all the things in that environment or that area that there should be either no tax to it or less tax. I mean, we've all heard about the tourist taxes, was the Edinburgh's proposing tourist taxes for people that went and stayed there? Well, maybe there should be some sort of land tax. And if they're not using their

land properly and profitably for the environment and the area, then they should have be taxed on it, which should then be fed back into the communities”.

Concerns about land in Scotland

Participants were concerned that **too much of the land in Scotland is owned by too few people**, and that those who own land are not ‘sharing the wealth’ or engaging and supporting communities through tourism, jobs or other means.

Some **questioned the extent to which some landowners care for the environment**. Indeed, one participant pointed out how the building of battery storage in their local area caused noise and disruption to nearby people and animals.

There was a sense that landowners could do more to “not disrupt peat bogs which capture carbon” or “plant the right kind of trees to take carbon in”. There were also concerns around the modern-day existence of grouse moors, wherein there is “protected land for people to go shooting on rather than buildings or wildlife”. Indeed, there were initial discussions on how large landowners should have, and be able to demonstrate, their responsibility to the environment, such as yearly audit reports.

Principles to guide land reform

Respondents suggested several guiding principles for land reform, including:

- **A clear mission and end goal** – including knowing where Scotland is headed in regard to land reform, and what is needed in specific areas.
- An understanding that **what is needed in one area is not necessarily needed in, or will benefit, others**.
- **Longevity** – new buildings and infrastructure should have a long lifespan and be ‘built to last’.
- One suggested that land reform should not be allowed to hold back economic growth – indeed, it should be a requisite of landowners to show that they are **driving economic growth**.

Thoughts on prioritising individuals having access to owning more land and prioritising community-led land ownership

Participants felt that Scotland should prioritise individuals having **access to owning more land** in the case of groups like rural communities and farmers, but avoid “giving people land for the sake of it”. Indeed, there were worries that the dilution of land ownership to other individuals would result in land being sold to “other rich individuals” meaning there is “one enormous piece of land divided by two or three people rather than one person”.

Meanwhile, some participants felt that Scotland should encourage – though not necessarily prioritise – **community land ownership**:

“I think it should be encouraged, but only where they have a viable solution that is going to meet the needs of the community and not just the needs of the few, because that's you're taking from one to give to another, you know, with much the same values”.

Several participants raised that more should be done to make it easier for communities to develop ideas in regard to community ownership, and support them in understanding “what they can do and how they can do it”. Some discussed what they have heard about community ownership, in that “people have a proper stake in the land and therefore there is a longer-term investment in it”.

There was unanimous agreement that Scotland should aim for **more equal distribution of land**.

Thoughts on the availability of small landholdings to buy and lease

Participants said they would like to see **greater availability of small land holdings to buy and lease**, so long as these are “big enough that it's sustainable for people to make a living from it”.

Participants heard how crofting – a regulated system of small-scale land holdings – is currently restricted to specific counties in the north and the west of Scotland. All but one of the focus group participants had heard of the concept of crofting.

They discussed whether similar opportunities should be available across all of Scotland. Some felt that it could diversify rural populations and encourage people to move out of the towns and cities. Participants admitted that they did not have a strong sense of what modern-day crofting looks like, but sensed that it does not produce enough income for families to have a modern standing of living.

One participant suggested that people in Scotland may prefer allotments over crofts, noting that Crown Estate or government-owned land could be handed over to make more allotments, allowing people to grow their own produce.

Thoughts on owning large amounts of land

The focus group participants discussed whether there should be **limits on how much land one individual or organisation can own**. They saw this largely dependent on what the land is being used for and whether the landowners are responsible in looking after the land. They were wary of attaching strict numerical quotas or limits.

One participant said they would **prefer that it is not economically viable to hold lots of land**, in that large landowners currently “don't really have to pay much on it”. Without prompting, the same participant said their “ideal scenario would be to tax it to the point where you can't have large land holdings”.

As above, participants agreed that **large landowners should have responsibility to protect and restore the environment**. They suggested that large landowners should have to return audits to ensure that they are paying back into the land and caring for the environment, emphasising a need for transparency and care to avoid loopholes. One participant advised enlisting SEPA to issue fines to landowners who are not caring for the environment:

“Because at the moment, they don't seem to fine people. Or if they do, it doesn't seem to be very much. I mean, if you're one of these big landowners, it needs to be like 6 or 7 figures before they'll even pay attention”.

Next, participants were shown the following **statements** and asked which would be their preferred focus:

- Large land holdings must comply with the principles for ethical wildlife control.
- Large land holdings must deliver reductions in climate emissions.
- Large land holdings must rewild at least 30% of their land holdings.

They saw the second statement – large land holdings must deliver reductions in climate emissions – as most realistic. They saw a reduction in carbon climate emissions and CO2 from large landowners in Scotland as meaning fewer green levies on electricity and gas bills, which the general public would welcome. Others felt that large land holdings could be used to create more environmentally friendly sources of electricity.

When asked whether **large landowners** should have to pay **tax on carbon emissions from their land**, respondents felt this would depend on where the emissions are coming from.

In terms of the statement on rewilding, they felt that some land is more available to rewild than others. One participant felt that rewilding “can only really be done with consent” and cannot be done in accordance to numerical targets, calling it a ‘nice to have’.

Thoughts on land tax – and taxing large landowners

Participants were asked for their views on **having a general tax on non-residential or domestic land (i.e. not on a person's house and garden, but on extra land that is owned)**. One participant was worried that such a tax could create barriers for people, particularly young people, looking to get into farming. Others were concerned that taxing land in that respect would “hit the small people but not the people that it's probably aimed at”. They suggested that there could be other ways of ensuring there is “more equitable use of land and more equitable money made from it”.

Some participants felt that people who are using their land as their means of income should be **exempt** from paying such a land tax.

One participant recommended taxing landowners who are earning more than an average wage in Scotland on their land:

“Let's just say in principle an average working wage is a perfectly decent thing to take. If that is what you're earning from the land, you shouldn't face additional taxes, but you could then set that limit at anything. [...] But if we agree that the Scottish Government has said 43 grand a year is wealthy, then that to me might be the figure above which you should be taxed additionally on land and land ownership”.

While they agreed that **large landowners should be prioritised for such a tax**, participants were wary that large landowners could find and exploit loopholes to avoid paying tax on non-residential or domestic land. One felt that introducing additional taxes could mean an additional layer of complexity, making it ‘easier for [large landowners] to mess around with it’. They suggested a simpler approach, in having one type of tax for ownership of property:

“I've always been in favour of just having like one type of tax for ownership of property because at the moment like you have council tax, which is sort of a weird combination of old rates and poll tax, it's strange. But if you just taxed all land equally, then there's no way of getting out of it other than having less land”.

There was general agreement that **councils should have the power to tax large landowners in their areas**, with participants seeing this as a useful mechanism in making large landowners ‘give back’ to local communities. Participants advised that councils should spend the money raised through such a tax as per the wishes of the people living in the local authority area – who are most affected by the large land ownership – allowing for an element of consent.

Some felt that this approach should be even more localised, such as through community councils rather than district councils. They saw some district councils as too large, spanning both rural and urban areas. Using the example of Highland council, one participant worried that the views of more centralised residents (e.g. those living in Inverness) would differ from, or could skew, the views of those living in more rural areas of the Highlands. Overall, there was a strong sense that the taxes raised in a particular area must also be spent in that area:

“I think especially in Highland Council area, there will be the most people live in the bigger towns. So if they are going to have a say in how that money is spent, then of course they're going to vote for the places that have the most population. [...] And that is where the most population live, in the larger towns around the coast and Inverness. So if you brought back even the boundaries of the old district councils and that money had to be spent in that area, I just feel that it would stay more locally to the area of where these large landowners are”.

Suggested promises on land reform

With the 2026 Holyrood election approaching, participants were asked what they would say in their promise on land reform in Scotland. They suggested that political parties:

- **Be radical and realistic** – ensure that what is promised is actionable in practice: “Why wait for the perfect piece of radical land reform when you could have really good bits happening”.
- Some expressed political apathy, feeling that political parties will “promise you the world and then say ‘sorry, we can’t afford it’”. Participants highlighted that political parties need to **take accountability** for the promises, statements or manifestos they make, to build public trust and gain further support for land reform.
- **Make a few small changes** to “get the ball rolling” on land reform, rather than sweeping commitments.
- **Replace council tax with land value tax.**
- **Offer low interest loans** (pegged to Bank of England base rate) to tenant farmers to buy their land.
- Help to **empower communities** to buy out land for community ownership by simplifying and increasing the size of the Scottish Land Fund.

Summary

Participants believed that land used for large estates should be broken up and handed over to the community. They raised the issue of large landowners before being prompted, and felt strongly that these individuals need to uphold their social and environmental responsibilities.

They thought there should be penalties for large landowners who do not support their community or 'use their land properly', though were wary that large landowners could find and exploit loopholes to avoid paying tax on non-residential or domestic land. Nonetheless, they saw value in giving councils the power to tax large landowners in their areas, helping to feed funds back into the communities surrounding large estates.

Participants suggested several guiding principles for land reform in Scotland, including a clear mission and end goal, a focus on longevity, building 'to last' and building only where there is need, and being flexible whereby what is needed in one area is not needed in others.

5. Stakeholder Roundtable

As part of the Big Land Question project, a roundtable was convened with land reform stakeholders including representatives from community groups, environmental NGOs, landowners, sectoral experts, estate/land managers and wildlife managers. The session explored opportunities, challenges, and policy priorities for the future of land reform in Scotland.

5.1 Shared Vision

There was broad consensus that land reform is essential to building a fairer, greener, and more democratic Scotland. Participants emphasised that “who owns the land shapes who has power,” and saw land reform as a key lever for addressing inequality, climate change, and housing need.

Land was framed not just as an economic asset, but as a foundation for wellbeing, community flourishing, and long-term resilience. Several contributors called for a bolder, values-based narrative around land, positioning it as a shared national resource.

“We need a radical vision of the future of Scotland that starts with land.”

5.2 Tensions and Caveats

While supportive of reform, participants highlighted important tensions. Several cautioned against viewing land reform as a “magic bullet”, noting that without wider structural change—particularly around economic models, planning, and local democracy—land reform alone may not deliver transformative outcomes.

There was also concern about instrumentalising land solely as a solution to discrete issues like housing or climate. Participants argued that while these goals are important, they risk narrowing the scope of reform and missing opportunities to shift deeper power dynamics.

“We need to be careful not to frame land only as a means to an end. That risks reproducing the same systems under a different name.”

Finally, there was recognition that land ownership is only one part of the equation. How land is used, governed, and made accountable to communities was seen as equally vital.

5.3 Policy Recommendations

Participants put forward a range of policy proposals, many of which align with public views captured in the wider research:

- **Stronger public interest tests** for land transactions, to ensure alignment with national goals.
- **Enhanced data and transparency**, including open registers of land ownership and use.
- **Fiscal levers** such as land value taxation or development land taxes, to incentivise sustainable and equitable land use.
- **Greater accountability and democratic oversight**, potentially through a dedicated land reform agency.
- **Community capacity-building**, to ensure that local groups are equipped to engage with land opportunities.

There was particular support for creating long-term mechanisms to ensure land contributes to climate, nature, and social justice targets—not just immediate delivery outcomes.

5.4 Contrasts with Public Perceptions

Stakeholders noted that public support for land reform is high, but understanding remains low. This reflects earlier survey findings: only 1% of the public report knowing “a lot” about land reform, yet a clear majority support measures such as land taxes, community ownership, and transparency reforms.

Participants saw this as both a risk and an opportunity. Without better communication and public engagement, land reform could lose momentum or be co-opted. But there is also strong potential to build a broader coalition around land reform by connecting it more clearly to everyday concerns such as housing, cost of living, and community control:

“We’re at a tipping point. But we need to bring people with us.”

5.6 Summary

The roundtable discussion reinforced that land reform remains a vital policy frontier—closely tied to Scotland’s ambitions for climate action, social justice, and community empowerment. Stakeholders shared a clear vision for a more democratic and accountable land system, but also highlighted critical tensions: the risk of overpromising, the need to move beyond ownership alone, and the importance of aligning reform with deeper structural change.

There was strong alignment between stakeholder priorities and public support captured through the survey and consultation—particularly around transparency, taxation, and community control. However, the gap between public support and public understanding was a recurring theme. Bridging that gap through storytelling, political leadership, and inclusive policymaking will be essential.

Ultimately, stakeholders called for reform that is ambitious, enduring, and grounded in the lived experiences of people and places across Scotland. The challenge ahead is to embed land reform in a broader vision of the future—and to ensure that power, opportunity, and stewardship are more fairly shared.

Appendix A: Public Survey

Scotland has one of the most unequal patterns of land ownership in the developed world. This is a result of our history, with the Highland Clearances and other events, leading to the formation of massive hunting estates which persevere to this day, with many still owned by the same families they were a century ago.

We want to find out more about what the Scottish public think the next Scottish Government should do to take forward land reform.

ASK ALL

1. How much, if anything, do you know about the Scottish Government's plans for land reform in Scotland?

- A lot,
- A little,
- Not very much,
- Nothing at all,
- Don't know

5.1 million people live in Scotland, but just 433 people own most of Scotland's private land.

ASK ALL

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Scotland would benefit from having more diverse land ownership
- There is enough information available about who owns land in Scotland
- Scottish Government should take action to break up large landholdings
- Scottish Government could do more to help people own and manage land

Scale: Strongly agree, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree, strongly disagree, don't know.

ASK ALL

3. In general, to what extent would you say you support the following:

- Land reform in Scotland
- A Scottish land tax; where large landowners are required to pay an annual tax based on what they own
- Large landowners being required to meet climate and nature targets

Scale: Strongly support, Tend to support, Neither support nor oppose, Tend to oppose, Strongly oppose, Don't know

ASK ALL

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Landowners should not receive public subsidies
- Where landowners receive public subsidies they should only be used for environmental enhancements, like creating new native woodland or restoring damaged peatlands.
- Where landowners receive public subsidies, then they should be capped, so that no landowner can receive more than a fixed amount each year.
- Land that is primarily managed for sport shooting of animals should not receive public subsidies.

Scale: Strongly agree, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree, strongly disagree, don't know

ASK ALL

5. 2.7% of land in Scotland is under community ownership. This means that the local community own and manage the land and buildings on it. Which of these comes closest to your view

- The Scottish Government does enough to encourage community ownership
- The Scottish Government should do more to encourage community ownership
- The Scottish Government should not interfere with land ownership

Appendix B: Public Consultation

D1. Before we begin I'd like to get to know you better. Please could you share some details about yourself so we know who is answering The Big Land Question? Please don't worry, you can choose to keep your response anonymous meaning we won't quote or publish it.

- Name
- Email address
- Age
- Organisation (if applicable)

D2. Your location:

- Local authority

D3. Are you happy for us to attribute your name and organisation (if applicable) to your comments?

- Yes
- No

ASK ALL

1. How important is it to you that the next Scottish Government delivers land reform?

SCALE: 0-10

ASK ALL

2a. Should there be more restrictions on who can own large areas of land and how much they can own?

SCALE: Yes, No

ASK IF Q2a = YES

2b:

- Large amounts of land should only be bought by people who are registered for tax in Scotland and the UK.
- Large amounts of land should only be bought by owners who are going to live there
- A cap on land ownership to restrict new land purchases
- The Scottish Government should be able to break up large landholdings in the public interest.

Scale: Strongly agree, agree, neutral, oppose, strongly oppose

ASK ALL

3a. Should large landowners be taxed for the land they own?

SCALE: Yes, no

ASK IF Q3a = YES

3b.

- Large landowners should pay extra tax when they buy land
- Councils should have the power to tax large landowners in their area
- Landowners should pay tax on carbon emissions from their land.

Scale: Strongly agree, agree, neutral, oppose, strongly oppose

ASK ALL

Q4. Should large landowners have new responsibilities to protect and restore the environment?

ASK IF Q4a = YES

4b.

- Large landholdings must deliver reductions in climate emissions
- Large landholdings must rewild at least 30% of their landholdings
- Large landholdings must comply with the principles for ethical wildlife control

Scale: Strongly agree, agree, neutral, oppose, strongly oppose

ASK ALL

5: Should community ownership play a bigger role in Scotland?

SCALE: Yes, No

ASK ALL

6: Should public ownership play a bigger role in Scotland?

SCALE: Yes, No

ASK ALL

7: Should the Scottish Government do more to require land to be made available for housing?

SCALE: Yes, No

ASK ALL

8. Before we finish do you have any comments or ideas you'd like to share? We'd love to hear about your vision for land reform and how land issues have affected your life.

ASK ALL

9. Who would you vote for if there was a Holyrood election today?

- Scottish National Party (SNP)
- Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party
- Scottish labour
- Scottish Green Party
- Scottish Liberal Democrats
- Alba Party
- Reform
- Other (please specify)

ASK ALL

10. Would you like to sign up to the REVIVE mailing list?

- Yes
- No

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussion Guides

The Big Land Question

Discussion Guide, Focus Group 1 – Land Ownership in Scotland

Set up

Introduce Diffley Partnership Team

Welcome to the focus group–

- Explain the discussion will last up to 90 minutes
- There will be plenty of time to get your views across and discuss issues between yourselves, something we encourage; my role is to keep the conversation flowing, ensuring we cover the broad areas we need to and ask any follow-up questions,
- Fully anonymous and confidential; The Diffley Partnership abide by the Market Research Society Code of Practice and the SRA Ethical Guidelines.
- Request permission to record discussion – with your permission I will record the discussion; this is just so we can go back and listen again after the discussion

Do you have any questions before we start?

Introductions and opening discussion (10 minutes)

Introductions: Please can you share your first name, where you're from and a brief statement on what interests you about land reform.

Who owns Scotland? (15 minutes)

What do you know about land ownership in Scotland?

Prompt: Who owns most of Scotland's land?

Prompt: Do you think land ownership in Scotland is fair?

Prompt: What are the main activities Scotland's land is used for?

FACILITATOR SHARE SCREEN.

[Prepare one or two slides maximum to give an overview of land ownership in Scotland. This should include the number of landowners, the use of the land, the % community owned land and the prevalence of foreign land ownership in Scotland.]

Understanding Perspectives on Land Ownership (30 minutes)

Do you feel like land in Scotland is fairly distributed?

Prompt: why / why not?

Probe: was any information in the slides I shared a surprise?

What do you think should be main priorities in shaping who can own land in Scotland? (e.g. should land be owned by individuals, communities, the government, private companies etc.)

Should there be limits on how much land one person, organisation or corporation can own?

Prompt: If yes, what do you think would be a reasonable limit?

What responsibilities should come with land ownership?

Prompt: Should owners have a duty to care for the land? [e.g. let nature breathe, protect/restore water sources, support pollinators, encourage wildlife]

Prompt: Should owners have a duty to meet climate targets?

Prompt: Should owners help support the economic and social wellbeing of the local community?

How much influence should local communities have in land ownership?

Prompt [If communities should influence LO]: Should the public have a role in decisions about land ownership?

How important is land reform as an issue in Scotland, compared to other economic, environmental and social challenges?

Probe if not mentioned: affordable housing is a big issue in Scotland at the moment, to what extent do you think this aligns with land reform?

[Facilitator to summarise the discussion to this point]

[If not mentioned by this point:]

Do you think any of the issues we've raised so far today differ between urban and rural areas?

For example, are the issues of land ownership any different in cities compared to island communities.

Prompt: What do you think land reform could look like in urban areas? (prompt with examples if not spontaneous: derelict sites, housing problems, greenspaces)

Challenges in Land Reform (10 minutes)

As you know, our aim for the panel and this series of focus groups is to understand priorities for land reform in Scotland. We want you to each develop an idea of what fair land reform in Scotland looks like.

What do you think the biggest barriers to changing land ownership might be?

Prompt: Bureaucracy / law

Prompt: Not enough support for communities for buyouts

Prompt: power of landowners

Prompt: power to influence local places (not enough local democracy)

Prompt: Political will

Has anyone been involved in accessing or purchasing land? (This could be through community ownership or initiative) [Facilitator will know this from the panel information but will ask this in an open way in the event the participant does not want to discuss their involvement]

Prompt: If yes: Would you mind sharing any challenges you faced?

Exploring Solutions for Land Reform (15 minutes)

What would land reform look like for you if it was done well?

What policies or interventions could help in land reform?

Prompt: what role could taxation play in land reform?

Prompt: Should foreign ownership of land in Scotland be restricted?

How could communities have a stronger say in land ownership in their area?

Prompt: Community ownership is one way local communities can do this, is anyone aware of any projects in their local area?

Conclusions and wrap-up (10 minutes)

Facilitator to summarise the key themes that emerged in the discussion.

Now it's time for your final thoughts. If you could change just one thing about land ownership in Scotland, what would it be?

Thank you all very much for the discussion.

Facilitator to explain next steps: Incentive will be paid via bank transfer, a summary of the discussion will be circulated round the rest of the panel. Keep an eye out for the next session which will be announced towards the end of the month.

Thank and close

The Big Land Question

Discussion Guide, Focus Group 2 – Land Use in Scotland (v.Final)

Set up

Introduce Diffley Partnership Team

Welcome to the interview/ focus group–

- Explain the discussion will last up to 90 minutes
- There will be plenty of time to get your views across and discuss issues between yourselves, something we encourage; my role is to keep the conversation flowing, ensuring we cover the broad areas we need to and ask any follow-up questions,
- Fully anonymous and confidential; The Diffley Partnership abide by the Market Research Society Code of Practice and the SRA Ethical Guidelines.
- **Request permission to record discussion** – with your permission I will record the discussion; this is just so we can go back and listen again after the discussion

Do you have any questions before we start?

Introductions and opening discussion (5 mins)

Introductions: Please can you share your first name, where you're from and a brief statement on what interests you about land reform?

Summary of FG1 (10-15 mins)

FACILITATOR TO SHARE SCREEN

Talk through the summary document circulated.

Ask for any immediate feedback –

Check for agreement.

Check for any disagreement.

Today's discussion will explore in detail the way land is used in Scotland.

Initial thoughts about current land use (10 mins)

Scotland's land is a precious resource – how do you feel it is being used currently?

Prompts: Do you think it is being used effectively – why/why not?

Do you think it is being used in a positive way – why/why not?

Prompt for examples of how Scotland's land is currently being used (e.g. agriculture, housing and infrastructure, green spaces)

What should our land enable people in Scotland to do?

Prompt: What activities do you want to see on Scotland's land?

Priorities for land use (10 mins)

How much of a priority do you think the following should be when considering land use?

We'll go through each in turn:

- The interests of biodiversity and environmental protection
- Community development
- Housing
- Tourism and recreation
- Economic activity and land-based businesses
- Energy

Prompt for explanations behind prioritisation – **why do you see this/these as a priority?**

Land and the wider ecosystem (10-15 mins)

Land is a natural habitat for many species in Scotland. Let's talk a bit more about land reform in relation to biodiversity and the environment.

Thinking about the animals also living on the land, what considerations should we bear in mind when we talk about land reform in Scotland?

Thinking of using land specifically for sport shooting, what considerations should we bear in mind when we talk about land reform in Scotland?

Probe on sport shooting statistic – 78% of estates do country sports and estates take up 53% of Scotland's landmass – what are your thoughts on this?

Prompt: Should restrictions on land use be imposed? (e.g. to avoid land being used specifically for sport shooting)

Prompt: Shooting estates are being indirectly supported by farm subsidies, what are your thoughts on this?

To what extent should animal welfare play a role in land reform in Scotland?

Prompt/context: Animals like foxes, stoats, crows and other 'non-target species' like hedgehogs can be snared, trapped and killed in the attempt to increase and maintain grouse numbers for sport shooting

Community ownership (15 mins)

Do you think there are enough opportunities for citizens to own, lease and have access to land?

Prompt: Why/why not?

Prompt: What do you think could be done to improve these opportunities?

Has anyone been involved in accessing or purchasing land? This could be through community ownership or initiative. [Facilitator will know this from the panel information but will ask this in an open way in the event the participant does not want to discuss their involvement]

Prompt: If yes: Would you mind sharing any challenges you faced?

Should more land be available for community ownership?

Prompt: benefits of community ownership

Prompt: disadvantages of community ownership

What barriers prevent communities from accessing land?

Prompt: what could be done to mitigate these barriers?

How could land use and land reform strengthen local communities?

Prompt: e.g. revenue into the local economy

Additional thoughts on land ownership and land management (10 mins)

Would you like to see more availability of small landholdings (e.g. crofts) to buy or lease?

N.B. Crofting is a regulated system of small-scale land holdings currently restricted to specific counties in the north and west

Prompt: Should similar opportunities be available across all of Scotland?

Do you think large landowners should be taxed for the land they own?

Context/prompt: 50% of private rural land in Scotland is owned by around 420 people/companies.

If yes, how do you think this could be achieved?

Prompt: should large landowners pay extra tax when they buy land?

Prompt: should landowners pay tax on carbon emissions from their land?

Prompt: should councils have the power to tax large landowners based on the value of the land?

When thinking about what land reform could look like in Scotland, what do you see as priorities for the management of the land?

Prompt: should owners need to live on the land? Or near it?

Conclusions and wrap-up (5 mins)

Thank you very much for the discussion, **is there anything not already covered that you would like to mention?**

Thank and close – mention incentive payment process

The Big Land Question

Discussion Guide, Focus Group 3 – Ambitions for Land Reform

Set up (c.5 mins)

Introduce Diffley Partnership Team

Welcome to the interview/ focus group–

- Explain the discussion will **last up to 90 minutes**
- There will be plenty of time to get your views across and discuss issues between yourselves, something we encourage; my role is to keep the conversation flowing, ensuring we cover the broad areas we need to and ask any follow-up questions,
- Fully anonymous and confidential; The Diffley Partnership abide by the Market Research Society Code of Practice and the SRA Ethical Guidelines.
- Request permission to record discussion – with your permission I will record the discussion; this is just so we can go back and listen again after the discussion

Do you have any questions before we start?

Introductions and opening discussion (c.5 mins)

Introductions – ASK ALL: Please can you share your first name, where you're from and a brief statement on what interests you about land reform.

The story so far (c.10-15 mins)

FACILITATOR TO SHARE SCREEN

Talk through the summary document circulated.

Ask for any immediate feedback.

Check for agreement.

Check for any disagreement.

Today's discussion will explore your ambition for land reform in Scotland.

Vision for Land Reform in Scotland (c.10 mins)

What is your vision for land in Scotland?

PROMPT: What changes would you like to see in how land is owned and used in Scotland?

PROBE: What difference would that make to you, your community, or your work?

What should be the priorities for land reform?

PROMPT: What should land reform achieve in the long term?

PROMPT: Should the focus be on redistribution of land, better land use, sustainability or anything else?

What concerns do you have about land in Scotland?

PROMPT: Fairness and transparency

PROMPT: Climate and sustainability

PROMPT: Jobs and economy

PROBE: Should land reform focus on redistributing land, changing how it is used or improving access to the land?

What could land reform look like? – Principles, aims and thoughts on availability of small landholdings (c.10 mins)**What principles should guide land reform?**

PROMPT: Sustainability, transparency, fairness

PROMPT: Should Scotland prioritise individuals having access to owning more land? Why/why not?

PROMPT: Should Scotland prioritise community-led land ownership? Why/why not?

Should Scotland aim for a more equal distribution of land?

PROMPT: If yes, how?

Would you like to see more availability of small landholdings to buy or lease?

N.B. Crofting is a regulated system of small-scale land holdings currently restricted to specific counties in the north and west of Scotland – should similar opportunities be available across all of Scotland?

PROBE: Why/why not?

What could land reform look like? – Thoughts on owning large amounts of land (c.20 mins)

[NOTE: The following ties in with the questions from The BLQ. Panel members will likely have knowledge of these questions by this point and may spontaneously mention the prompts]

Should there be limits on how much land one individual/organisation can own?

PROBE: If yes, what would a reasonable limit be?

PROMPTS (Possible responses)

Large amounts of land should only be bought by people who are registered for tax in Scotland and the UK.

Large amounts of land should only be bought by owners who are going to live there

A cap on land ownership to restrict new land purchases

The SG should be able to break up large landholdings in the public interest

Should large landowners have responsibilities to protect and restore the environment? If yes, how do you think this could be achieved?

Thinking about the following statements (relating to large landholdings and the environment), which would be your preferred focus if you could only pick one?

[Go through each in turn]

- Large landholdings must comply with the principles for ethical wildlife control
- Large landholdings must deliver reductions in climate emissions
- Large landholdings must rewild at least 30% of their landholdings

PROBE for reasons why

Sticking to the environmental theme, do you think large landowners should have to pay tax on carbon emissions from their land?

PROBE: Why/why not?

What are your thoughts on having a general tax on non-residential/domestic land, that is not your house and garden but on extra land that is owned?

PROMPT: Do you support this? Why/why not?

PROMPT: Should anyone be exempt from this? If so, who? Should anyone get discounts on this? If so, who?

PROMPT: Do you think large landowners should be prioritised for such a tax? (that is, be a key target audience for taxes like these). Why/why not?

How do you think such a tax could be achieved?

PROBE: Do you think councils should have the power to tax large landowners in their areas?

[N.B. Taxing large estates could raise money for local areas but also stop land banking, lower the value of estates and therefore could reduce costs for people and community to acquire that land.]

Conclusions, final question and wrap-up (c.10-15 mins)

Summarise the discussion so far.

As a final thought, please think ahead to the Holyrood election in 2026. Soon political parties will start to make promises about a wide range of issues facing Scotland.

If you could write the promise on land reform in Scotland, what would you say?

Thank you very much for the discussion, **is there anything not already covered that you would like to mention?**

Thank and close – mention incentive

Appendix D: Stakeholder Roundtable

The Big Land Question

Discussion Guide for Stakeholder Roundtable v.1

Hybrid – In-person/online, **2 hours** including break

Roundtable with key stakeholder organisations in the field: The stakeholder roundtable is an important step in contextualising the survey results and strategising ways to achieve public buy in to additional land reform interventions. The purpose of this session will be to discuss and debate the benefits of land reform and interventions which could be used which go further than the current land reform bill.

Note this Discussion guide is to be used in conjunction with **slides (shown in green)**

Set up (c.5 mins)

In advance– room set up: chairs, slides on screen, logged into Teams for online attendees, Dictaphone, materials

Welcome to the Roundtable on the Big Land Question **Opening slide on screen**

Introduce Diffley Partnership Team members

We are independent – REVIVE has commissioned us carry out this research as part of a consultation on land reform in Scotland. This research has included a national survey, an open consultation questionnaire and focus groups with members of the public who formed part of the specially created Big Land Question panel.

The Diffley Partnership abide by the Market Research Society Code of Practice and the SRA Ethical Guidelines

Housekeeping– fire alarm and exit, toilets, break, key fob

Do you have any questions before we start?

Request permission to record discussion – with your permission I will record the all-group discussion; this is just so we can go back and listen again after the discussion and aid our analysis.

We will not share the recordings and we will delete these at close of our contract at the latest.

Introductions and opening discussion (c.5 mins)

Let's begin by going round the room – please tell me your name, your organisation and where land reform sits as a priority for you and your organisation?

[Follow up – Is it central to the work that you do? How so?

The story so far – National Survey and the BLQ consultation (c.20 mins)

Show slides 0-7 (beginning of deck to last 'National Survey: Four key takeaways' slide] – present for 5-10 mins

What do you think about these survey results

- What stands out to you? Why?
- How do these results chime with your organisation – do any of these results align with what you have found in previous work undertaken by your organisation/s? If yes, what?
- Do any of the results surprise you? What/why?

Move on

The Big Land Question Consultation launched in November 2024 and closed just last week. Here's an overview of the questions it asked...

Show slides 8-10 (BLQ consultation)

We built on these questions in the focus groups we held with members of the Scottish public, which we'll discuss next.

BLQ Online Panel – Focus Groups – Purpose and emerging findings (c.25 mins)

Show slide 11

We set up the BLQ online panel, bringing together participants from across urban and rural Scotland.

Participants were invited to attend online focus groups, each centred on a different aspect of land reform.

We talked the participants through some of the context at the beginning of each focus group, to introduce them to the topic...

Show slides 12-13

The first focus group centred on Land Ownership in Scotland

Show slides 14-17

[Talk through summary of findings]

What are your thoughts on these focus group findings?

- Is there anything that stands out/ is interesting to you? What/why?
- Do any of the results surprise you? What/why?

The second focus group centred on Land Use in Scotland, including initial reactions to land reform, barriers to progress and priorities for land use

Show slides 18-20

[Talk through summary of findings]

What are your thoughts on these findings?

- Is there anything that stands out/ is interesting to you? What/why?
- Do any of the results surprise you? What/why?

The third focus group centred on Ambitions for Land Reform in Scotland

Show slides 21-25

[Talk through summary of findings]

What are your thoughts on these findings?

- Is there anything that stands out/ is interesting to you? What/why?
- Do any of the results surprise you? What/why?

STOP SHARING SLIDES

BREAK

Organisations' vision for land reform – including perceived benefits (c.10 mins)

What would land reform look like for you and your organisation if it was done well?

- What changes would you like to see in how land is owned and used in Scotland?
- What should land reform achieve in the long term?
- What do you see as the key benefits of land reform?

What principles should guide land reform?

PROMPT: Sustainability, transparency, fairness etc

Priorities for land use and reform (c.10-15 mins)

Thinking about your organisation, how much of a priority do you think the following should be when considering land use?

We'll go through each in turn:

- The interests of biodiversity
- Community development
- Housing
- Tourism and recreation
- Economic activity and land-based businesses
- Energy

Prompt for explanations behind prioritisation – **Why do you see this/these as a priority?**

Should Scotland prioritise individuals having access to owning more land?

- Why/why not?
- How do you think this could be achieved?

Should Scotland prioritise community-led land ownership?

- Why/why not?
- How do you think this could be achieved?

And still thinking about community-led land ownership, what barriers prevent communities from accessing land?

- What could be done to mitigate these barriers?

Challenges and concerns (c. 10 mins)

We've just spent some time discussing the barriers that prevent communities from accessing land.

What other challenges exist in accessing or purchasing land in Scotland?

Thinking specifically about land *use*, what concerns do you have about current land use in Scotland?

PROMPT: Fairness and transparency

PROMPT: Climate and sustainability

PROMPT: Jobs and economy

PROMPT: Foreign ownership of land in Scotland

Enablers/interventions (c.10-15 mins)

How successful do you think efforts towards land reform in Scotland have been so far?

- Why is this the case?
- What have been key enablers to land reform?
- What have been key barriers to land reform?

PROMPTS – Political will, bureaucracy/law, support for communities for buy power of landlords

What are your thoughts on having a general tax on non-residential/domestic land, that is not ones' house and garden but on extra land that is owned?

PROMPT: Do you think this is a good idea? Why/why not?

PROMPT: Should anyone be exempt from this? If so, who?

PROMPT: Should anyone get discounts on this? If so, who?

How do you think such a tax could be achieved?

Do you think councils should have the power to tax large landowners in their areas?

[N.B. Taxing large estates could raise money for local areas but also stop land banking, lower the value of estates and therefore could reduce costs for people and community to acquire that land.]

Do you have any other suggestions for policies or interventions that could help in land reform?

- What is needed to achieve/implement these?
- Are there any examples where these have been implemented elsewhere (e.g. internationally)?

Conclusions and wrap-up (c.5-10 mins)

Thank you very much for the discussion

Is there anything which we didn't cover today that you would like to mention?

Thank and close



Mhairi McFarlane

Research Manager

mhairi@diffleypartnership.co.uk

Megan Dickson

Researcher

megan@diffleypartnership.co.uk

From many voices to smart choices

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