

## Public Services and Government

### **Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2013: Core module – attitudes to government, the economy, health and social care services, and social capital in Scotland**

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The *Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA)* survey was launched by ScotCen Social Research in 1999, with the aim of providing robust data on changing public attitudes in Scotland. This report uses SSA data from 1999 onwards to explore changing attitudes to government, the economy, health and social care services. It also discusses findings on general life satisfaction and its relationship with social capital.

### Main Findings

- The attitudes of people in Scotland towards the Scottish Government were at historically high levels following the Scottish election in May 2011. Between 2011 and 2013 the attitudes of people in Scotland became less positive, returning to pre-election levels. For example:
  - 59% in 2013, compared with 71% in 2011, trusted the Scottish Government ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ to act in Scotland’s best interests
  - 46% in 2013, compared with 60% in 2011, felt that having a Scottish Parliament gives ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed.
- Attitudes towards the Scottish Government have been consistently and by a substantial margin more positive than attitudes towards the UK Government. For example in 2013:
  - 59% trusted the Scottish Government to act in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ compared with 26% who said this of the UK Government
  - 46% said the Scottish Government was ‘very good’ or ‘quite good’ at listening to people’s views, compared with 21% who said this of the UK Government.
- In 2013, many more people thought the Scottish Government *ought to have* the most influence over the way Scotland is run (63%) than thought the Scottish Government *does have* the most influence (30%). More than a third of people (37%) believed that the Scottish Government *ought to*, but *does not*, have the most influence over the way Scotland is run.
- Growing the economy remained the most commonly chosen highest priority for the Scottish Government (chosen by 35%, in comparison with 18% who chose the next most popular options).
- In 2013, a quarter of people in Scotland thought that the economy had improved over the last 12 months, and a further third that it had stayed the same. This is the least negative assessment since the recession began in 2008. The proportion of people who reported that they were ‘struggling on their present income’ has been fairly stable since 2010 at around 1 in 6.
- Satisfaction with the way the NHS in Scotland is run increased from 58% in 2011 to 61% in 2013, continuing an upward trend which began in 2005 when 40% of people were satisfied. The proportion of people who believed that the government should pay for care of older people, regardless of how much money the person has, declined from 55% in 2007 to 45% in 2013.
- There is a notable degree of stability in life satisfaction measures, with no substantive difference before and after the recession. Both social connectedness and social trust were strongly associated with life satisfaction.

## Introduction

This report presents findings from the Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey on two key questions relating to the relationship between the general public, the government and public services:

- How have attitudes to government, the economy and standards of living, the health service and social care, changed over time?
- What factors are related to trust in the Scottish Government, and who *does* and *ought* to have the most influence over the way Scotland is run?

In addition this year's report also considers a further question that is of particular relevance in the context of the experience, over recent years, of economic recession and now potential recovery:

- What is the relationship between social capital and life satisfaction?

The report uses SSA data from 1999 onwards, and the most recent data included in this report were collected between June and October 2013.

## Changing attitudes to government

The attitudes of people in Scotland towards the Scottish Government were at historically high levels following the Scottish election in May 2011. Since then, attitudes have become less positive in many areas. The analysis of SSA 2013 suggests this decrease was mostly the result of an 'election bounce' effect in 2011 (similar to, but perhaps even stronger than, those found in 2003 and 2007), with attitudes in 2013 returning to their 2010 (pre-election) levels.

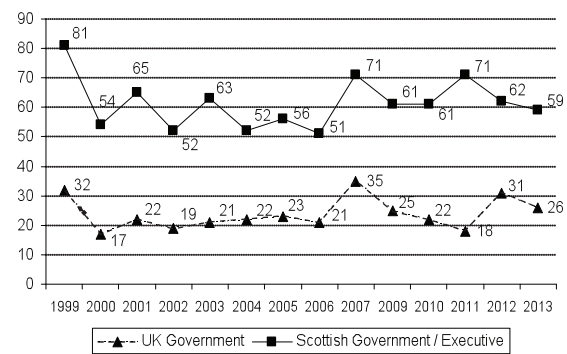
Levels of trust in the Scottish Government both to act in Scotland's best interests and to make fair decisions decreased between 2011 and 2013. In 2013, around six in ten (59%) trusted the Scottish Government to act in Scotland's best interests compared with around seven in ten (71%) in 2011. Awareness of the activities of the Scottish Government, and the proportion of people in Scotland who thought that the Scottish Government was good at listening to people's views before taking decisions, also declined over this period.

The proportion of people who thought the Scottish Parliament gives ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed decreased from 60% in 2011 to 46% in 2013. Both the proportion of people believing that the Scottish Government *has* the most influence and *ought* to have the most influence reduced over the same period. In 2013, 57% of people thought that the Scottish Parliament gives Scotland a stronger voice in the UK, compared with 69% in 2011.

The clear longer term trend shows that attitudes towards the Scottish Government have been more positive on average between 2007, when the first SNP minority government was elected, and 2013 compared with the period from 1999 to 2006. The single exception to this pattern was the proportion who thought that the Scottish Government *ought* to have the most influence over the way Scotland is run (see below).

Attitudes towards the Scottish Government were consistently, and by a substantial margin, more positive than attitudes towards the UK Government. In 2013 the proportion who trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests 'just about always' or 'most of the time' was more than double that for the UK Government (59%, compared with 26%). (See Figure 1 below.) Similar patterns were also observed in relation to trust in the Scottish / UK Governments to make fair decisions, and in relation to the responsiveness of both institutions in listening to people's views before taking decisions.

**Figure 1 Trust in the UK and Scottish Government to act in Scotland's interests? (1999-2007, 2009-2013 % trust 'just about always'/'most of the time')**



In both 2011 and 2013, levels of awareness of the activities of the Scottish Government were similar to awareness of UK Government activities. This is in contrast to the previous pattern from 2004-2010, when awareness of the Scottish Government and its activities was slightly lower than awareness of the activities of the UK Government.

## How does trust in government vary?

In 2013, people's trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests varied by a range of factors including age, constitutional preferences, identification with political parties, and degree of confidence in the accuracy of official statistics published by the Scottish Government.

For example, younger people were more likely than older people to trust the Scottish Government 'just about always' or 'most of the time' to act in Scotland's best interests. Those who identified as SNP supporters, and those who thought

the Scottish Parliament should make all the decisions for Scotland, were more likely to trust the Scottish Government.

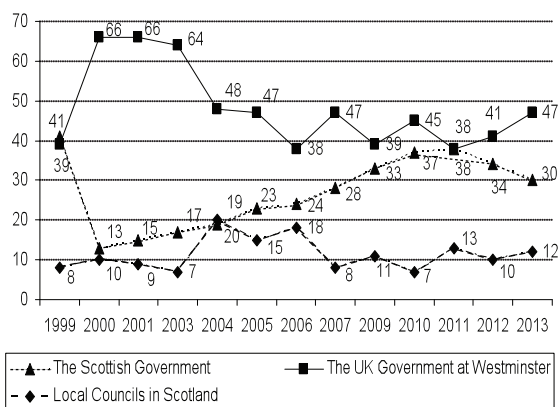
In general, the decrease in people's trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests occurred across all subgroups. There were, however, a few exceptions to this. Levels among the following groups did not decrease between 2011 and 2013: those aged 18-29, those who support independence for Scotland, self-identified SNP supporters, and those who have not seen or heard much about the Scottish Government in the last 12 months.

## Influence over the way Scotland is run

In 2013, less than one-third of people (30%) thought the Scottish had the most influence over the way Scotland is run, compared to almost half (47%) who thought the UK Government had the most influence. The proportion choosing the UK Government was consistently higher over the period 1999-2013 than the proportion choosing the Scottish Government, and the gap has widened substantially since 2011, when the proportions choosing each were equal (38%). (See Figure 2).

Many more people thought that the Scottish Government *ought* to have the most influence over the way Scotland is run (63% in 2013) than think that it *actually does have* the most influence (30%). Indeed, more than one-third of people (37%) believe that the Scottish Government *ought to*, but does not, have most influence over the way Scotland is run. (This figure has not changed significantly since 2011 when it was 38%).

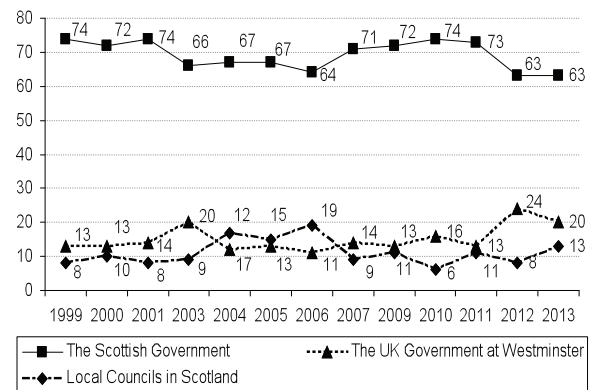
**Figure 2: Who has the most influence over the way Scotland is run? (1999-2007, 2009-2013, %)**



In contrast to the other findings described above which have shown more positive attitudes during the period 2007-2013 as compared to 1999-2006, the percentage who thought that the Scottish Government *ought to have* the most influence over the way Scotland is run, has been stable. When averaged over the periods 1999-2006 and 2007-

2013, this proportion has remained steady at 69%. (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Who ought to have the most influence over the way Scotland is run? (1999-2007, 2009-2013, %)**



The proportion of people who thought the Scottish Government *ought* to have, but *does not* have, most influence over the way Scotland is run, varies markedly by political factors, but less so by attitudinal or demographic factors. For example, around half (52%) of those who said 'the Scottish Parliament should make all decisions for Scotland' think that the Scottish Government *ought to have*, but *does not* have, most influence, over the way Scotland is run compared with just 12% of those who said 'the UK Government should make all decisions for Scotland'.

## Changing views of the economy and living standards

Views on how much of a priority the economy is for the Scottish Government have clearly shifted since the recession. Before the recession fewer than 1 in 6 of Scottish people viewed the economy as the Scottish Government's top priority; whereas since 2009 more than 1 in 3 have chosen this above all other options.

In 2013, a quarter of people (24%) in Scotland thought that the economy had improved over the last 12 months, and a further third (31%) that it had stayed the same. Whilst this represents a fairly negative assessment of the state of the economy, it is the least negative assessment since the recession started in 2008. Furthermore, it is substantially less negative than in 2011 when about one in six people (18%) thought the economy had improved over the last 12 months and a further one in six (16%) that it had stayed the same.

By contrast only 15% of people thought that living standards had increased over the last 12 months, and a further 25% that they had stayed the same. Before the recession, the proportion who thought living standards had either increased

or stayed the same was fairly consistent at around 7 in 10. Since 2009, this figure has ranged between 3 in 10 and 4 in 10.

The proportion of people who reported that they were 'struggling on their present income' has been fairly stable since 2010 at around 1 in 6 and is much higher than pre-recession levels (1 in 11 people in 2006). There was evidence of a relationship between people's own personal financial situation and their perception of the general standard of living in Scotland; 69% of those who said they were struggling on their present income believed that the standard of living had fallen in the past 12 months, compared with 53% of those who said they were living comfortably on their present income.

In 2013, as in previous years, the Scottish Government was more likely than the UK Government to be credited with improvements to the economy and less likely than the UK Government to be blamed for a weaker economy. Among those who thought the economy had improved, the proportion crediting the Scottish Government with these improvements has reduced between 2011 and 2013, the proportion crediting these improvements to 'some other reason' increased, and the proportion crediting the UK Government stayed the same.

Those who were more likely to credit the Scottish Government with improvements to the economy were men, older people, SNP supporters, people with a stronger Scottish identity and those on the left of the political spectrum. Those more likely to blame the UK Government for falling economic standards included women, those on lower incomes and people on the left of the political spectrum.

## Changing views about the health service and care for the elderly

Satisfaction with the NHS in Scotland has been increasing steadily since 2005, when 40% of people in Scotland were satisfied with 'the way the NHS runs nowadays in Scotland'. It continued to rise between 2011 (58%) and 2013 (61%). The British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey includes an identical question which asks people across the UK their views on the NHS. Although comparisons are not available across the entire time series, satisfaction with the way the NHS is run in Scotland (as measured by SSA) is fairly similar now to satisfaction levels with the way the NHS is run in the UK (as measured by BSA). This is in contrast to earlier years (2005, 2006) when levels of satisfaction with the NHS in Scotland were lower than those in the UK.

Views on who would provide the most effective and best quality services for older people who need regular help have not changed since 2011. Many more people (approximately

one-half) believe that 'charities would provide better services than Government', than believe 'private companies would provide better services than Government' (approximately one-third). Those who were more likely to think that private companies would provide the best quality services included younger people, people working in the private sector, and people who rated their health as 'good' or 'fair'.

The proportion of people who thought that the government should pay for the care of older people who need regular help with looking after themselves, no matter how much money the person has, declined between 2007 and 2013 (from 55% to 45%). Over the same period there has been an increase in the proportion who thought that who pays for the care should depend on how much money the person has (from 42% in 2007 to 51% in 2013).

In 2013, views on care provision varied in relation to newspaper readership (broadsheet readers were less likely than tabloid readers to think 'government should pay for care, no matter how much money the person has') and education levels (those with standard grades or no formal qualifications were more likely than those with Highers or a degree level education to say the 'government should pay for care, no matter how much money the person has').

## Changing views about social capital and life satisfaction

There was a notable, and perhaps surprising, degree of stability in life satisfaction measures as assessed both before and after the recession in 2008. People in Scotland had high levels of satisfaction with their job, their family and personal life, their standard of living, and their life as a whole, and these measures have all held up strongly following the recession. Below average levels of life satisfaction were found among those who were permanently sick or disabled, the unemployed, those who were divorced or single and among both young people (aged 18-24) and older people (aged over 65). Social connectedness, as measured by contact with, and reliance on, people in the local area was also fairly high, with three quarters of people in Scotland feeling that they had regular contact with people who live locally.

Participation in activities which have a 'civic' dimension was widespread in Scotland, with an increase in both active (e.g. attending a protest, contacting an MP or MSP) and more passive, or socially distant, activities (e.g. signing a petition, giving money to a campaign) since 2009. The degree of social trust which exists (i.e. the extent to which people feel that others can be trusted) was, however, low by comparison, with almost half of the people in Scotland (46%) feeling that 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people'. The levels of social trust were lower in 2000 (when 53% said 'you can't

be too careful in dealing with people'), but have been fairly constant (between 44% and 46% selecting this statement) when asked on four occasions between 2004 and 2013.

Both social connectedness and social trust were found to be quite strongly associated with life satisfaction, with those who are least socially connected, and those least trusting of others, having lower life satisfaction than others.

## Methodology

The Scottish Social Attitudes survey involves c. 1,200 to 1,500 interviews annually, with respondents selected using random probability sampling to ensure that the results are robust and representative of the Scottish population. The 2013 survey, which was conducted between June and October 2013, involved 1,497 face-to-face interviews.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at [socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or on 0131-244 2111.