

Scottish Social Attitudes 2021/22

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Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2021/22:

Attitudes to Government, The Economy, The Health Service and Political Engagement in Scotland

Alex Scholes, Ian Montagu, Rachel Whitford, Alys Daniels-Creasey and Lucy Dean

ScotCen Social Research

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Summary

The Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey is run by ScotCen Social Research, with the aim of collecting objective data about public attitudes on issues relevant to Scotland. It has run almost every year in Scotland since the first survey was conducted in 1999.

Fieldwork for this year's survey was conducted between 21st October 2021 and 27th March 2022 – all figures included in this report are based on data collected in this period. Interviews were undertaken with 1,130 randomly selected people aged 16+ from 1,043 addresses. The data has been weighted to be representative of Scotland's adult population in terms of age, by sex and area deprivation.

This publication reports the findings from the survey's core module, which focuses on attitudes to government, the economy and public services.

Previously SSA has been administered face-to-face but for the first time this year, as a result of coronavirus restrictions in place at the time of fieldwork, the survey was conducted via telephone. This change in methodology impacted the nature of the sample and responses received, and as a result affected comparability with previous SSA data. This report, therefore, focusses solely on results from this year's survey rather than examining trends over time. Trends in attitudes over the 20 year period since the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament were explored in the [2019 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey](#) report.

Key Findings

Attitudes to Government and the Scottish Parliament

- Two-thirds (66%) of people in Scotland trust the Scottish Government **to work in Scotland's best interests**, compared with 22% who trust the UK Government to do so
- People in Scotland were more likely to trust the Scottish Government (48%) and their local council (31%) to **make fair decisions** than the UK Government (15%)
- Just under 6 in 10 (58%) people thought the Scottish Government was good at **listening to people before it made decisions**, compared with just over 4 in 10 (41%) who thought this of their local council and just under 2 in 10 (18%) who thought this of the UK Government
- The majority of people in Scotland thought the Scottish Parliament was **giving Scotland a stronger voice** in the UK (64%), with only 7% thinking it was giving Scotland a weaker voice
- Similarly, 63% of Scots thought the Scottish Parliament was **giving ordinary people more say** in how Scotland is governed, compared with 5% of people who thought it was giving them less say
- Just under 6 in 10 people in Scotland (58%) thought that the Scottish Government **has the most influence** over the way Scotland is run, compared with just over 3 in 10 (32%) who thought the UK Government did so
- Three-quarters (75%) of people in Scotland thought the Scottish Government **ought to have the most influence** over the way Scotland is run, compared with 14% who thought the UK Government should

Views on level of tax and spend and government priorities

- The majority of people in Scotland (64%) thought **the level of taxation and spending** on health, education and social benefits should be increased, 32% thought the level of taxation and spending should stay the same and 3% thought it should decrease
- Most people (68%) agreed that **income should be redistributed** from the better-off to those who are less well-off, while 16% disagreed
- Asked to choose what they thought the **Scottish Government's highest priority** should be, the three priorities selected most often were: improve standards of education (21%), reduce inequality (19%) and improve the economy (18%)

Views on the National Health Service in Scotland

- Over half (54%) of people in Scotland were **satisfied with the way the NHS** is run, compared with 28% who said they were dissatisfied
- Despite over half of people saying they were satisfied with the way the NHS is run, the majority of people (66%) thought the standard of the health service had

fallen in the previous 12 months, only 6% thought the standard had increased and 23% thought it had stayed the same

- Of those who thought the standard of the health service had fallen, 28% thought this was the result of UK Government policies, 24% thought it was the result of Scottish Government policies, and 40% cited 'some other reason'
- Of those who thought the standard of the health service had increased, 3% thought UK Government policies were responsible for this shift, 60% thought Scottish Government policies were responsible, and 33% cited 'some other reason' as the cause

Views on the Economy and Standard of Living in Scotland

- More people thought that the **Scottish economy** had got weaker in the previous 12 months (66%) than thought it had got stronger (7%), and 21% thought it had stayed the same.
- More people thought that the **standard of living** had fallen (63%) than thought it had increased (8%), while 27% thought it had stayed the same
- Of those who thought the economy had grown weaker in the past 12 months, 31% thought this was mainly the result of UK Government policies, 25% thought it was mainly the result of Scottish Government policies and 33% cited 'some other reason' as being responsible. Of those who thought the standard of living had fallen, 45% thought the UK Government's policies were mainly responsible, 17% thought that Scottish Government policies were mainly responsible, and 31% cited 'some other reason' as causing the change
- Of those who thought the economy had grown stronger in the previous 12 months, 10% thought UK Government policies were mainly responsible for this change, 45% thought Scottish Government policies were mainly responsible, and 36% said it was the result of 'some other reason'. Of those who thought the standard of living had increased over the same period, 21% thought the UK Government's policies were mainly responsible, 28% thought the Scottish Government's policies were mainly responsible, and 33% cited 'some other reason'

Political Engagement and levels of social trust

- A large majority thought it **important to vote** in Scottish Parliament elections (98%), local council elections (95%) and UK Government elections (92%)
- The majority of people in Scotland (61%) thought that, in general, 'most people can be trusted', while 37% of people thought that 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people'
- Just under four-fifths of people (79%) agreed that there were people in their area they could 'turn to for advice and support', compared with 8% of people who disagreed that this was the case

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This report presents findings from the 2021/22 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSA), conducted between October 2021 and March 2022. It focuses on attitudes to government, the economy and public services and seeks to address the following key questions:

- What attitudes towards government do people in Scotland currently hold, and how does this differ between different subgroups?
- Given the large-scale societal impact of the pandemic, what are people's current attitudes towards the health service, economy and standard of living in Scotland?
- What are the levels of both political engagement and social trust in Scotland today?

Political and constitutional context

Both a parliamentary election in 2021 and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic provided the key political context for this year's report. Following on from the December 2019 UK election, in which the Conservative Party increased its overall majority and the SNP increased its seat share in Scotland, another Scottish parliamentary election was also held six months before fieldwork for this year of the survey began. The SNP won this election, increasing their number of seats by 1 to bring their total to 64.

For the last few years, UK and Scottish politics have also operated against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic. This unprecedented event highlighted how differences in decision-making between the UK and Scottish parliaments impact on people's everyday lives. Given that responsibility for public health in Scotland is devolved to the Scottish Government, with the emergence of the pandemic there was potential for policy divergence on a high-profile issue that affected the lives of all citizens of Scotland. While England moved out of the initial lockdown restrictions in May 2020 with government messaging shifting from 'Stay at Home' to 'Stay Alert', Scotland's rules remained largely unchanged¹. The law on face masks diverged between the two governments: the legal requirement to wear a face mask in public places changed to guidance in England around three months earlier² than in Scotland³. This divergence between nations in early public communications and beyond, enabled by devolutionary powers, demonstrated the complexities of Scotland acting autonomously within the context of UK-wide issues.

¹ [Coronavirus and Scotland \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/news-and-analysis/2020/may/2020-05-20-scotland-coronavirus)

² [UK Government Coronavirus Guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-when-to-wear-a-face-mask)

³ [Scottish Government Mask Wearing Guidance](https://www.scotland.nhs.uk/health-topics/coronavirus/coronavirus-mask-wearing-guidance)

Economic context

Since the previous Scottish Social Attitudes Survey in 2019, the Scottish economy has experienced periods of volatility and a succession of shocks. The UK's decision to leave the EU in 2016 resulted in significant economic uncertainty, which has impacted Scotland's opportunities for growth and business development in the years following the referendum⁴. Going into the pandemic, economic growth in Scotland was relatively stable and had increased slightly from 0.8% in 2018 to 1% in 2019.⁵

During the pandemic however, Scotland, much like the rest of the world, faced a particularly turbulent economic period. Scotland's annual GDP fell by 10.6% in 2020⁶, and services, production, construction, and agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors all contracted in comparison to 2019⁷. The economy started to recover in 2021, with Scotland's annual GDP increasing by 7.4%⁸.

The pandemic also presented new challenges for the labour market in Scotland. The furlough scheme, introduced by the UK Government, was established to mitigate emerging economic issues by aiding the retention of jobs and earnings throughout various restrictions. The scheme supported 911,700 jobs in Scotland up to September 2021⁹. The employment rate in April 2020 to March 2021 was estimated at 72.8%, lower than in April 2019 to March 2020 at 74.5% and below the UK rate of 74.7%¹⁰. The unemployment rate for the same period was 4.6%, lower than the UK rate of 4.8%¹¹.

There were ongoing challenges for recruitment during this period: an imbalance between demand and supply of staff resulted in labour shortages affecting haulage, construction, tourism, hospitality and food and drink sectors. Scotland's unemployment rate was 4.1% by September 2021, having remained relatively stable throughout the year. The employment rate at the same time was 74.8%, up 0.6 percentage points over the quarter indicating a strengthening in the labour market as restrictions eased and Scotland came out of the pandemic¹².

⁴ [Brexit impact on Scotland's economy - gov.scot](#)

⁵ [GDP first quarterly estimate: 2022 Quarter 2 \(April to June\) - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁶ [GDP first quarterly estimate: 2022 Quarter 2 \(April to June\) - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁷ [Scotland's GDP, First Estimate, 2020 Q4 - gov.scot](#)

⁸ [GDP first quarterly estimate: 2022 Quarter 2 \(April to June\) - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁹ [State of the economy: November 2021 - gov.scot](#)

¹⁰ [Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places and Regions - Statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2020/21 - gov.scot](#)

¹¹ [Scotland's Labour Market: People, Places and Regions - Statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2020/21 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

¹² [Labour Market - State of the economy: November 2021 - gov.scot](#)

Moving into 2022, the unemployment rate continued to fall to 3.1%¹³ and GDP was gradually recovering to pre-pandemic levels,¹⁴ helped by the vaccination programme (though with sectoral differences as tightened restrictions across the turn of the year continued to impact consumer facing services). The employment level in Scotland is 0.1% points down on its pre-pandemic level while the UK employment level is 1.1% points down.¹⁵ The labour market has been adjusting since the end of the furlough scheme in October 2021, with the aforementioned low level of unemployment and labour shortages continuing to emerge as the economy has been fully reopening.

However, the overall economic outlook has weakened since the start of the year. The war in Ukraine has resulted in an economic shock and exacerbated supply chain disruption, as well as increasing inflationary pressures.¹⁶ In August, due to inflationary pressures, the Bank of England forecast the UK economy as a whole to enter recession at the end of 2022 and in 2023.¹⁷

The National Health Service (NHS) in Scotland

The NHS in Scotland has experienced extreme pressures from dealing with the pandemic and has been operating on an emergency footing, with a backlog of treatments, a variety of workforce issues and an ongoing need to respond to coronavirus variants¹⁸. Prior to 2020, the NHS was already facing increased demand on its services and was facing substantial financial pressures prior to the pandemic, which has only been exacerbated by the challenges presented by the pandemic¹⁹.

These issues are reflected in decreased patient satisfaction with the NHS. In Scotland, 83% of people responded positively in 2018 when asked to rate the care provided by their GP, which dropped to 79% in 2020 and again to 67% in 2022²⁰. Additionally, 55% of doctors in Scotland responding to a Covid-19 impact survey in April 2020 felt that prioritising patients with coronavirus was worsening care for people with other healthcare needs, and 47% noted their biggest pandemic-related concern to be the longer-term impact on patient clinical demand²¹.

How NHS Scotland staff rated their overall working experience remained relatively unchanged during the pandemic, although this varied significantly according to role

¹³ [Scotland's Labour Market Trends September 2022](#)

¹⁴ [State of the economy: May 2022 - gov.scot](#)

¹⁵ [Scotland's Labour Market Trends 2022](#)

¹⁶ [State of the economy: May 2022 - gov.scot](#)

¹⁷ [Bank of England Monetary Policy Report August 2022](#)

¹⁸ [NHS in Scotland 2021 \(audit-scotland.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁹ [NHS in Scotland 2021 \(audit-scotland.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁰ [Health and Care Experience survey - 2022](#)

²¹ [BMA Scotland Covid Tracker Survey Results May 2020](#)

and environment, with several national support boards (e.g. Healthcare Improvement Scotland and NHS Education for Scotland). experiencing a rise in staff ratings whilst many patient-facing boards noted a drop²². In 2021, 73% of nursing staff in Scotland reported working over their contracted hours, 72% felt under too much pressure at work and 67% felt too busy to provide the level of care they would like²³. These are all higher than the 2019 figures of 70%, 60% and 60% respectively. These figures represent a continuing strain on the NHS in Scotland, felt by both staff and patients.

Survey Methodology

The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey has been run regularly by the Scottish Centre for Social Research since 1999. This report presents findings from the Scottish Government 'core' module of questions concerning public attitudes to government, the NHS, the economy and living standards.

This module has been funded by the Scottish Government since 2004. SSA has tracked attitudes to government and public services since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and throughout the past 23 years which has seen constitutional changes, the economic downturn of 2008, the UK's exit from the EU and the coronavirus pandemic.

Previously SSA has been administered face-to-face and for the first time this year, the survey was conducted as a telephone survey, as a result of coronavirus restrictions in place at the time of fieldwork. As in previous years, a random sample of all those aged 16 and over living anywhere in Scotland (including the Highlands and Islands) were interviewed. Fieldwork for SSA 2021/22 began on 21st October 2021 and ceased on 27th March 2022.

Letter invitations to take part were issued to 21,775 addresses, of which 1349 households opted-in and 1043 provided at least one interview. A maximum of two adults per household were invited to take part in the survey, which is different to previous years where only one adult per household could take part. A total of 1130 interviews were achieved in total. Assuming 10% of addresses were vacant, derelict or ineligible for other reasons²⁴, these figures equate to an opt-in rate of 7% and a response rate among opted-in households of 77%. Data are weighted in order to correct for non-response bias and differential selection probabilities due to deliberate over-sampling of rural areas and those living in the most deprived areas, and to ensure that they reflect the age-sex profile of the Scottish population. Technical details about the survey are published in a separate Scottish Social

²² [Health and social care - staff experience: report 2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/health-social-care-staff-experience-report-2021/pages/11.aspx)

²³ [Employment Survey 2021: Scotland | Publications | Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](https://www.rcn.org.uk/employment-survey-2021-scotland)

²⁴ This includes empty / derelict addresses, buildings under construction, holiday homes, businesses, other non-residential (such as schools, offices and institutions), and addresses that had been demolished. Based on other similar surveys it was assumed that 10% of addresses would fall into this category.

Attitudes Survey 2021/22 Technical Report, available at <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-social-attitudes-survey/>.

The telephone approach in 2021/22 differs from the usual face-to-face survey method in a number of ways which are likely to impact the responses received and so affect comparability with previous SSA data. The survey was last conducted face-to-face in 2019, which marked the 20th anniversary of SSA. The most recent time series analysis for attitudes to government, the economy and the health service is available in the 2019 report, accessible [here](#).

Due to the change in methodology, the analysis in this report focusses on attitudes and factors impacting on attitudes in 2021/22, rather than any long-term changes over time. This decision was made as a result of analysis conducted on the achieved representativeness of the sample against the Scottish population as outlined in the Technical Report.

Analysis

Most of the statistics presented in this report show the percentage of respondents who selected particular answer options. All percentages cited in this report are based on the weighted data and are rounded to the nearest whole number. A percentage may be quoted in the text for a single category that aggregates two or more of the percentages shown in a table. The percentage for the single category may, because of rounding, differ by one percentage point from the sum of the percentages in the table. Differences between figures shown in the tables are calculated using unrounded figures and may differ from the rounded figures shown in the text.

A new variable measuring respondent's assessment of Scotland's handling of the pandemic was introduced in the Core Module this year. This was a derived variable constructed from seven questions used on the pandemic handling module of SSA 2021/22. The resulting scale was divided into 3 groups: 'positive', 'neutral' and 'negative' assessments of Scotland's handling of the pandemic. Further details of the construction of the variable can be found in the accompanying Technical Report.

All differences described in the text (between different groups of people) are statistically significant at the 95% level or above, unless otherwise specified. This means that the probability of having found a difference of at least this size, if there was no actual difference in the population, is 5% or less. The term 'significant' is used in this report to refer to statistical significance; this is not intended to imply substantive importance. Further details of significance testing and analysis are included in the separate technical report and full data tables are available as 'supporting files' to this publication.

Chapter 2 – Attitudes to government

This chapter is concerned with attitudes towards government in Scotland and addresses the following key questions:

- What level of trust do people have in the UK Government, Scottish Government and their local council, on matters such as acting in their best interests and making fair decisions?
- Do people in Scotland feel that the UK and Scottish governments, as well as their local council, listen to people before taking decisions?
- Is the Scottish Parliament thought to be giving ordinary people more or less say in how Scotland is governed, and is it considered to be giving Scotland a stronger or weaker voice in the UK?
- Do people in Scotland feel that the government in Westminster or at Holyrood has the most influence over how Scotland is run, and which do they think ought to have the most influence?

These attitudes are presented and then examined by sub-groups. Full subgroup breakdowns for 2021/22 data are available in the ‘Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2021/22: Chapter 2 subgroup variation tables’ Excel file published as a ‘supporting file’ alongside this report. Equivalent tables are also available for Chapters 3 and 4 in this report.

Trust in UK/Scottish Government to act in Scotland’s best interests

All respondents who took part in SSA were asked whether they trusted the UK and Scottish Governments to work in Scotland’s best interests. Table 2.1 shows responses to this question in 2021/22. As can be seen, people in Scotland generally had more trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests than they had in the government at Westminster.

Table 2.1: Level of trust in UK and Scottish Governments to work in Scotland’s best interests (2021/22)

	UK Government (%)	Scottish Government (%)
Just about always	5	30
Most of the time	17	36
Only some of the time	32	23
Almost never	46	11
Don’t know/Refusal	1	*
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>	<i>1130</i>

Base: all respondents

Two in three people (66%) said they trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’, compared with 22% who said they trusted the UK Government to do so. Just over three in ten people (32%) said they trusted the UK Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘only some of the time’, compared with 23% who said this of the Scottish Government. Over four times as many said they ‘almost never’ trusted the UK government to work in Scotland’s best interests (46%) than said this of the Scottish Government (11%).

Trust in UK/Scottish Government/local council to make fair decisions

Respondents were also asked whether they trusted the UK and Scottish Governments to make fair decisions. As can be seen in Table 2.2, the Scottish Government were the most trusted to make fair decisions, with just under half (48%) of people trusting them ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’, compared with an equivalent figure of 15% for the UK Government and 31% for their local council.

Table 2.2: Level of trust in UK Government, Scottish Government and local council to make fair decisions (2021/22)

	UK Government (%)	Scottish Government (%)	Local Council (%)
A great deal	3	13	4
Quite a lot	12	35	27
Some	28	32	39
Not very much	27	13	18
Not at all	30	6	7
Don't know/Refusal	*	1	4
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1130	1130	1130

Base: all respondents

Just under a fifth of people in Scotland (19%) said they trusted the Scottish Government to make fair decisions either 'not very much' or 'not at all', compared with around three-fifths (56%) of people who said this of the UK Government and 26% who said it of their local council.

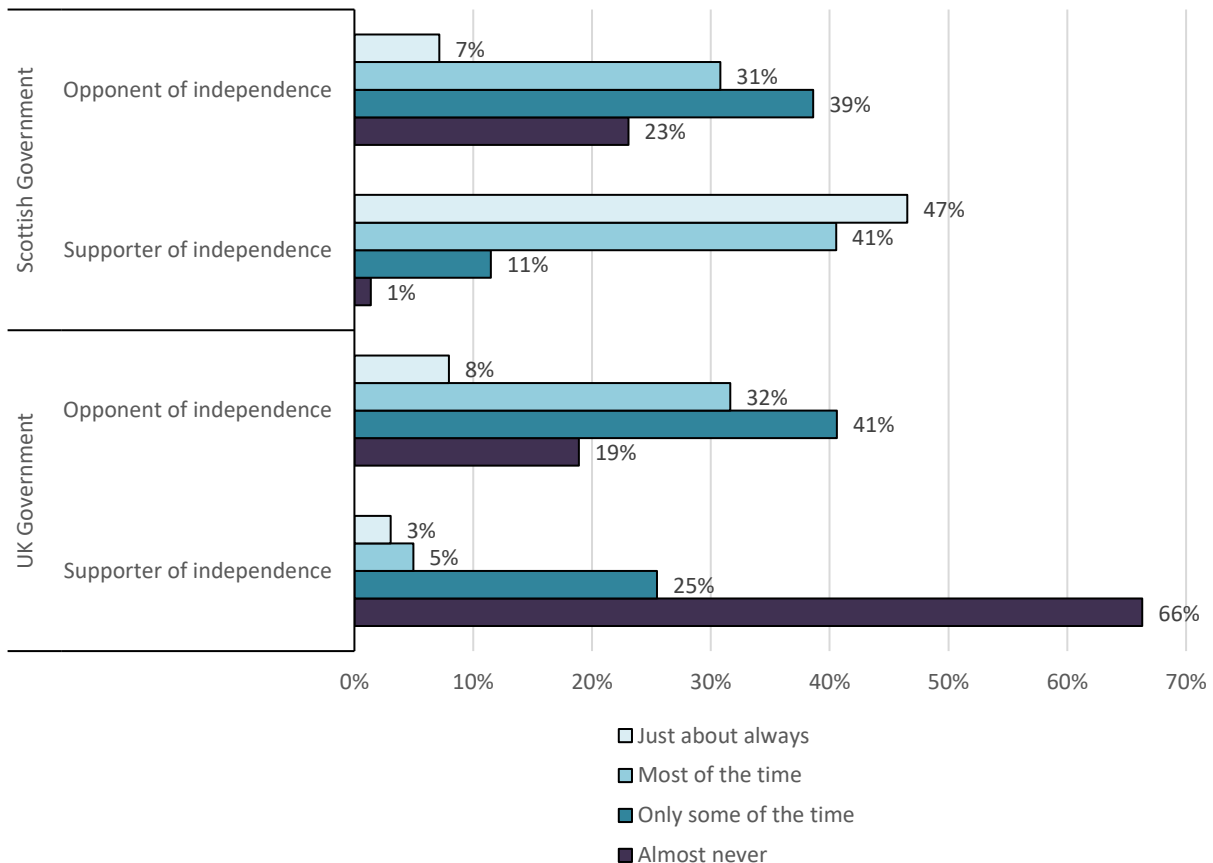
How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

Certain groups of people were more likely than others to expect the UK or Scottish Governments to work in Scotland's best interests. Perhaps unsurprisingly, levels of trust in the UK and Scottish Governments to work in Scotland's best interests were significantly related to someone's party political identification, constitutional preference and attitudes towards the EU. SNP (88%) and Scottish Green Party (85%) supporters were significantly more likely than others, such as Conservative (28%) and Labour supporters (49%), to trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests 'just about always/most of the time'. They were also significantly less likely (8% SNP, 9% Green) to trust the UK Government to do so, compared with Conservative (71%), Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters (18 and 19% respectively). Similarly, 87% of independence supporters trusted the Scottish Government 'just about always/most of the time' compared with 38% of those who think Scotland should remain part of the UK, with the equivalent figures for the UK Government 8% and 40% respectively.

As part of the survey, all respondents were asked whether they would vote to Remain or Leave the European Union, if they were given the chance to do so again

in a hypothetical future referendum.²⁵ Those who reported that they would vote to leave in a future EU referendum were less likely (34%) than those who would vote to remain (74%) to say they trusted the Scottish Government to act in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always/most of the time’, while half of Leavers (50%) trusted the UK Government this much compared with just 15% of Remainers.

Figure 2.1: How much do you trust Scottish/UK Government to work in Scotland’s best interests by views on Scottish independence (2021/22)



Base: all respondents

Attitudes also varied according to position on the left-right and liberal-authoritarian scales²⁶. Attitudes towards five individual statements in the case of the former, and six statements in the case of the latter, are combined to form these scales. The left-right scale is constructed from statements concerning the distribution of wealth in society and the relationship between ‘workers’ or ‘ordinary people’ and ‘big business’ or ‘management’. In general terms, those on the left are more supportive of government having a role in redistributing income from the better off to those

²⁵ Those who would vote to Remain in a hypothetical future referendum are referred to as ‘Remainers’ and those who would vote to Leave as ‘Leavers’ for the purposes of this report

²⁶ Further details on these scales can be found in the accompanying Technical Report.

who are less well-off, and see a greater level of conflict between ‘working people’ and ‘management’ or ‘big business’ than those on the right.

The liberal-authoritarian scale is constructed from statements on the acceptability or otherwise of censorship, attitudes towards sentencing and the law, as well as respect for British values and authority. In general, ‘liberals’ value the freedom to choose a moral code and lifestyle and value social diversity, whereas ‘authoritarians’ put a greater value on social cohesion and hold more conservative views on matters of law and order.

Those on the left were more likely (80%) than those on the right (49%) to trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time.’ The opposite was the case for the UK Government, with 43% of those on the right trusting them to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always/most of the time’ compared with just 9% of those on the left. Half of those on the authoritarian end of the authoritarian-liberal scale (50%) trusted the Scottish Government to act in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always/most of the time’ compared with 79% of liberals who did so, while the equivalent figures for the UK Government were 33% and 9% respectively.

Trust in the Scottish and UK Governments to work in Scotland’s best interests was also related to assessments of how well the COVID-19 pandemic was handled in Scotland.²⁷ Nine in ten (90%) of those who held a positive view of how Scotland handled the pandemic trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always/most of the time’, compared with 35% of those who viewed Scotland’s pandemic performance negatively. In comparison, 11% of those who held a positive view of how Scotland had handled the pandemic trusted the UK Government this much, while 37% of those who held a negative view of Scotland’s pandemic performance did so.

If we examine the other measure of trust in government, namely *whether people trusted the UK and Scottish governments to make fair decisions*, the same relationships with these subgroups were evident. Significant relationships were found between trust in government on this measure by position on the left-right and liberal-authoritarian scales, political party identification, constitutional preference, attitude towards the EU and pandemic handling. All of these relationships were in the same direction as those identified for trust in governments to work in Scotland’s best interests. Those on the left, liberals, SNP and Scottish Green voters, independence supporters, Remainers and those with a positive view of Scotland’s handling of the pandemic were all more likely to trust the Scottish Government and less likely to trust the UK Government to make fair decisions than their counterparts.

²⁷ A new attitude scale was created this year, which combined responses from 7 questions on how the COVID-19 pandemic was handled in Scotland. Further details on this scale can also be found in the accompanying Technical Report.

Logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine the main drivers of opinion on whether the UK and Scottish Governments are working in Scotland's best interests. For the UK Government, the key drivers were party political affiliation and attitudes towards Scottish independence.²⁸ Controlling for all other variables, the odds of a Conservative Party supporter stating that the UK Government works in the best interests of Scotland 'just about always' or 'most of the time' was around ten times that of a Labour, Liberal Democrat, or SNP supporter. In addition, the odds of someone opposed to independence stating this was the case was around four times that of a supporter of independence doing so.

For trust in the Scottish Government to work in the best interests of Scotland, controlling for all other variables the key factors were attitudes to how the pandemic had been handled and views on Scottish independence.²⁹ The odds of someone with a positive view of how Scotland handled the pandemic saying that the Scottish Government acts in Scotland's best interests 'just about always/most of the time' was ten times greater than the odds of someone with a negative view of pandemic handling doing so. Also, the odds of a supporter of independence saying the Scottish Government acts in Scotland's best interests 'just about always/most of the time' was 4.5 times greater than someone who thinks Scotland should remain part of the UK. It appears, therefore, that the level of trust in the Scottish Government is rather less influenced by someone's political opinions (e.g. political party supported) than it is for a person's level of trust in the UK Government.

While trust in local councils to make fair decisions varied less across different groups of people, some notable differences were observed. Opponents of independence (26%) were less likely than Scottish independence supporters (35%) to say they trusted their local council to make fair decisions either 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot', and Leavers (23%) were less likely than Remainers (33%) to do so. Around four in ten of those who could be described as positive (37%) towards Scotland's handling of the pandemic or neutral (38%) trusted their local council 'a great deal/quite a lot', compared with just 18% of those who held a negative view.

How good the Scottish Government/UK Government/local council is at listening before taking decisions

To determine how connected to the public people in Scotland feel their elected governments are, all respondents were asked whether they thought the UK and Scottish Governments, as well as their local council, were good at listening to

²⁸ Logistic regression was conducted by firstly running a model using all the subgroup variables, then by running a reduced model including only those variables where there was a significant and theoretically plausible relationship between them and the outcome variable. The variables in the reduced model for this analysis were age category, urban-rural, left-right scale, political party identification and views on independence. Further details of the logistic regression analysis are provided in the Technical Report, and the results are shown in an annex table to this report.

²⁹ Variables included in the reduced regression model were position on left-right scale, party political identification, views on independence and views on Scotland's handling of the pandemic.

people's views before taking decisions. Table 2.3 presents results from these questions.

Table 2.3: How good would you say the UK Government/Scottish Government/Local council is at listening to people's views before taking decisions (2021/22)

	UK Government (%)	Scottish Government (%)	Local Council (%)
Very good	3	10	6
Quite good	15	48	35
Not very good	41	22	36
Not at all good	40	17	17
Don't know/Refusal	1	3	7
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>	<i>1130</i>	<i>1130</i>

Base: all respondents

People in Scotland were more likely to think that the Scottish Government were either 'very' or 'quite good' (58%) at listening to people's views before taking decisions than they were to think this of the UK Government (18%) or their local council (41%). Four in five people (80%) thought the UK Government was either 'not very' or 'not at all' good at listening to people's views before taking decisions, double the proportion (39%) who believed this of the Scottish Government. The equivalent figure for a person's local council was just over half – 52%.

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

Attitudes in this area were strongly related to people's party political affiliation. Around 4 in 10 Conservative supporters (39%) believed the UK Government was either 'very' or 'quite' good at listening to people's views before it takes decisions, compared with 10% of Labour, 14% of SNP and 14% of Scottish Green Party supporters. For the Scottish Government, SNP (84%) supporters and Greens (79%) were the most likely to think they are 'good' or 'very good' at listening to people's views, compared with 39% of Labour supporters and 18% of Conservatives. Liberal Democrat supporters (51%) were the most likely to say their local council is very good/quite good at listening to people's views before taking decisions, compared with just 29% of Conservative Party supporters.

There was an association between level of education and how good people felt the UK Government was at listening to people's views, but there was no such association for the equivalent assessments of the Scottish Government and local

council. Those with no qualifications were almost twice as likely (31%) as those educated to the equivalent of degree level or above (16%) to think that the UK Government is 'very' or 'quite' good at listening to people's views before taking decisions.

The proportion of Leavers (31%) who thought the UK Government is 'very good/quite good' at listening to people's views before taking decisions was around double that of Remainers (15%), and opponents of independence (24%) were more likely than independence supporters (14%) to think this is the case. For the Scottish Government this relationship is reversed: eight in ten (80%) independence supporters thought the Scottish Government is 'very/quite good' in this regard, compared with just under three in ten (29%) of those opposed to independence, and 68% of Remainers had this impression of the Scottish Government compared with just 21% of Leavers.

Position on the left-right and liberal-authoritarian scales were related to perceptions of the UK and Scottish Government on this issue, but this was not the case for local councils. While around 3 in 10 (29%) of those on the right thought the UK Government was either 'very' or 'quite' good at listening to people's views before taking decisions, around 1 in 10 (11%) of those on the left thought so. The equivalent figures for liberals and authoritarians were 10% and 26% respectively. Around 7 in 10 (71%) left-wingers and liberals (73%) held this perception of the Scottish Government, compared with 38% of those on the right and 45% of authoritarians.

Attitudes were also related to people's general perceptions of Scotland's handling of the pandemic. Around 9 in 10 (89%) of those who had a positive perception thought the Scottish Government was 'very' or 'quite' good at listening to people's views before taking decisions, compared with around a quarter (24%) of those who had a negative perception. Similarly, 46% of those who had a positive perception of Scotland's handling of the pandemic thought their local council was 'very' or 'quite' good at listening to people's views before taking decisions, compared with 29% of those who had a negative view.

Logistic regression analysis on the main drivers of attitudes in this area returned similar results to those found earlier on whether the UK or Scottish Governments can be trusted to work in Scotland's national interests. For perceptions of the UK Government – party political affiliation and interest in politics were two of the key drivers.³⁰ The odds of a Conservative Party supporter saying that the UK Government is 'very/quite good' at listening to people's views before taking decision was ten times greater than a Liberal Democrat supporter, and around four times greater than an SNP supporter. Meanwhile, the odds of someone with an interest in politics that is either 'not very much' or 'none at all' saying that the UK Government is 'very/quite good' at listening to people's views was around 2.5 times

³⁰ Variables in the reduced model were age, educational qualification, left-right scale, party political identification, interest in politics, and views on Scotland's handling of the pandemic.

greater than someone who said they had ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of interest in politics.

For perceptions of the Scottish Government - attitudes towards Scotland’s handling of the pandemic was a key driver.³¹ Controlling for all other variables, the odds of those with a positive view of how the pandemic was handled stating that the Scottish Government is ‘very good/quite good’ at listening to people’s views before taking decisions was 22 times greater than those with a negative view.

Whether the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more or less of a say in how Scotland is governed and a stronger or weaker voice in the UK

To gauge what impact people in Scotland think the current devolution settlement is having, all respondents were asked whether having a Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more or less of a say in how Scotland is governed, and whether it is giving Scotland a stronger or weaker voice in the UK. As shown in Table 2.4, the majority of people in Scotland (63%) thought the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more say in how they are governed. Only one in twenty (5%) people thought it is giving them less say, while 31% thought that it is making no difference.

Table 2.4: Do you think that having a Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more or less say in how Scotland is governed? (2021/22)

	(%)
More say in how Scotland is governed	63
No difference	31
Less say in how Scotland is governed	5
Don’t know/Refusal	1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1130

Base: all respondents

A similar proportion (64%) thought that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK. Around 3 in 10 (28%) people thought it is not making a difference, while 7% thought it is giving Scotland a weaker voice, as shown in Table 2.5.

³¹ Variables in the reduced model were party political identification, views on Scottish independence, attitudes towards Britain’s membership of the EU and views on Scotland’s handling of the pandemic.

Table 2.5: Do you think that having a Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger or weaker voice in the UK? (2021/22)

	(%)
A stronger voice in the UK	64
No difference	28
A weaker voice in the UK	7
Don't know/Refusal	1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1130

Base: all respondents

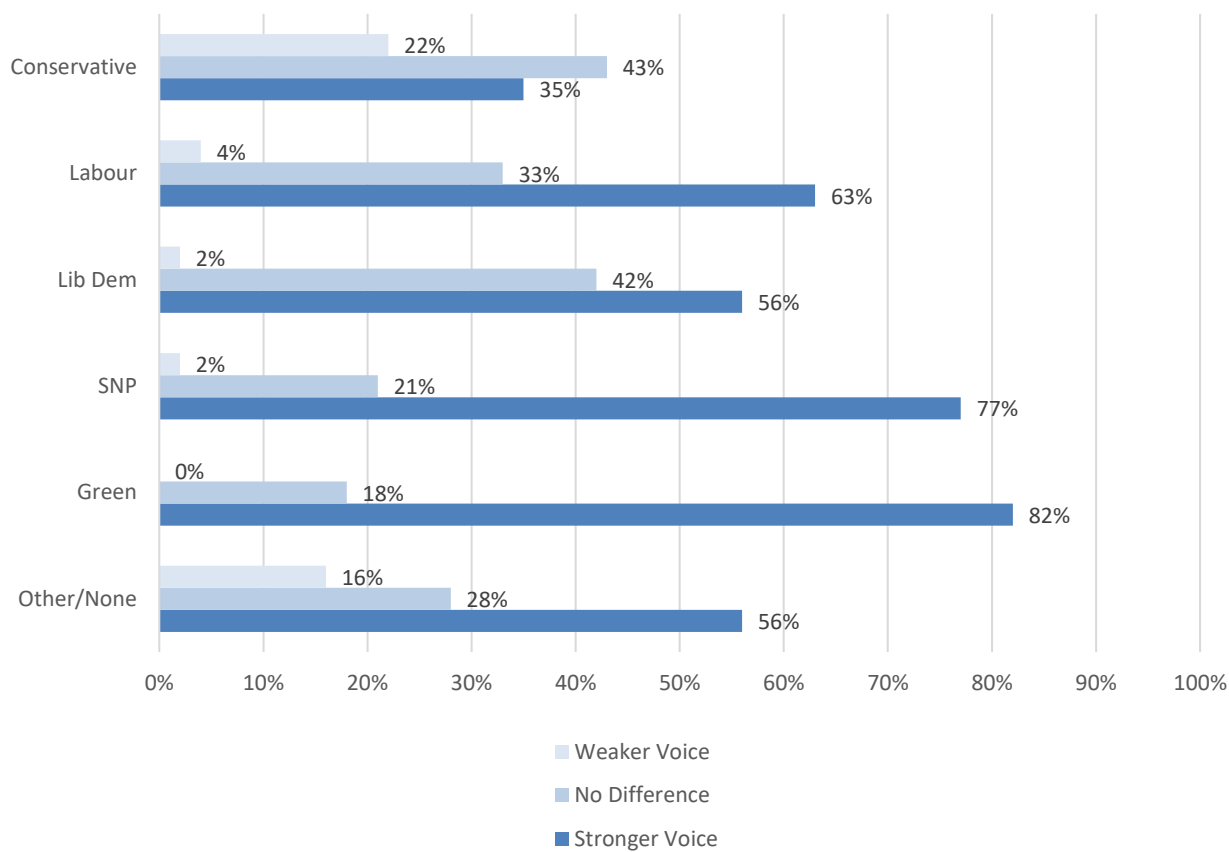
How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

Those with a higher level of education were both more likely than those with fewer educational qualifications to say that having a Scottish Parliament was giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK and that it was giving ordinary people more of a say. Around 7 in 10 of those with degrees thought that having a Scottish Parliament was giving Scotland a stronger voice (67%) and ordinary more people more of a say in how they are governed (67%), whereas the equivalent figures for those with no qualifications were 53% and 47% respectively.

Around three quarters of left-wingers thought the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more of a say (74%) and a stronger voice (72%), compared with equivalent figures of 47% and 54% for those on the right. The split was similar across the liberal-authoritarian scale. Around three-quarters (77%) of liberals thought that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK, compared with 49% of authoritarians, and four-fifths (80%) of liberals thought it is giving ordinary people more of a say, compared with 47% of authoritarians.

SNP (83%) and Scottish Green Party (89%) supporters were more likely than their counterparts to think that having a Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more of a say in how they are governed. Only around three in ten Conservative Party (28%) and around half of Labour Party supporters (48%) supporters thought this was the case. The figures were similar for whether the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK. Just 35% of Conservative Party supporters thought it is doing so, compared with 63% of Labour, 77% of SNP and 82% of Scottish Green Party supporters, as shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Whether the Scottish Government is giving Scotland a stronger/weaker voice in the UK by party political identification (2021/22)



Base: all respondents

Attitudes on these questions were also strongly correlated with attitudes towards Scottish independence and how people would vote if they were given the chance to vote in another EU Referendum. Supporters of independence (80%) were more likely than opponents (40%) to say the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people ‘more say’ in how they are governed; they were also more likely (75%) than opponents of independence (51%) to say it is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK. Around seven in ten (71%) Remainers believed that the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people ‘more say’, compared with 33% of Leavers. Remainers were also significantly more likely (70%) than Leavers (45%) to think the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland ‘a stronger voice’ in the UK.

Whether people thought the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people ‘more’ or ‘less say’ and whether it is giving Scotland a ‘stronger’ or ‘weaker’ voice was also related to perceptions of Scotland’s handling of the pandemic. Around 9 in 10 (88%) of those who held a positive view of how Scotland handled the pandemic thought the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people ‘more say’, and around 8 in 10 (78%) thought it is giving Scotland a ‘stronger voice’ in the UK. In comparison, the equivalent figures for those who hold a negative view of Scotland’s handling of the pandemic were 31% and 43% respectively.

Further regression analysis showed that attitudes towards the pandemic was a key driver of differences in attitudes towards whether the Scottish Government is giving ordinary people more say in how Scotland is run.³² The odds of someone with a positive view of how Scotland handled the pandemic saying that the Scottish Parliament was giving ordinary people more say was eleven times greater than someone with a negative view of Scotland’s handling of the pandemic.

Who has/ought to have most influence over how Scotland is run?

To gauge perceptions of government influence, all respondents were asked who they thought *has* and who they thought *ought to have* the most influence over the way Scotland is run: the Scottish Government, UK Government, local councils or the European Union.³³ Table 2.6 presents results from these questions:

Table 2.6: Which of the following do you think has/ought to have the most influence over the way Scotland is run? (2021/22)

	Has most influence (%)	Ought to have most influence (%)
Scottish Government	58	75
UK Government at Westminster	32	14
Local Councils	4	7
European Union	3	1
Don’t know/Refusal	2	3
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1130	1130

Base: all respondents

The majority of people in Scotland thought the Scottish Government has the most influence over the way Scotland is run (58%), while around 3 in 10 (32%) people thought the UK Government has the most influence. Fewer than 1 in 10 thought that either local councils (4%) or the European Union (3%) have the most influence.

Three-quarters of people in Scotland think that the Scottish Government *ought to* have the most influence over the way Scotland is run, while 14% thought the UK

³² Variables included in the reduced model were party political identification, views on independence and views on Scotland’s handling of the pandemic.

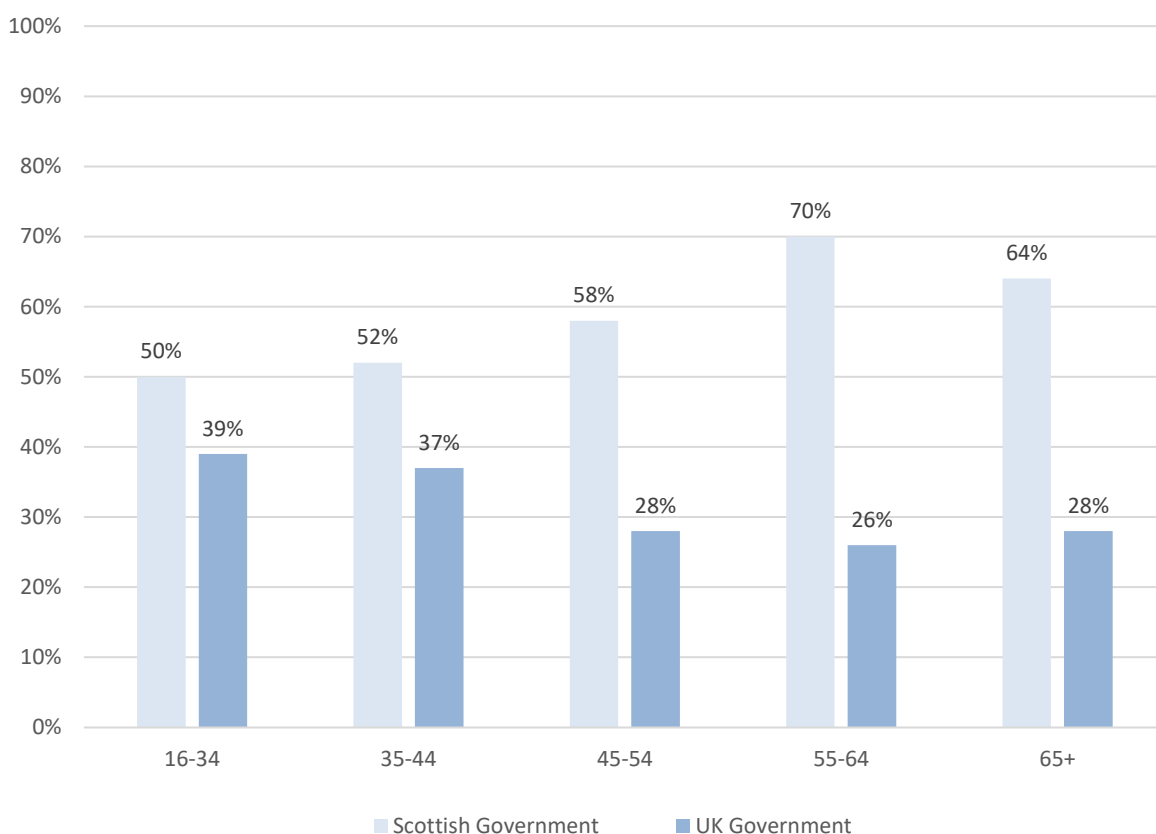
³³ Even though Britain has now left the EU, these questions have ‘the European Union’ as a response option as they are long-running, repeat questions dating back to before the 2016 referendum. The continued inclusion of the EU as a response option will be kept under review by the SSA team.

Government ought to do so. Just 7% of people think local councils ought to have the most influence, and 1% think the European Union ought to do so.

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

In general, younger people in Scotland were less likely than others to think the Scottish Government has the most influence. Half of those (50%) aged 16-34 thought the Scottish Government has the most influence over the way Scotland is run, compared with 64% of those aged 65 and over.

Figure 2.3: Which of the Scottish/UK Government do you think has the most influence over the way Scotland is run by age group (2021/22)



Base: all respondents

There was also a relationship between attitudes towards who has the most influence over the way Scotland is run and level of household income, area deprivation³⁴ and how people felt about their current income. Those in the highest household income quartile (71%) were more likely than those in the lowest income quartile (52%) to say the Scottish Government has the most influence over the way Scotland is run. Similarly, those living in the least deprived areas of Scotland (72%) were more likely than those living the most deprived areas (42%) to say the

³⁴ Area deprivation on SSA 2021/22 is measured using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020 divided into quintiles. SIMD 2020 measures the level of deprivation across Scotland – from the least deprived to the most deprived areas. It is based on 38 indicators in seven domains of: income, employment, health, education skills and training, housing, geographic access and crime. Further details are included in the separate technical report.

Scottish Government has the most influence. Also, those who stated they were living really comfortably (69%) on their current income were more likely than those who said they were struggling or really struggling (41%) to say the Scottish Government has the most influence.

Those less likely to be in favour of the Scottish Government having the most influence over the way Scotland is run were the most likely to think they have the most influence. Conservative (73%) and Liberal Democrat (73%) supporters were the most likely to think the Scottish Government has the most influence over the way Scotland is run, compared with half of SNP (50%) supporters who thought this. Similarly, opponents of independence (71%) were more likely than independence supporters (50%), and Leave supporters (69%) more likely than Remainers (56%), to say that the Scottish Government has the most influence.

Logistic regression analysis showed that, controlling for all variables, views on independence were a key driver of attitudes in this area.³⁵ The odds of someone who is opposed to independence thinking that the Scottish Government has the most influence on the way Scotland is run was around 2.5 times greater than a supporter of Scottish independence.

As with the question on who *has* the most influence, attitudes on who *ought* to have most influence varied according to people's political views. Around 9 in 10 SNP (92%) and Scottish Green Party (89%) supporters thought the Scottish Government ought to have the most influence over the way Scotland is run, compared with 67% of Labour supporters and 42% of Conservatives. Similarly, supporters of independence (91%) and Remainers (80%) were more likely than opponents of independence (53%) and Leavers (55%) to state the Scottish Government ought to have the most influence. Women (79%) were more likely than men (71%) to say the Scottish Government ought to have most influence over the way Scotland is run. Those on the left (84%) and social liberals (85%) were significantly more likely than those on the right (63%) and authoritarians (63%) to think the Scottish Government ought to have the most influence.

Further regression analysis showed that attitudes towards independence was also a key driver of attitudes towards who ought to have the most influence over how Scotland is run.³⁶ Controlling for all other variables, the odds of a supporter of independence stating that the Scottish Government ought to have the most influence was five times greater than an opponent of independence.

While attitudes to who has the most influence were unrelated to attitudes towards the pandemic, attitudes to who ought to have the most influence were. Nine in ten (90%) of those who held a positive view of Scotland's handling of the pandemic felt

³⁵ Variables in the reduced model were SIMD and views on independence.

³⁶ Variables in the reduced model were gender, SIMD, urban-rural, perceptions of ability to live on household income, party political identification, views on independence and views on Scotland's handling of the pandemic.

it ought to have the most influence over how Scotland is run, compared with 53% of those who held a negative view.

Chapter 3 – Views on level of tax and spend, redistribution, government priorities, the health service and the economy

This chapter examines attitudes towards taxation and spending in Scotland, views on the redistribution of income, and public priorities for government action. It also details perceptions of the health service, the economy, and standards of living in Scotland. It addresses the following key questions:

- Do people in Scotland feel that levels of taxation and public spending should be increased, decreased, or maintained at current levels?
- Do people in Scotland believe that government should play a role in the redistribution of income across society?
- What do the public perceive to be the key policy issues for the Scottish Government to address?
- Are people in Scotland satisfied with the NHS, and do they believe that standards within the health service have risen or fallen during the past 12 months?
- Do people in Scotland feel that the strength of the economy and the standard of living have increased or decreased, and who do they believe is responsible for this?

Attitudes towards the level of taxation and government spending

In 2021/22, SSA presented respondents with the following question aimed at gauging their views on taxation and public spending:

‘Suppose the government had to choose between the three options on this card. Which do you think it should choose?’

Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits
Keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now
Increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits

Almost two-thirds (64%) felt that levels of taxation and public spending should be increased, while just under one-third (32%) believed that the government should keep levels of taxation and spending the same as they are now. Three percent of people in Scotland said that the government should reduce taxes and spend less on health, education, and social benefits.

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

Attitudes towards taxation and spending varied by party identity and views on both Scotland's constitutional future and the UK's place within the EU. Just 33% of Conservative Party supporters, for example, backed an increase in taxes and spending on key public services, while 73% of SNP, 86% of Scottish Green Party, 66% of Labour Party and 62% of Liberal Democrat supporters adopted this stance. Meanwhile, three-quarters (75%) of those who support Scottish independence and seven in ten (70%) of those who believe that Britain should remain a member of the EU were in favour of an increase in taxation and public spending, compared with one half (50%) of those who believe Scotland should remain a part of the UK and just over four in ten (42%) of those who support Britain's departure from the EU. In addition to differences in attitudes between those on either side of the debate around both Scotland's constitutional future and the UK's relationship with Europe, there was also variance between those with a positive perception of Scotland's handling of the pandemic and those with a negative perception: among the former, support for increased taxation and spending was 77%, while among the latter this figure was measured at 46%.

Views also differed notably by social and political values; while 77% of those on the left supported increasing taxes and spending more on health, education, and social benefits, only 46% of those on the right shared this view. Attitudes also diverged between those with more liberal social values and those with a more authoritarian outlook; 83% of liberals favoured an increase in taxation and public spending, compared with 44% of their authoritarian counterparts who did so. Views also varied between those who display an interest in politics and those who do not: 74% of those who state that they have 'a great deal' of interest in politics supported a rise in taxes and spending, while among those who assert that they have either 'not very much' interest in politics or 'none at all' the equivalent figure stood at just 40%.

Logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine the main drivers behind views on levels of taxation and public spending.³⁷ This analysis indicates that an individual's position on SSA's liberal-authoritarian scale played a key role in shaping their attitudes towards taxation and spending. Controlling for all other variables, the odds of an individual with more liberal views stating that the government should increase taxes and spend more on public services were 7.5 times that of an individual with a more authoritarian outlook. Attitudes towards Scotland's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic were also associated with views on taxation and spending. Once again, controlling for all other variables, the odds of an individual who assessed Scotland's handling of the pandemic either positively or neutrally suggesting that taxation and spending should be increased were three times that of an individual who assessed Scotland's handling of the pandemic negatively.

³⁷ Variables in the reduced model were age, gender, household income, educational qualification, position on liberal-authoritarian scale, interest in politics and views on Scotland's handling of the pandemic.

Attitudes towards the redistribution of income

In addition to giving their views on taxation and public spending, in SSA 2021/22 respondents were also asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement on the redistribution of income:

‘Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well-off’

Just over two-thirds (68%) of people in Scotland said they support redistribution of income: 37% ‘agree strongly’ with the principle of redistribution as framed by the question, while a further 30% ‘agree’. Meanwhile, just under one in six (16%) opposed the principle of redistribution: 12% ‘disagree’ with the statement, and a further 4% ‘disagree strongly’ that government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off.

Table 3.1: ‘Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well-off’ (2021/22)

	(%)
Agree strongly	38
Agree	30
Neither agree nor disagree	16
Disagree	12
Disagree strongly	4
Don’t know/Refusal	*
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1130

Base: all respondents

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

As with views on taxation and public spending, attitudes towards redistribution varied by party identity, constitutional preference, and feelings towards the UK’s place within the EU. Around half of Lib Dem supporters (51%) and around eight in ten SNP supporters (79%), Labour supporters (80%) and Scottish Green party supporters (84%) backed the principle of redistribution, compared with just under three in ten Conservative party supporters (29%) who adopted this stance. Meanwhile, 80% of those who support Scottish independence and 75% of those who believe that Britain should remain a member of the EU were in favour of the redistribution of income from the better-off to the less well-off, compared with just

52% of those who believe Scotland should remain a part of the UK and 41% of those who support Britain's departure from the EU. Attitudes once again diverged by views on Scotland's handling of the pandemic: eight in ten (80%) of those with a positive perception of Scotland's management of the consequences of COVID-19 support the principle of redistribution, while around a half (51%) of those with a negative perception feel that the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off.

Public opinion on the principle of redistribution also varied by social values. Although 85% of the most liberal third of Scots felt that government should redistribute income from those who are better off to those who are less well-off, this figure stands at 53% among those with more authoritarian values.³⁸ Also, while 25% of authoritarians said they disagreed with the principle of redistribution, just 6% of liberals did so. Views on redistribution also varied by interest in politics, with 79% of those who have 'a great deal' of interest in politics supportive of redistribution compared with just 57% of those with 'some' interest in politics and 58% of those with either 'not very much' or 'none at all'.

Attitudes also differed by area deprivation: while 13% in the most deprived quintile and 12% in both the second-most and third-most deprived quintiles either 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly' with the principle of redistribution, the equivalent figure was 21% among those in the least deprived and second-least deprived quintiles. In addition, those in rural areas were more likely to either 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly' with the principle of redistribution than those living in urban areas; while 20% of the former felt that government should not redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off, just 14% of the latter shared this view.

Priorities for government action

In order to understand the public's view on government action across key areas of policy, SSA 2021/22 asked its respondents which of a series of policy goals the Scottish Government should have as its number one priority.

Table 3.2 displays the distribution of responses to this question. Top of the Scottish public's list of policy priorities is improving standards of education, with just over one in five (21%) selecting this response option in 2021/22. A similar proportion indicated that the Scottish Government's top priority should be reducing inequality, with 19% choosing this option. A further 18% said that the Scottish Government should prioritise improving the economy, while 17% thought that the top priority for the Scottish Government should be to improve people's health.

³⁸ Although there was a significant relationship between attitudes towards redistribution and a person's position on the left-right scale, answers to the question on redistribution are used to create the scale itself. Therefore, any relationship between the dependent and independent variable in this case have the potential to be circular, so have not been reported.

Table 3.2: Priorities for government action (2021/22)

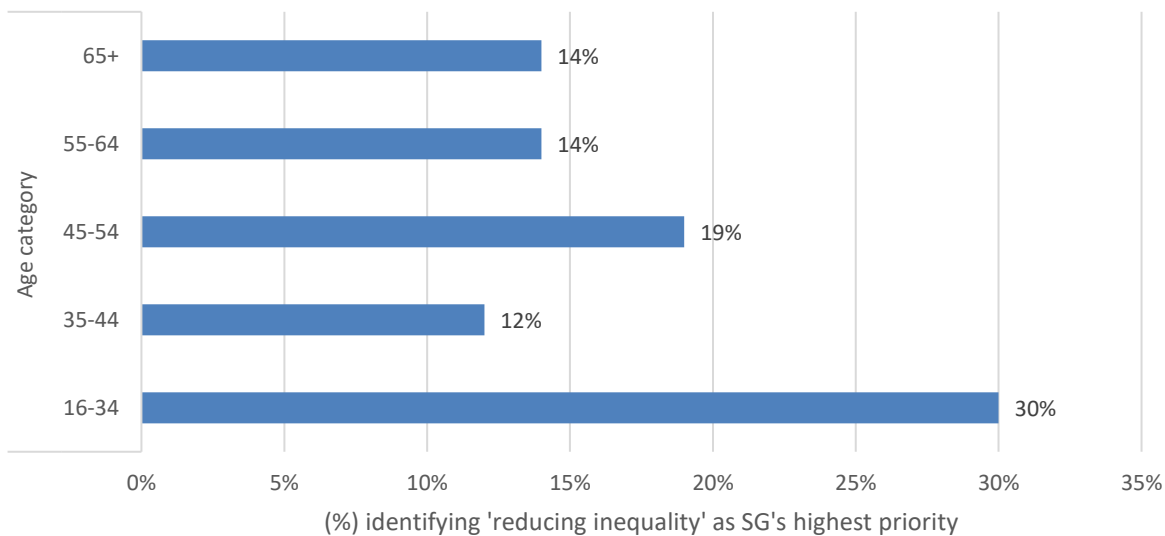
	(%)
Improve standards of education	21
Reduce inequality	19
Improve the economy	18
Improve people's health	17
Improve housing	10
Reduce environmental problems	8
Improve public transport	2
Cut crime	1
Other	3
Don't know/Refusal	1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>

Base: all respondents

How does this vary by sub-groups?

People's priorities for government action varied by age. For instance, while 20% of those aged 45-54 and 65 and over, and 28% of those aged 55-64 identified 'improving the economy' as their highest priority, just 10% of those aged 16-34 did so. Meanwhile, at 30%, those aged 16-34 were more likely than their counterparts in all other age groups to point to the reduction of inequality as their number one priority, as shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Proportion identifying 'reduce inequality' as their highest priority for the Scottish Government by age group (banded) (2021/22)

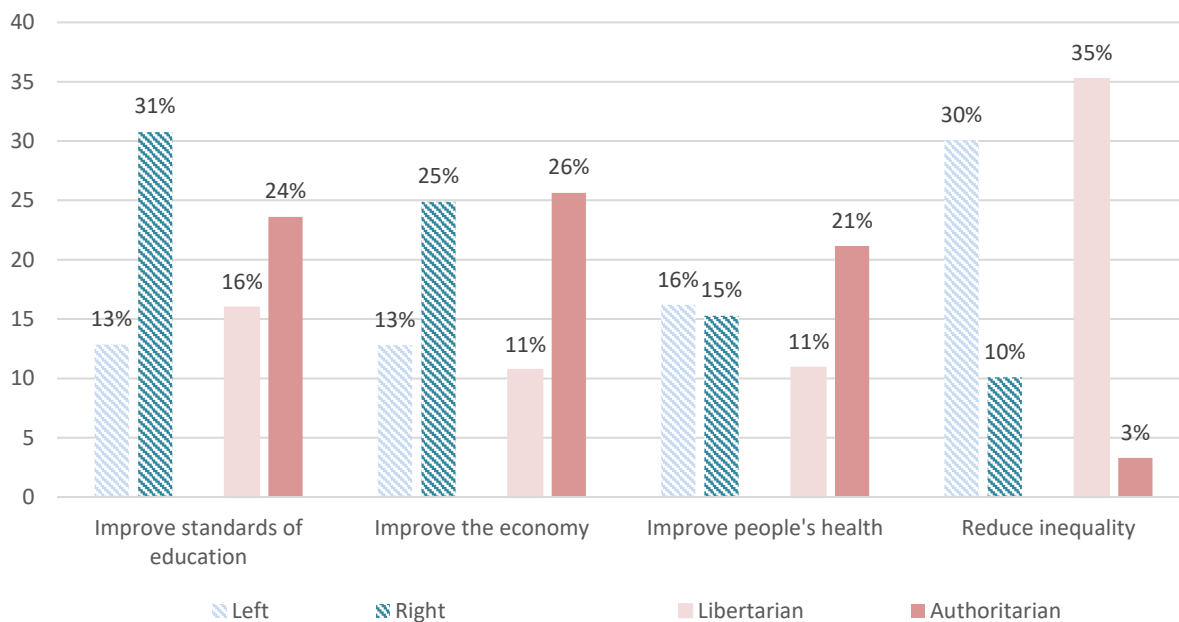


Base: all respondents

There was also variation by gender for these priorities; for example, although 23% of men highlighted 'improving the economy' as their highest priority for government action, only 13% of women did so. Conversely, 21% of women prioritised improving people's health, compared with 13% of men. There was also variance by education: while 22% of those with at least a degree-level qualification prioritised the reduction of inequality, this figure fell to just 5% among those with no formal educational qualifications.

Political and social values also appeared to shape public priorities for government action. While 31% of those on the right identified improving standards of education as their highest priority, just 13% of their more left-wing counterparts did so. Similarly, although 25% of those on the right pointed to improving the economy as their number one priority, this stance was adopted by just 13% of those on the left. Meanwhile, three in ten (30%) of those on the left prioritised the reduction of inequality compared with just one in ten (10%) of those on the right. Further, those who adopt a more authoritarian outlook were more likely to prioritise improving the economy (26%) and improving people's health (21%) than their more liberal counterparts (11% of whom prioritised improving the economy and 11% of whom prioritised improving people's health), while liberals (35%) were more likely than authoritarians (3%) to prioritise a reduction in inequality. Priorities also differed by interest in politics: those who report having little or no interest in politics (36%) were more likely than those with 'some' (14%), 'quite a lot' (14%) or 'a great deal' (15%) of interest to prioritise the improvement of people's health, while those with 'a great deal' of interest in politics (28%) were more likely than those with 'not very much' or 'none at all' (4%) to prioritise a reduction in inequality.

Figure 3.2: Priorities for Scottish Government action by social and political values (2021/22)



Base: all respondents

Public priorities for government action also differed by party identity, views on how Scotland should be governed, and attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU. Conservative supporters (36%) were more likely than SNP supporters (16%) and Scottish Green party supporters (5%) to prioritise improving the standard of education in Scotland, and were also more likely than supporters of the SNP to point to improving the economy as a priority (33% compared with 15%) and the Scottish Green party (3%). Meanwhile, supporters of the SNP (25%) and the Labour Party (27%) were more likely than Conservative Party supporters (3%) to identify the reduction of inequality as the number one priority for government action.

Differences were also present by constitutional preference: those in favour of Scotland remaining part of the UK were more likely than supporters of independence to prioritise improving standards of education (30% compared with 13%) and improving the economy (23% compared with 14%), while independence supporters were more likely than opponents to prioritise the reduction of inequality (26% compared with 9%). Priorities also varied by attitudes towards the UK's ties with the EU: those who support Britain's departure from the institution were more likely than their Remain-supporting counterparts to prioritise improving standards of education (29% compared with 19%) and improving the economy (30% compared with 15%), while those who back Remain (23%) were more likely than those who back Leave (2%) to view the reduction of inequality as their number one priority. Whether people felt positively or negatively about Scotland's handling of the pandemic represented a further distinguishing factor.

Levels of satisfaction with the health service in Scotland

SSA 2021/22 asked its respondents a number of questions aimed at measuring public attitudes towards the health service in Scotland. Firstly, respondents were presented with the following question:

All in all, how satisfied or dissatisfied would you say you are with the way in which the National Health Service runs nowadays?

Very satisfied
Quite satisfied
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Quite dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied

Table 3.3: Satisfaction with the National Health Service (2021/22)

	(%)
Very satisfied	12
Quite satisfied	43
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	17
Quite dissatisfied	19
Very dissatisfied	9
Don't know/Refusal	1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1130

Base: all respondents

Over half (54%) indicated that they were either 'very' (12%) or 'quite' (43%) satisfied with the way in which the National Health Service is run. In comparison, just under three in ten (28%) expressed dissatisfaction with the way the NHS in Scotland is run; around two in ten (19%) felt 'dissatisfied', with a further one in ten (9%) indicating that they were 'very dissatisfied'.

These figures indicate that satisfaction with the NHS in Scotland is higher than across Britain as a whole. In the most recent British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, 36% of people in Britain said they were either 'very' (6%) or 'quite' (30%) satisfied with the way the NHS is run, while 41% said they were either 'very' (13%) or 'quite' (28%) dissatisfied.

How do levels of satisfaction vary by sub-groups?

As with other attitudes, satisfaction with the NHS differed according to views on Scotland's handling of the coronavirus pandemic: 72% of those with a positive perception of Scotland's handling of the COVID-19 crisis indicated that they were satisfied with how the NHS runs, while among those who evaluated Scotland's handling of the pandemic more negatively this figure stands at 39%.

Levels of satisfaction also varied by how people feel about their ability to live comfortably on their present level of income. While 70% of those who indicate that they are 'living very comfortably on their present income' reported satisfaction with the NHS, this figure stands at 46% among those who are 'neither comfortable nor struggling' and at 50% among those who are either 'struggling' or 'really struggling'. Satisfaction with the NHS also differed between those living in urban and rural areas: just over half (52%) of those living in urban areas indicated that they are satisfied with the way in which the NHS runs, compared with 60% of those living in rural areas.

Levels of satisfaction also varied by social values, with those holding more authoritarian views more likely than their more liberal counterparts to display dissatisfaction with the way in which the NHS is run (33% compared with 21%). Views on the NHS further diverged by party identification. For example, while 62% of SNP supporters indicated that they were satisfied with the NHS, among Conservative supporters this figure fell to 42%. This represents less of a division of opinion between these party supporters than on some of the other attitudes, such as on taxation, spending and redistribution. Meanwhile, levels of satisfaction with the NHS were higher among those who supported Scottish independence (60%) than their counterparts who wish Scotland to remain in the UK (47%), and among those who would vote to Remain in a hypothetical second EU referendum (59%) compared with those who would vote to Leave (38%).

Logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine the main attitudinal drivers behind satisfaction with the health service in Scotland³⁹. This analysis suggested an association between views on the NHS and assessments of Scotland's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Controlling for all other variables, the odds of an individual who perceives Scotland's handling of the pandemic positively stating that they were satisfied with the way in which the NHS runs were around four times that of an individual who views Scotland's response to the pandemic in a more negative light.

Standards in the health service

In addition to asking its respondents whether they felt satisfied with how the NHS runs, SSA carries an additional item aimed at assessing whether respondents felt

³⁹ For the purpose of this analysis the level of satisfaction with the NHS was collapsed into a binary variable; satisfied or dissatisfied/neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Variables in the reduced model were household income, attitudes towards Britain's membership of the EU, assessments of Scotland's handling of the pandemic and perceptions of ability to live on present income.

that standards within the health service in Scotland had increased or fallen during the past twelve months. As Table 3.4 indicates, two-thirds (66%) believed that standards within the health service fell during this period, one-third (33%) felt that standards fell ‘a little’, while a further third (33%) asserted that standards fell ‘a lot’. Around a quarter (23%) felt that standards within the health service were maintained during this period, with only 6% of the belief that standards had increased.

Table 3.4: Perceptions of whether standards in the health service in Scotland have increased or fallen (2021/22)

	(%)
Increased a lot	3
Increased a little	4
Stayed the same	23
Fallen a little	33
Fallen a lot	33
Don't know/Refusal	5
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>

Base: all respondents

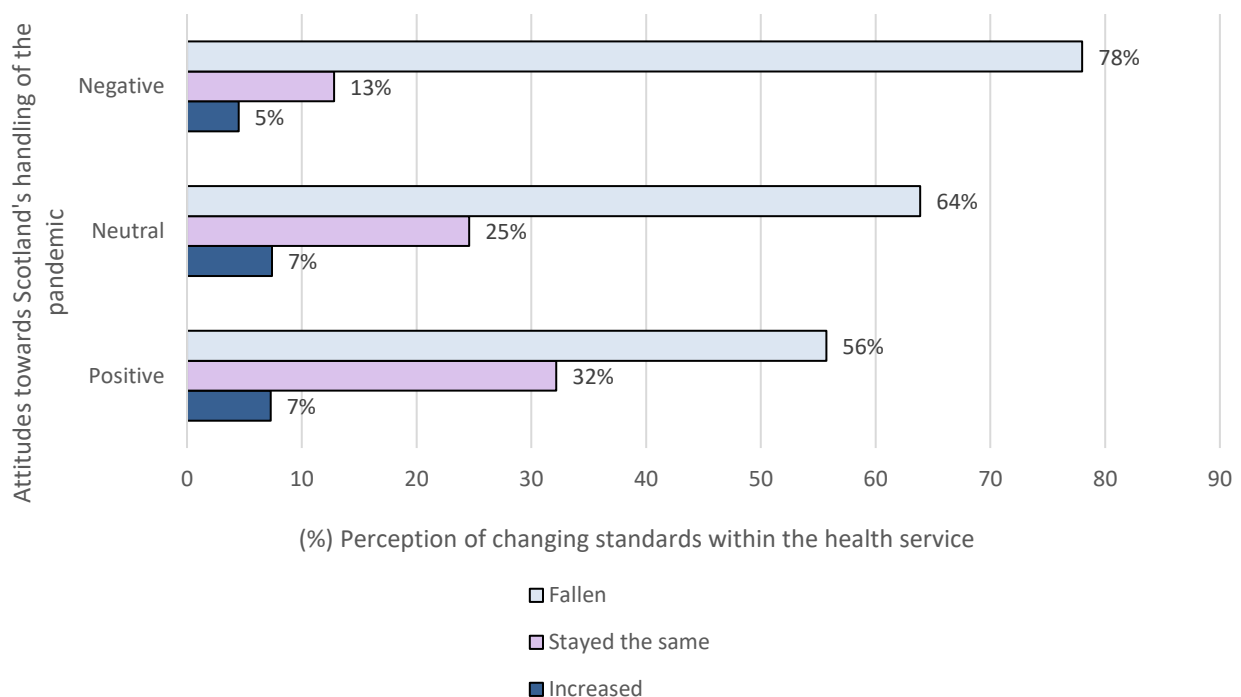
How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

Responses to this item varied by views on Scotland’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Among those who feel positively about how Scotland has dealt with the COVID-19 crisis, 56% believed that standards in the health service had fallen. Among those who adopt a neutral stance on Scotland’s handling of the pandemic this figure rises to 64%, while among those who view Scotland’s handling of the pandemic negatively 78% felt that standards within the health service had fallen.

Attitudes also varied according to how people feel about their ability to live comfortably on their present level of income. While over half (54%) of those who asserted that they were ‘living very comfortably’ on their present income believed that standards within the health service had fallen during the past year, among those who are either ‘struggling’ or ‘really struggling’ on their present income this figure rises to just over four in five (81%).

Beliefs about whether standards within the health service have risen or fallen also differed by party identification and constitutional preference. For instance, while over half (54%) of Scottish Green party supporters felt that standards within the health service had fallen during the previous twelve months, this figure stood at almost two-thirds (63%) among SNP supporters and around three-quarters among Conservative (74%) and Labour (77%) supporters. As with level of satisfaction with the NHS this represents less of a divergence of opinion between these party supporters than on some of the other attitudes, such as on taxation, spending and redistribution. Meanwhile, while 59% of those in favour of Scottish independence believed standards had fallen during the past year, 74% of those who believe Scotland should remain in the UK felt that standards have dropped.

Figure 3.3: Perceptions of changing standards within the health service over the past 12 months by attitudes towards Scotland’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic (2021/22)



Base: all respondents

Responsibility for changes in standards within the health service

Having indicated whether they believe standards within the health service in Scotland had increased, fallen or stayed the same, respondents were then presented with the following question aimed at assessing who they felt was accountable for this:

What do you think this has been mainly the result of?

- Mainly the result of the UK Government's policies at Westminster
- Mainly the result of the Scottish Government's policies

For some other reason

Over three in ten (33%) people felt that responsibility for the standard of the health service either increasing, falling or staying the same was 'mainly the result of the Scottish Government's policies', while just over two in ten (22%) attributed responsibility to the UK government's policies.

Among those who said that standards within the health service had fallen during the past 12 months, just over a quarter (28%) pointed to the UK Government's policies at Westminster as the primary reason for this change, while just under a quarter (24%) identified the Scottish Government's policies as resulting in a drop in standards. However, the most common response to this question among those who felt that standards within the health service had fallen during the previous year was that this was caused by a reason other than the policies of either the UK Government or the Scottish Government, with four in ten (40%) selecting this option. Although not referred to within this answer option ('for some reason') it is likely that most of those who stated this would be thinking of the pandemic.

Among those who do not believe standards have fallen (i.e. that they had stayed the same or increased) during this period, 46% thought this was mainly due to Scottish Government policies, 32% mainly due to UK Government policies and 32% for some other reason. Among the relatively small proportion (6%) of those who felt that standards within the health service had increased during the previous twelve months, the majority (60%) credited Scottish Government policies for this shift, with a further 3% identifying the UK Government's policies as boosting standards. One-third (33%) asserted that standards in the health service had risen during the past year for a reason other than the policies of either the UK Government or the Scottish Government.

Views on the economy and standards of living

In addition to the items measuring attitudes towards the health service, SSA 2021/22 carried two further questions on whether Scotland's economy had become stronger or weaker over the past 12 months, and whether the standard of living in Scotland had increased or fallen during the same period.

Table 3.5: Attitudes towards whether Scotland’s economy has strengthened or weakened / whether the standard of living in Scotland has increased or fallen over the past 12 months (2021/22)

Scotland’s economy	(%)	The standard of living in Scotland	(%)
A lot stronger	1	Increased a lot	3
A little stronger	6	Increased a little	4
Stayed the same	21	Stayed the same	27
A little weaker	41	Fallen a little	42
A lot weaker	25	Fallen a lot	21
Don’t know/Refusal	7	Don’t know/Refusal	2
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>

Base: all respondents

As Table 3.5 indicates, in 2021/22 two-thirds (66%) of people in Scotland believed that Scotland’s economy has weakened over the past 12 months: 41% felt that the economy has become ‘a little weaker’, while a further 25% thought it had become ‘a lot weaker’. Meanwhile just 7% asserted that the economy had strengthened: 6% thought that Scotland’s economy had become ‘a little stronger’, and 1% felt that the economy has become ‘a lot stronger’. Around one-fifth (21%) believed that the strength of the economy had stayed the same during the past year.

This pattern is broadly reflected in the distribution of attitudes towards the standard of living in Scotland: around two-thirds (63%) believed that the standard of living in Scotland had fallen over the past twelve months (42% by ‘a little’ and 21% by ‘a lot’), while just 8% felt that the standard of living had increased during this period (4% by ‘a little’ and 3% by ‘a lot’). Just over a quarter (27%) said that the standard of living in Scotland had stayed the same during the previous year.

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

Attitudes towards the strength of Scotland’s economy over the past twelve months differ by age; at 55%, those aged 16-34 were less likely than their older counterparts to believe that the economy had weakened during the previous year (this stance was adopted by 73% of those aged 35-44, 64% of those aged 45-54, 68% of those aged 55-64, and 74% of those aged 65 and over). Views on whether the economy in Scotland had strengthened or weakened also diverged by income, with 51% of those in the lowest income quartile saying that the economy had

weakened over the past year compared with 65%-71% of those across all other income quartiles. Meanwhile, attitudes towards whether the standard of living in Scotland had increased or fallen over the past 12 months varied by disability: while around six in ten (59%) of those without a disability felt that the standard of living in Scotland fell during the previous year, this figure rises to almost seven in ten (69%) among those with a disability or long-term health condition.

Views on whether the economy in Scotland had strengthened or weakened over the past year also diverged by party identification, attitudes towards how Scotland should be governed, and views on the UK's ties with the EU. In terms of party support, while just under six in ten (58%) SNP supporters believed that the economy had weakened over the past twelve months, this rose to around eight in ten of both Conservative (80%) and Labour (78%) supporters. Further, supporters of Scottish independence (58%) were less likely than opponents (75%) to feel that the Scottish economy had weakened over the past year, while the proportion who believed the economy had weakened in Scotland during the previous 12 months was lower among those who would vote to Remain in a hypothetical second EU referendum (64%) than among those who would vote to Leave (76%). Meanwhile, although attitudes towards whether the standard of living in Scotland had increased or fallen did not vary significantly according to party identification, constitutional preference, or views on Britain's place in Europe, opinions did vary by level of interest in politics. While around two-thirds of those with 'a great deal' (67%) or 'quite a lot' (68%) of interest in politics believed the standard of living had fallen during the previous year, the proportion was lower among those with either 'some' interest in politics (55%) or with 'not very much' interest or 'none at all' (54%).

Attitudes towards changes in both the strength of the economy and the standard of living in Scotland differed by views on Scotland's handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Among those who felt positive about how Scotland dealt with the COVID-19 emergency, 61% indicated that the economy had weakened over the past 12 months and 60% believed the standard of living had fallen during the same period. In comparison, among those who feel negatively about the Scottish Government's approach to the pandemic these figures rise to 75% and 71% respectively.

Responsibility for changes in the economy and standard of living

Having given their views on changes in the strength of the economy and standard of living in Scotland during the past twelve months, respondents were asked who they felt was responsible for these changes. Thirty-one percent viewed the Scottish Government's policies as responsible for the performance of the economy, while 27% felt that economic performance was 'mainly the result of the UK government's policies at Westminster'. A further 8% believed that the Scottish Government and the UK Government's policies were jointly responsible for the performance of the economy, while one-third (33%) asserted that whether the economy had strengthened or weakened during the past year was the result of 'some other reason'. As with reasons for changes to the standard of the NHS it is likely that

most who stated this was ‘for some other reason’ had in mind the pandemic. Meanwhile, 24% viewed changes in the standard of living in Scotland as ‘mainly the result of the Scottish Government’s policies’, while 37% saw the UK government’s policies as responsible for the standard of living in Scotland. An additional 7% stated that the policies of both the UK Government and the Scottish Government were responsible for changes in the standard of living, while three in ten (30%) said that a change in the standard of living in Scotland was a consequence of ‘some other reason’.

Table 3.6: Responsibility for changes in Scotland’s economy and the standard of living in the past twelve months (2021/22)

Responsibility for changes in Scotland’s economy	(%)	Responsibility for changes in the standard of living in Scotland	(%)
Mainly the result of the UK government’s policies at Westminster	27	Mainly the result of the UK government’s policies at Westminster	37
Mainly the result of the Scottish Government’s policies	31	Mainly the result of the Scottish Government’s Policies	24
For some other reason	33	For some other reason	30
<i>SPONTANEOUS: Both Westminster and Scottish Government</i>	8	<i>SPONTANEOUS: Both Westminster and Scottish Government</i>	7
Don’t know/Refusal	2	Don’t know/Refusal	2
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>

Base: all respondents

While these figures give a sense of who the public felt was most responsible for the strength of the economy and the standard of living in Scotland, analysing the attitudes of those who felt the economy had weakened and of those who think it had strengthened and then looking at these attitudes relating to the standard of living allows us to assess who the public ‘blame’ for negative changes and who they ‘credit’ for positive developments. A larger proportion credited the Scottish Government’s policies, rather than the UK Government’s, for positive shifts and blamed UK Government policies, rather than Scottish Government policies, for negative shifts. Of those who believed that the economy in Scotland has weakened during the past year, 31% ‘blamed’ UK Government policies for this shift while 25% ‘blamed’ Scottish Government policies (a further third – 33% – viewed such

changes as the result of 'some other reason). Among those who felt that the economy had strengthened during the past twelve months, one in ten (10%) thought that such changes were the consequence of the UK Government's policies at Westminster, while 45% asserted that the policies of the Scottish Government are responsible for these developments (once more, around a third – 36% – position the strength of the economy as being dependent upon 'some other reason').

Meanwhile, of those who felt that the standard of living in Scotland had fallen during the same period, 45% held the UK Government's policies responsible for this development and 17% viewed such changes as the result of Scottish Government policies (again, around a third – 31% – believed that such changes stemmed from 'some other reason'). Of those who believe that the standard of living in Scotland had increased during the previous year, 21% 'credited' the policies of the UK Government while 28% 'credited' the policies of the Scottish Government (a further third – 33% – viewed such changes as the result of 'some other reason').

Chapter 4 – Political engagement and levels of social trust

This chapter outlines the level of political engagement and social trust among people in Scotland. Social trust, for the purposes of this chapter, can be defined as “confidence in the moral orientation or trustworthiness of our fellow citizens...[levels of social trust] play an important role in how secure individuals feel and how well society functions.”⁴⁰

Specifically, the following research questions are addressed:

- Is voting in each type of election deemed to be equally important, or is voting in some considered to be more important than in others?
- Do people feel that others be trusted and that there are people in their local area that can be turned to for help and support?

This chapter also provides an analysis of how political engagement and levels of social trust differ between various subgroups.

Importance of voting

All respondents were asked how important they thought it was to vote in Scottish Parliament, UK House of Commons and local council elections. Although the majority of people felt that it was ‘very important’ to vote in each of the three elections, as shown in Table 4.1, there was a slight variation in how important it was considered to be to vote in each one.

Table 4.1: Importance of voting in different types of elections (2021/22)

	Scottish Parliament (%)	UK House of Commons (%)	Local council (%)
Very important	88	78	72
Fairly important	9	14	23
Not very important	2	4	4
Not important at all	*	3	1
Don't know/Refused	*	*	*
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>	<i>1130</i>	<i>1130</i>

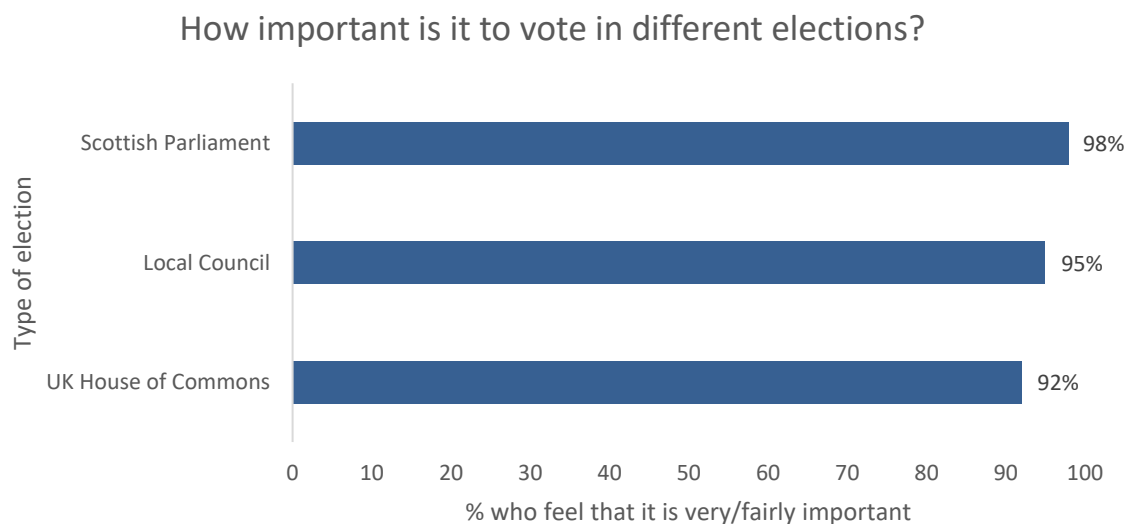
Base: all respondents

⁴⁰ [British Social Attitudes 35 | Social trust \(natcen.ac.uk\)](#)

Just under 9 in 10 people (88%) living in Scotland felt that it was ‘very important’ to vote in Scottish Parliament elections. This was ten percentage points higher than the 78% of people who felt it was ‘very important’ to vote in UK House of Commons elections, and 16 percentage points higher than the proportion who thought it ‘very important’ to vote in local council elections (72%).

When examining overall importance by combining the categories of ‘very important’ and ‘fairly important’, the vast majority of people in Scotland regarded these three elections as important; 92% said so of the House of Commons elections, 95% of Local Council elections and 98% of Scottish Parliament elections. These figures are depicted in Figure 4.1:

Figure 4.1: Proportion of those who agree that it is important to vote in Scottish Parliament, UK House of Commons and local elections (2021/22)



Base: all respondents

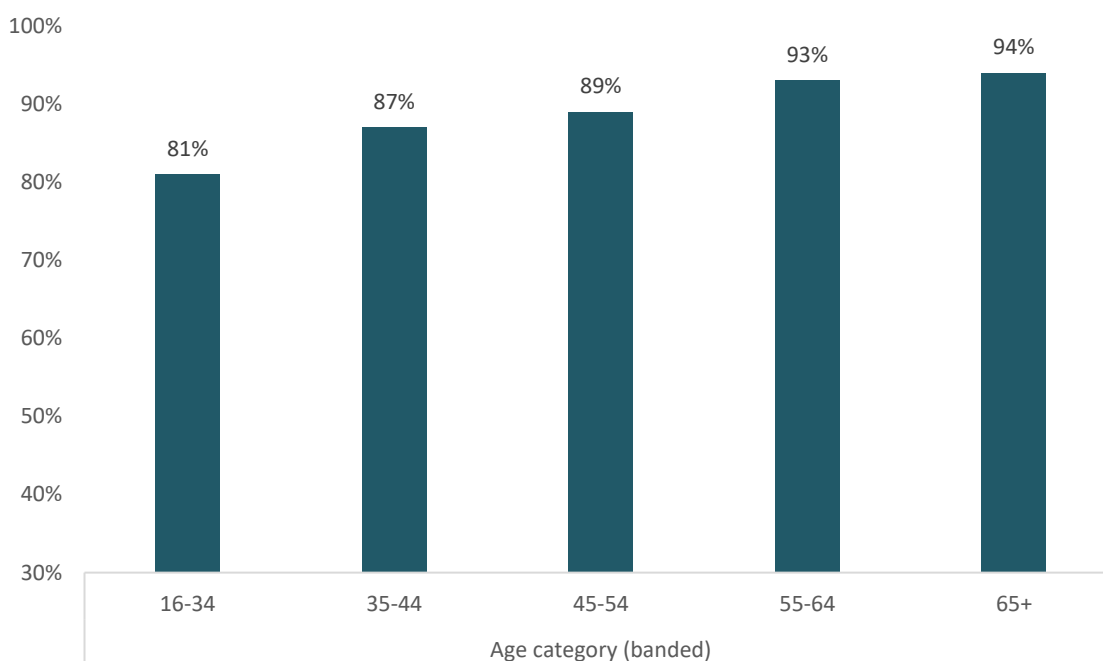
How do these attitudes vary between sub-groups?

The proportion of people who felt that it was ‘very’ important to vote in Scottish Parliament elections was higher among older people. The vast majority of those (94%) aged 65 and over felt that it was ‘very’ important compared with around 8 in 10 (81%) people aged 16-34, as shown in Figure 4.2 below. There was an association with perception of income, whereby nearly all (98%) of those living ‘really comfortably’ on their present income felt that it was ‘very important’ compared with 86% of those struggling or really struggling on their present income. There was also variation by social values, with 93% of those on the left rating Scottish Parliament elections as ‘very important’ compared with 82% of their right-wing counterparts.

Unsurprisingly, there was an association between interest and participation in politics and the level of importance attributed to voting in Scottish Parliament

elections. Those who had a greater interest in politics were more likely to think voting in Scottish Parliament elections was important than their counterparts: the vast majority (97%) who had ‘a great deal’ of interest in politics thought it to be ‘very important’ to vote in Scottish Parliament elections, compared with 73% of those with ‘not very much’ or ‘no interest’ in politics. Attitudes also varied by views on Europe with 91% of Remainers saying these elections are ‘very important’ compared with 83% of Leavers, and by constitutional preference, with 92% of independence supporters compared with 84% of opponents believing Scottish Parliament elections ‘very important’.

Figure 4.2: Percentage of those who think it is ‘Very important’ to vote in Scottish Parliament elections by age group (banded) (2021/22)

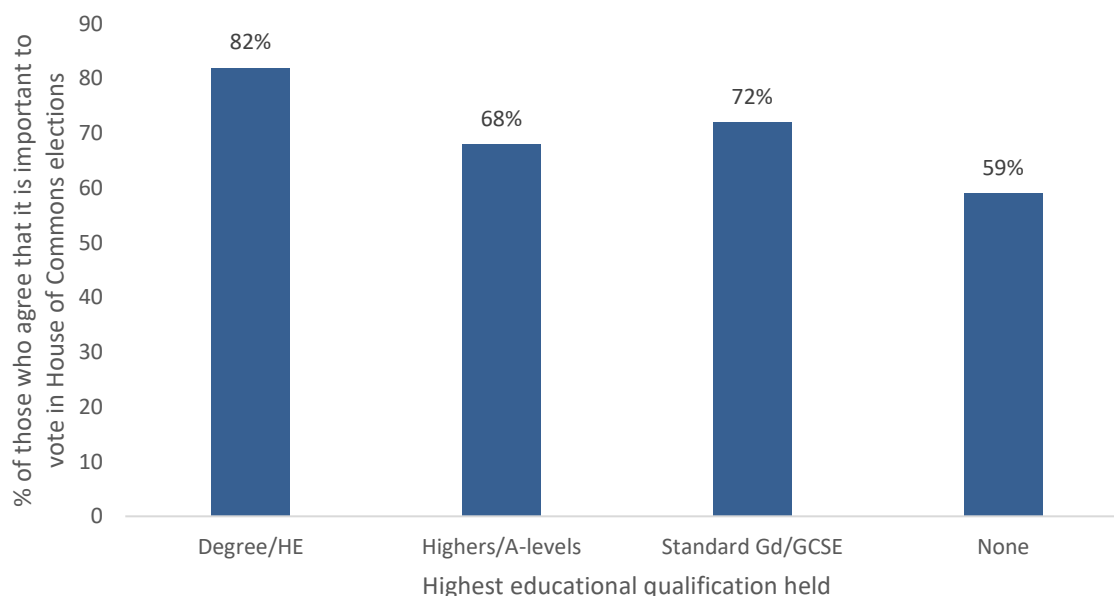


Base: all respondents who said it was ‘very important’ to vote in Scottish Parliament elections (n=1009)

There was an association between socioeconomic status and the level of importance attributed to voting in UK House of Commons elections. Over eight in ten (82%) of those in the highest household income quartile felt that it was ‘very important’ to vote in UK House of Commons elections, compared with 61% of those in the lowest income quartile. Over six in ten (62%) of those who reported ‘struggling’ or ‘really struggling’ on their present income thought it was ‘very important’ to vote in UK House of Commons elections. In comparison, 91% of those who were ‘living really comfortably’ on their present income felt the same way.

People with no educational qualifications were less likely than their counterparts to think it was important to vote in House of Commons elections. As shown in Figure 4.2, just under six in ten (59%) of those who had no qualifications felt that it was ‘very important’ to vote in this type of election. The proportion increased to 82% for those who held a degree or other higher education qualification.

Figure 4.3: Percentage of those who agree that it is ‘very important’ to vote in House of Commons elections by level of education (2021/22)



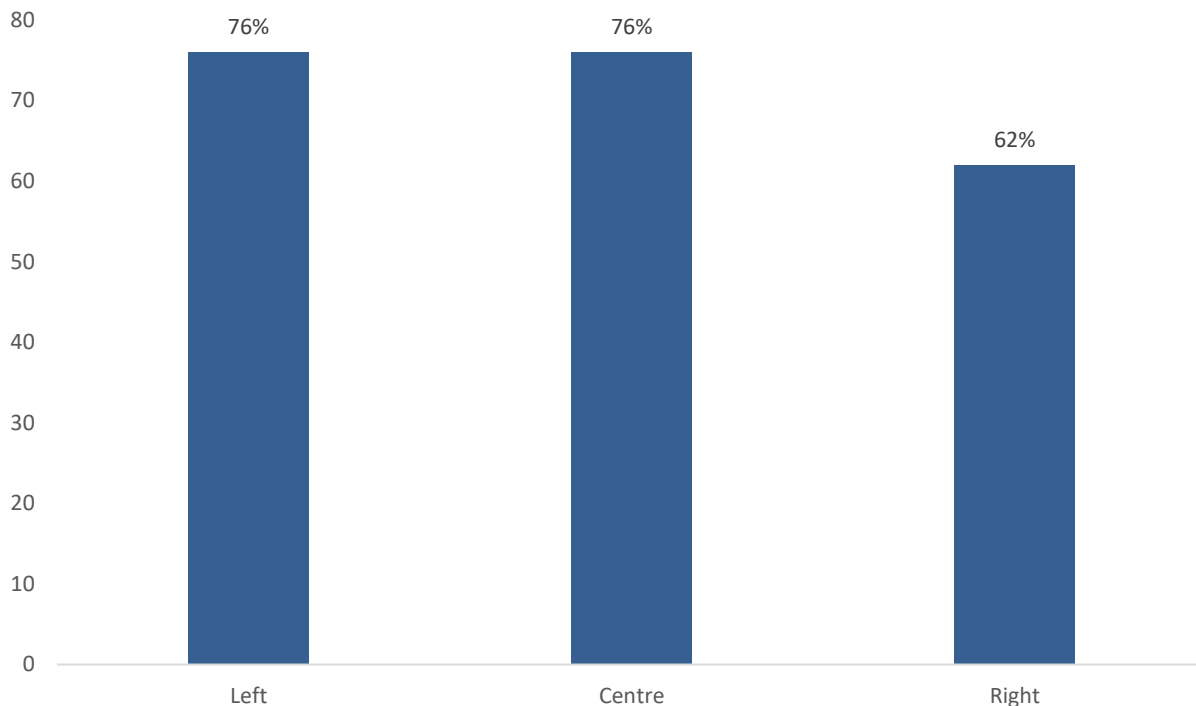
Base: all respondents who said it was ‘very important’ to vote in elections to the UK House of Commons (n=910)

As with the Scottish Parliament elections, there was a relationship between a person’s level of interest and participation in politics and their attributing greater importance to voting in UK House of Commons elections. Nearly nine in ten (88%) of those who had ‘a great deal of interest’ in politics felt it was ‘very important’ to vote in UK House of Commons elections, compared with nearly six in ten (58%) of those who had ‘not very much’ interest in politics or ‘none at all’.

There was a clear linear relationship between educational level and feelings around the importance of voting in local elections. Three-quarters of those who held a degree or other higher education qualification felt that it was ‘very important’ to vote in their local council elections, followed by 70% of those with a Scottish Higher or A-level, 56% of those with a Standard Grade/GCSE, and 58% of those who had no qualifications.

As shown in Figure 4.4, there was also variation by someone’s position on the left-right scale, with 76% of those on the left rating voting in local elections as ‘very important’ compared with 62% of their right-wing counterparts.

Figure 4.4: Relationship between position on left-right scale and proportion of those who think it is ‘very important’ to vote in local elections (2021/22)



Base: all respondents who said it was ‘very important’ to vote in local council elections (n=837)

Levels of social trust

People across Scotland were asked about the level of trust they had in others and whether they felt they could rely on others for advice and support. Table 4.2 summarises their response to the former question:

Table 4.2: ‘Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?’ (2021/22)

	(%)
Most people can be trusted	61
Can’t be too careful in dealing with people	37
Don’t know/Refusal	2
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>

Base: all respondents

Around 3 in 5 (61%) said that ‘most people can be trusted’, while just under 2 in 5 (37%) felt that they ‘can’t be too careful in dealing with people’.

As shown in Table 4.3, the majority of people in Scotland (79%) agreed that there were people in their area they could turn to for advice and support, while just 8% disagreed.

Table 4.3: ‘I feel that there are people in this area I could turn to for advice and support’ (2021/22)

	(%)
Agree strongly	39
Agree	40
Neither agree nor disagree	13
Disagree	6
Disagree strongly	2
Don’t know/Refusal	1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1130</i>

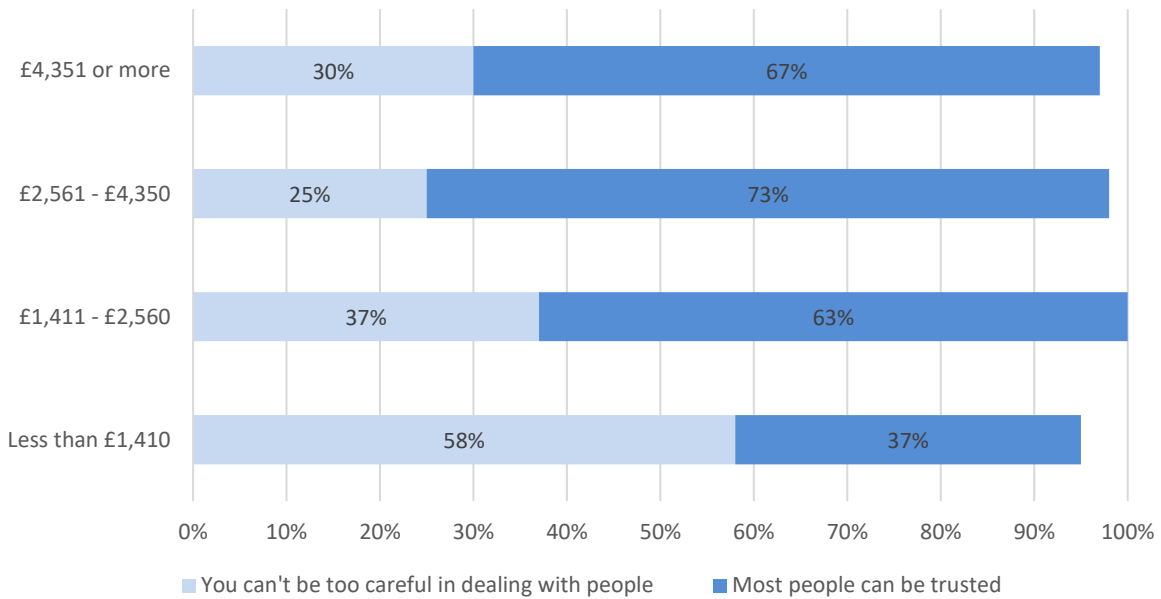
Base: all respondents

How do these attitudes vary between sub-groups?

There was a high level of variation between certain subgroups in regard to the trust they held in others, indicating a polarisation in attitudes between different socioeconomic backgrounds and political beliefs.

The majority of people (67%) in the highest income quartile believed that ‘most people can be trusted’, compared with just 37% of those in the lowest income quartile who felt this way. These figures are shown in Figure 4.5:

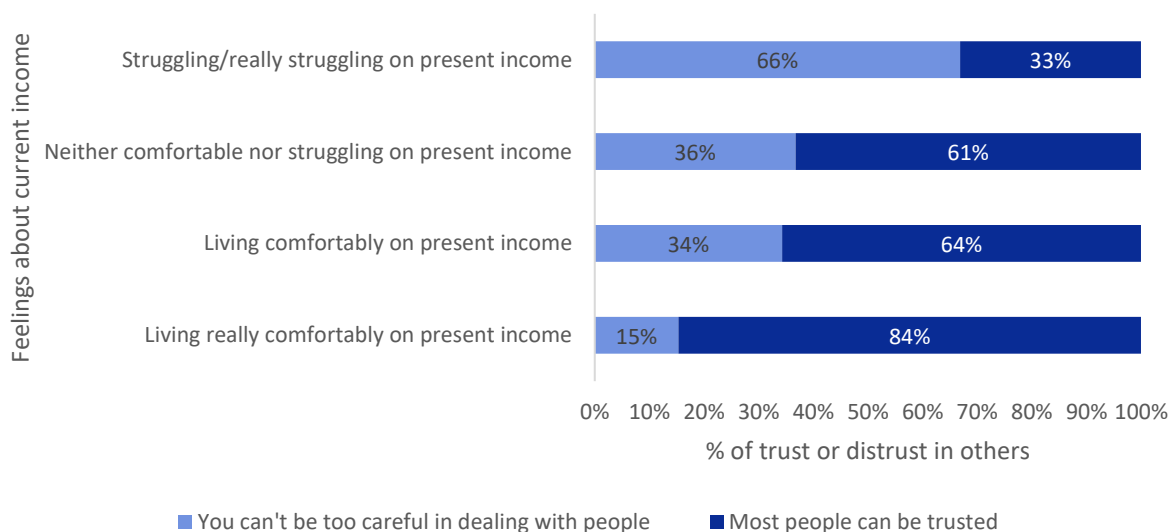
Figure 4.5: Level of trust in others by monthly household income quartiles (2021/22)



Base: all respondents

There was a similar polarisation between those who reported that they were struggling on their present income and those who were not struggling. As shown in Figure 4.6, a majority of those who were either 'struggling' or 'really struggling' on their present income (66%) said that 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people', in comparison only 15% of those who said they were 'living really comfortably' on their present income thought this was the case.

Figure 4.6: Level of trust in others by feelings about current income (2021/22)



Base: all respondents

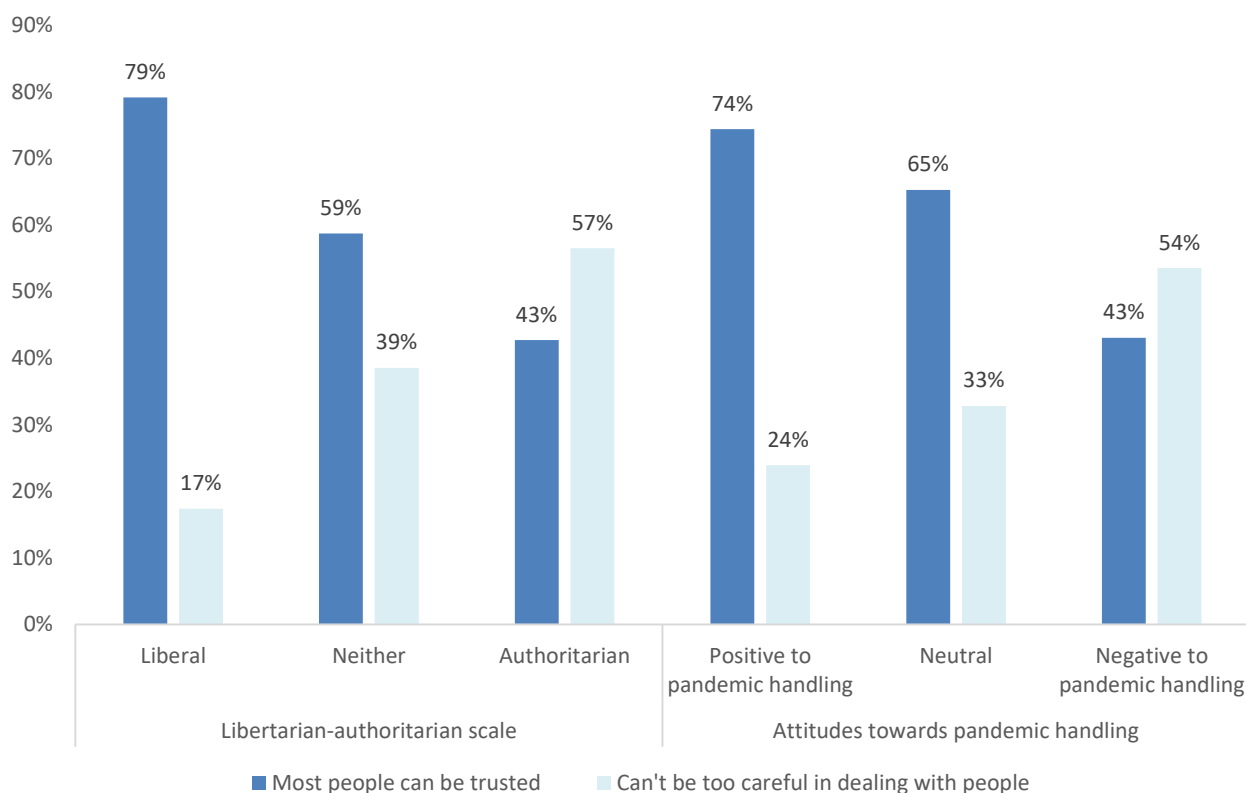
There was also a strong relationship between someone's educational level and their level of trust in others. While 67% of those who held a degree or higher education qualification felt that 'most people can be trusted', just 22% of those who held no qualifications did so.

Trust in others was also found to diverge sharply by differing political attitudes. Around 4 in 5 (79%) of those who identified with liberal values on the liberal-authoritarian scale felt that 'most people can be trusted'. However, this figure was almost halved for those on the authoritarian side of the scale, with 43% of this group feeling that 'most people can be trusted'. Out of those who identified with a political party, Scottish Green Party supporters were found to be the most trusting, with 79% stating that 'most people can be trusted', while Conservative supporters were the least trusting, with 50% thinking this is the case. A greater interest in politics was also associated with having more trust in others. Just under 7 in 10 of those (68%) who had 'a great deal of interest' in politics felt that 'most people can be trusted', compared with 40% of those who had either 'not very much' interest in politics or 'none at all'. Those who would vote to remain in the EU in the event of another referendum were also more likely to say that 'most people can be trusted' with 65% of remain voters saying this was the case, compared with 45% of leave voters.

There was also evidence of a connection between trust in others and more general trust in institutions, such as the Scottish Government. For example, 72% of those who thought that 'Most people can be trusted' said they trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests either 'just about always' or 'most of the time', compared with 55% of those who said you 'can't be too careful in dealing with people'. Similarly, 54% of those who thought that 'most people can be trusted' said they trusted the Scottish Government to make fair decisions 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot', whereas the equivalent figure for those who thought that 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people' was 40%.

Further evidence for this connection between trust in others and trust in institutions can be found by examining attitudes by views on Scotland's handling of the pandemic. While 74% of those who had a positive view of Scotland's pandemic handling felt that 'most people can be trusted', only 43% of those with a negative view felt the same way. Figure 4.7 shows the full breakdown for trust in others by both attitudes towards Scotland's handling of the pandemic and position on the liberal-authoritarian scale.

Figure 4.7: Level of trust in others by position on liberal-authoritarian scale and attitudes towards pandemic handling (2021/22)



Additional regression analysis was conducted to find out which variables were the key drivers of the level of social trust in others. Controlling for all other variables, someone's position on the liberal-authoritarian scale was found to be a key driver of a person's level of trust in others. The odds of someone on the liberal end of the scale saying that 'most people can be trusted' was 4 times greater than someone on the authoritarian end of the scale.⁴¹

Although variation by subgroup was less polarised than the question on whether others could be trusted, there were still marked differences between groups in response to the question on whether there were people in this area that could be turned to for advice and support. There was a clear association between someone's socioeconomic circumstances and the extent to which they agreed that they could turn to others for advice and support in the area. Those on the highest incomes were more likely to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they could turn to others for help in the area. While 85% of those in the highest household income quartile 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they could turn to others to help, 74% of those in the lowest household income quartile did, a difference of 11 percentage points.

⁴¹ Variables in the reduced model were household income, educational qualifications, perceptions of ability to live on present income, position on liberal-authoritarian scale, views on independence, and views on Scotland's handling of the pandemic.

For people living in rural areas, it was more common for them to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' (86%) that there were people they could turn to for advice and support than people living in urban areas (76%). Again, those who had a degree or higher education qualification were far more likely to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they could rely on others for support, with 83% of this group stating this compared with 62% of those with no qualifications.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

SSA 2021/22 was an unprecedented year in the history of the survey. While attitudes to government and public services have been tracked by conducting SSA face-to-face since 1999, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and resulting restrictions, SSA 2021/22 was, for the first time, conducted as a telephone survey. The pandemic not only had implications for the methodology used for this year's survey, but it also provided an important contextual background for the findings presented in this report. Differences in approach by the UK and Scottish Governments to the pandemic and the nature of restrictions highlighted how the current devolution settlement impacts on people's everyday lives.

A new variable measuring attitudes towards Scotland's handling of the pandemic was included in this year's report. Whether people had a positive or negative perception was frequently found to have a significant relationship with attitudes towards government, the economy and the health service in general. Often this had a notable effect on attitudes even when controlling for someone's political and social views. Given that these views are likely to have been held by respondents for a long time, this demonstrates the large impact the pandemic has held on Scottish politics and attitudes towards government in the recent past.

Beyond the introduction of the new variable on Scotland's handling of the pandemic, certain subgroups were consistently found to be key drivers of attitudes across the report as a whole. A person's political and social values, such as their position on the left-right and liberal-authoritarian scales, their views on independence and Brexit, and their party-political identification were much more likely to return statistically significant relationships than demographic variables such as someone's age, gender or level of area deprivation (SIMD).

At a time when trust in institutions was of particular relevance due to the coronavirus pandemic, in general the results across the various questions used to gauge the level of trust people had in the Scottish Government were positive. A majority of the people in Scotland said they trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests (66%) 'just about always' or 'most of the time', and around half (48%) trust them to make fair decisions either a 'great deal' or 'quite a lot'. A majority of the Scottish public (58%) also said that they think the Scottish Government is either 'very' or 'quite' good at listening to people's views before taking decisions. New questions on the Core Module this year to do with people's general level of social trust showed a connection between this and trust in institutions like the Scottish Government.

As well as more general questions on trust in government, all respondents were also asked for their opinions on the Scottish Government's policy on taxation, spending, and the redistribution of income, as well as what they think their highest priority should be. Most people (64%) were in favour of government increasing the

level of taxes and spending more on health, education and social benefits. Around a third of people in Scotland (32%) felt the level of taxation and spending should be kept as it is, while 3% thought it should be reduced. A majority of the Scottish public (68%) also either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that 'government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well-off'. The most important focus for the Scottish Government in 2021/22, according to the public, should be to improve standards of education, with 21% of people highlighting this as a priority. This was followed closely by 'reducing inequality' (19%) and 'improving the economy' (18%).

Although 'improving the economy' was not listed as the top priority for the Scottish Government, the majority of people in Scotland felt the general standard of living had either fallen 'a little' or fallen 'a lot' (63%) over the last twelve months, with a similar proportion (66%) stating that Scotland's economy had either got 'a little' or 'a lot' weaker. Of those who thought the standard of living had fallen in the past year, 45% said this was mainly the result of the UK Government's policies, 17% attributed blame to Scottish Government policies, while 31% said this was the result of 'some other reason'. In comparison, among those who thought the economy had grown weaker in the past year, 31% blamed the UK Government's policies, 25% blamed the Scottish Government's policies, and 33% cited 'some other reason' as the cause.

At a challenging time for the health service in Scotland, people said they were generally satisfied with the way the NHS is being run. Over half of people said (54%) they were either 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the way the NHS runs nowadays, while 28% said they were either 'quite' or 'very' dissatisfied. Despite this level of satisfaction, two-thirds of people in Scotland felt that the standard of the health service had fallen either 'a little' or 'a lot' (66%) over the last twelve months. Of those who felt the standard of the health service had fallen, more people said this was the result of 'some other reason' (40%) than specifically the fault of policies of the UK (28%) or Scottish Government (24%).

Finally, the level of social trust and the importance attributed to voting in elections was generally high. There is a broad consensus in Scotland that it is important to vote in elections: in 2021/22 over 9 in 10 people said it was either 'very important' or 'fairly important' to vote in UK, Scottish Parliament and local council elections. Voting in Scottish Parliament elections was considered most important, with 98% of people in Scotland stating it is 'very' or 'fairly' important to do so, followed by local council elections (95%) and elections to the UK House of Commons (92%).

With regards to social trust, a majority of people in Scotland (61%) felt that 'most people can be trusted', while 37% thought that you 'can't be too careful in dealing with people'. Almost 8 in 10 people in Scotland (79%) either 'agree strongly' or 'agree' with the statement: 'I feel that there are people in this area I could turn to for advice and support'. Despite challenging times, there are encouraging signs that both trust in institutions and trust in others are strong in Scotland.



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

The Scottish Government
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Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

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