

Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2014: **Public attitudes to sectarianism in Scotland**

Stephen Hinchliffe, Anna Marcinkiewicz, John Curtice
& Rachel Ormston
(ScotCen Social Research)

This report presents findings from the 2014 *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey (SSA) on public attitudes to sectarianism in Scotland. SSA involves around 1,500 interviews annually, with respondents selected using random probability sampling to ensure that the results are robust and representative of the Scottish population.

Main Findings

- The proportion of people in Scotland who do not identify with any religion increased over the 2000s, from 40% in 1999 to 54% by 2013. However, religious identity and belonging are complex - more people consider themselves to be 'Protestant', 'Catholic' or 'Christian' than say they 'belong' to any particular Christian Church.
- Catholics and Protestants appear to be very well integrated in Scotland. Very few (5% or less) Catholics or Protestants in Scotland do not know anyone of the other faith.
- People give very different responses to questions about sectarianism in Scotland depending on the language used to describe it ('sectarianism' vs. 'prejudice against Catholics/Protestants'), the frame of reference (local vs. national), and whether or not the questions are about general perceptions or personal experience.
- 88% of respondents believe that sectarianism is a problem in Scotland, but many (69%) believe that it is only a problem in certain areas (most commonly Glasgow or the West of Scotland). 19% see it as a problem throughout Scotland.
- There is a widespread perception of religious prejudice against Catholics and Protestants in Scotland, with 54% saying Catholics are the subject of at least 'some' prejudice and 41% saying the same of Protestants.
- However, people are much less likely to believe that specific examples of anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant discrimination are commonplace. Just under a quarter (24%) thought being Catholic stops people getting a job or a promotion they deserve either some of the time or a lot of the time. A lower proportion said the same of protestants (17%). People are also less inclined to believe that either Catholics or Protestants are likely to experience discrimination or harassment in their own area (9%/8%) compared with Scotland as a whole (35%/28%).
- When asked about their own experiences, 14% of people in Scotland say they have experienced some form of religious discrimination or exclusion at some point in their lives. Those who identified as Catholic were more likely to say they had experienced some form of discrimination or exclusion based on their religion than were those who identified as Protestant.
- Football is the most commonly mentioned factor people believe contributes to sectarianism in Scotland (88% mentioned it, and 55% thought it was the main factor). The next most commonly mentioned contributory factors were loyalist (including Orange Order) marches (79% mentioned it, and 13% thought it the main factor) and Irish Republican marches (70% mentioned it, and 3% thought it the main factor).
- Families (58%) and schools (55%) are most commonly viewed as best placed to tackle sectarianism, although 50% also viewed either football clubs or football authorities as having a role in this respect.

Introduction

This report presents findings from the 2014 *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey (SSA) on public attitudes to sectarianism. It is intended to fill a gap in the evidence base in detailed information about attitudes towards and beliefs about sectarianism across Scotland as a whole. Commissioned by the Scottish Government, following advice from the independent Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism (established by the Scottish Government in 2012) the report is part of a programme of research aiming to improve the evidence on sectarianism in Scotland.

Religion, football and social ties

Scotland has become an increasingly secular society: the proportion of Scots who do not identify with any religion has increased since the 2000s, from 40% in 1999 to 54% by 2013. Although this figure fell back in 2014, this appears to be an artefact of questionnaire content and ordering effects.

The increasing secularisation in Scottish society in recent decades has particularly affected affiliation with the Church of Scotland, which fell from 35% in 1999 to 21% in 2014. The proportion claiming belonging to the Catholic church barely changed over the same period. However, people's willingness to acknowledge a religious affiliation is clearly affected by how they are asked and in what context. More people consider themselves to be Protestant, Catholic or Christian than say they 'belong' to any Christian church.

Religious identity appears to matter more to those who consider themselves to be Catholic compared with those who identify as Protestant. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Catholics say being Catholic is an important part of who they are, compared with 45% of Protestants who say the same about their religious identity. Catholics are also more likely to claim to attend church more regularly.

Catholics and Protestants appear to be very well integrated in Scotland. Very few (5% or less) Catholics or Protestants in Scotland do not know anyone of the other faith. The majority of Protestants have a close friend who is Catholic, and vice versa.

Given the perceived associations between sectarianism and football allegiance, the survey looked at the level of support for different Scottish football teams. Most Scots (58%) do not support any Scottish football team. The most widely supported by far are Celtic

and Rangers, each supported by 12% of the Scottish population. While just over half of each of these clubs' support comes from people of the religion they have been historically associated with, they also gain support from people of other religions or none. However, relatively few Catholics support Rangers or Protestants Celtic.

General perceptions of sectarian prejudice and discrimination in Scotland

There is a widespread perception that religious prejudice against Catholics and Protestants exists in Scotland, though more people believe that Catholics are the subject of at least some prejudice (54%) than say the same of Protestants (41%). However, people are much less likely to believe that more explicit examples of anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant discrimination are commonplace in Scotland today. For example, only 24%/17% believed that being Catholic/Protestant stops people from getting a job or promotion they deserve either some of the time or a lot of the time.

People are also less inclined to believe that either Catholics or Protestants are likely to experience discrimination or harassment in their own area (9% for Catholics and 8% for Protestants) compared with Scotland as a whole (35% for Catholics and 28% for Protestants).

For many people, sectarianism appears to be viewed as a problem that happens elsewhere in Scotland. While the vast majority of people in Scotland believe that sectarianism is a problem (88%), over two-thirds 69% view it as a problem for specific areas of Scotland, with just 19% seeing it as a problem throughout Scotland. Glasgow and the West of Scotland generally were the most commonly mentioned areas where people saw a problem with sectarianism – around a third thought it was only a problem for Glasgow or the West of Scotland. However, those who actually live in the West of Scotland were more likely to see sectarianism as a problem across the whole of Scotland.

Public views on whether or not Catholic-Protestant relationships have improved over the last decade were divided – 47% thought they had, while 40% thought they had stayed the same. Only 3% felt relationships had worsened. Whether or not people think inter-faith relationships have improved over recent years, there is some scepticism about whether it will ever be possible to completely eradicate sectarianism

in Scotland – 66% agreed that ‘Sectarianism will always exist in Scotland’. However, two-thirds of those who believe Catholic-Protestant relationships have improved and over half of those who think that there is little or no general prejudice against Catholics or Protestants in Scotland nowadays nonetheless thought that sectarianism will always exist here. This may suggest that people do not necessarily expect the level of sectarianism in Scotland in the future to equate to serious anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant prejudice, discrimination or harassment. It also raises questions about how people understand and conceptualise sectarianism.

Perceptions of responsibility for sectarianism

Football is the most commonly mentioned factor people believe contributes to sectarianism in Scotland (88% mentioned it, and 55% thought it was the main factor). The next most commonly mentioned contributory factors were loyalist (including Orange Order) marches (79% mentioned it, and 13% thought it the main factor) and Irish Republican marches (70% mentioned it, and 3% thought it the main factor).

Around a third thought each of denominational schools¹, the internet and social media, and more traditional media contributed to some extent to sectarianism in Scotland.

When it comes to tackling sectarianism, families (58%) and schools (55%) are most commonly viewed as best placed to tackle sectarian attitudes in Scotland. However, 50% also view either football clubs or football authorities as having a role in this respect.

Although fewer people view the Scottish Government (31%), churches (22%), local community organisations (19%), local authorities (15%) or the police (14%) as best placed to tackle sectarian views, the fact that no one organisation or group attracted an overwhelming majority suggests that the public may support an approach which involves multiple organisations in tackling sectarianism.

The public is divided, however, on whether the Scottish Government gives the right amount of attention to sectarianism (47%) or too little (31%). Only 10% thought they gave it too much attention.

¹ Schools associated with a particular religious denomination – in Scotland, this is most commonly the Catholic Church.

Overt and subtle expressions of difference

In addition to exploring attitudes to sectarianism directly, the survey also explored attitudes to religious difference in Scotland. While such expressions of difference do not necessarily equate to sectarianism, the survey indicates that some public expressions of religious identity are viewed by some as contributing to sectarianism in Scotland. At the same time, people’s level of comfort with religious difference in their own lives might be seen as part of the social and cultural context that either allows sectarianism to persist, or may help ensure Scotland can become sectarianism-free.

Marches

Loyalist (for example Orange Order) and Irish republican marches are not widely supported by the Scottish public. Only 14% supported the right of loyalist organisations and 11% the right of republican organisations to march along public streets in Scotland. More than half opposed the right of each kind of organisation to march. Catholics were the most likely to oppose both loyalist and republican marches. 72% of Catholics opposed the rights of loyalist organisations to march, and 69% opposed the rights of Irish republican organisations. A majority (albeit a smaller one) of Protestants also opposed the right of each kind of organisation to march (54%/61%). In contrast, lower proportions (49%/50%) of those with no religion opposed each type of march.

Denominational schools

Overall, 43% of people in Scotland oppose denominational schools, while 25% support them. Opposition has fallen in recent years, from 50% in 2007. Catholics were much more likely to support denominational schools than other groups. 62% of Catholics supported denominational schools, while 18% opposed them.

Attitudes to jokes about religious groups and sectarian language

While only 5% thought that jokes about Catholics or Protestants were always acceptable, a further 34% thought they were acceptable if they did not offend anyone who heard them. Catholics and Protestants themselves were more likely than were those with no religion or those of other Christian identities to

think such jokes acceptable, as were older people compared with younger people.

Most people found sectarian language unacceptable, and the majority of those who did so reported that they would say something about it if someone used these terms. Only 8.9% thought that the terms 'Hun' and 'Fenian' were acceptable.

Faith, family and friends

Very few respondents (1.2%) admitted they would be unhappy if a Catholic or a Protestant married into their family. Previous SSA reports found that people are much more likely to feel unhappy about the prospect of people from other religious groups, including Muslims and Hindus joining their family.

Christians, be they Protestant or Catholic or neither, were less likely to say they feel more comfortable around people of similar religious beliefs (or none) than were people of no religion or non-Christian religions. 34% of those with no religious beliefs and 45% of those of non-Christian religions compared with 15% of Protestants, 16% of Catholics and 22% of other Christians agreed that they felt more comfortable with people of similar beliefs to themselves. Men, those living in the West of Scotland, people who said that their religion (or lack of it) was an important part of their identity, and people who attended religious services regularly were all more likely to say they felt more comfortable around those of similar beliefs to themselves.

Personal experience of religious discrimination or exclusion

14% of people in Scotland say they have experienced some form of religious discrimination or exclusion at some point in their lives. This includes 5% who did not attend or were not invited to a social event, 5%

who believe they were refused a job or promotion and 7% who say they have been harassed or threatened because of their religious beliefs or background. The proportion reporting 'ever' having experienced discrimination was higher than that recorded by other surveys that ask about a more recent time period (for example, the Scottish Household Survey asks about experiences of discrimination and harassment in the last 3 years).

Catholics were more likely to say they had experienced some form of discrimination or exclusion based on their religion than were Protestants.

A minority (14%) of people in Scotland has ever thought twice about revealing their religion or lack of it to others. Those more likely to have thought twice about whether to tell others about their religion (or lack of it) included 18-24 year olds, men, people with family connections with Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland and those who agree that religion is an important part of their identity. Out of all religious groups, Protestants were the least likely to have doubts about telling others about their religion (6% compared with 11-26% for other groups).

Methods

The *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey (SSA) is carried out by ScotCen Social Research, an independent research organisation based in Edinburgh. The 2014 survey involved 1,501 interviews with a representative probability sample of the Scottish population (a response rate of 54%). Interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's home, with a self-completion element for questions that were particularly sensitive or where there were concerns about respondents giving 'socially desirable' answers. Data are weighted to adjust for known non-response bias and to ensure they reflect the sex-age profile of the Scottish population.

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 or on 0131-244 2111.