
The May 2026 election in Scotland : what are the issues ?

❶ “What to expect at Holyrood and beyond as 2026 election race steps up”, BBC, 2 January 2026.

Among the big decisions affecting Scotland that lie ahead for the UK government - whether or not the massive Rosebank oil and gas field is given the go-ahead. Chinese plans to build wind turbines at Ardersier require approval from UK ministers and it is for them to choose a Scottish location for a new munitions factory. Tensions over immigration are likely to remain an issue this year with recent polling suggesting it is among the three biggest public concerns, behind the economy and health.

Former first minister Nicola Sturgeon is among the current MSPs who will definitely be leaving the Scottish Parliament. Internationally, the search for peace between Russia and Ukraine continues - a conflict which is reshaping UK defence policy and has contributed to the sharp increase in energy bills. A decade on from the Brexit vote, the UK is seeking closer ties with the European Union. It also hopes to keep President Trump sweet and to conclude whisky tariff negotiations with the United States. An updated energy strategy from the Scottish government is long overdue.[...]

Away from the Holyrood and Westminster parliaments, developments are awaited in two unrelated prosecutions of political figures. The former SNP chief executive Peter Murrell, who was married to the former first minister Nicola Sturgeon, has been charged with embezzlement. The MSP Colin Smyth, who has been suspended from the Labour party, is accused of possessing indecent images of children and voyeurism. Sturgeon is the highest-profile MSP who has chosen to stand down in 2026. Almost a third of Holyrood's 129 members are doing the same. This turnover makes it clear that the next Scottish Parliament will look very different, with voters to decide just how extensive that change will be.

❷ A cartoon by Steven Camley from *The Herald*, an apolitical mainstream newspaper from Glasgow, supporting devolution, not independence. It represents John Swinney, the current First Minister and SNP leader, preparing for the May 2026 Scottish election.



➤ Using the documents and your knowledge, discuss the political situation in Scotland.