

Scottish Social Attitudes 2019: Attitudes to government and political engagement

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SCOTTISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES SURVEY 2019:

ATTITUDES TO GOVERNMENT, THE ECONOMY
AND THE HEALTH SERVICE, AND POLITICAL
ENGAGEMENT IN SCOTLAND

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Key findings

20 years of Scottish Social Attitudes 1999-2019	Attitudes to government and the Scottish Parliament
<p>Over the last 20 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of trust in the Scottish Government to act in Scotland’s best interests and to make fair decisions have been consistently higher than trust in the UK Government. • The proportions of people who think the Scottish Government is good at listening to people before taking decisions, and that the Scottish Parliament gives ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed, have increased by 19 and 25 percentage points respectively since 2004. • Views on which body ought to have the most influence over how Scotland is run have remained relatively stable, with the Scottish Government typically favoured by two-thirds to three-quarters, and the UK Government by between around 1 in 5 and 1 in 10 in most years. • Between 1999 and 2006 support for increasing taxation and spending was above the level of support for keeping it the same, after which this reversed for almost a decade. Since 2015 support for increasing taxation and spending has been higher than for keeping it the same. • Satisfaction with the NHS has increased from a low of 40% in 2005 to a high of 65% in 2019. At the same time, in almost every year, more people think standards in the NHS have fallen since the previous year than think they have increased. • Between 2004 and 2007 more people felt that the economy had grown stronger than felt it had weakened. This picture was reversed in 2009 following the global financial crash. Views became more positive from 2013 despite another dip following the EU referendum in 2016. Views on the standard of living followed a similar pattern except that views on the standard of living continued to improve until 2017 when the proportion believing the standard of living had either increased or stayed the same returned to 2013 levels. • The importance attached to voting in elections has increased over time – from just under 8 in 10 considering it important to vote in 2004 to around 9 in 10 considering it important to do so in 2019. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019, 61% of people said they trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests, compared with 15% who said they trusted the UK Government to do so. • The Scottish Government (37%) and local councils (29%) were more likely to be trusted ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ to make fair decisions than the UK Government (11%). • Over half of people (51%) thought the Scottish Government was good at listening to people before it made decisions, compared with 45% who thought this of their local council, and 15% who thought this of the UK Government. • Substantially more people thought the Scottish Parliament was giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK (61%) than thought it was giving Scotland a weaker voice (5%). Similarly over half thought the Scottish Parliament was giving ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed (56%) than thought it was giving them less say (6%). • Views were fairly evenly split on which government had the most influence over the way Scotland is run, with 40% saying that the Scottish Government did, and 42% saying that the UK Government did. Almost three-quarters (73%) thought the Scottish Government ought to have the most influence, compared with 15% who thought the UK Government ought to have the most influence.

<h3>Views on the economy and the standard of living in Scotland</h3>	<h3>Views on the National Health Service in Scotland</h3>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people thought that Scotland's economy had grown weaker (42%) over the last 12 months than thought it had grown stronger (17%). 28% thought it had stayed the same. • Around half of people (49%) thought the standard of living in Scotland had fallen in the past year, while 16% thought it had increased. Thirty percent thought it had stayed the same. • Of those who thought that the economy had grown stronger, over two-thirds (68%) said this was a result of Scottish Government policies, compared with 11% who said it was a result of UK Government policies. Similarly, of those who thought that the standard of living had improved people were more likely to 'credit' Scottish Government policies (44%) than those of the UK Government (19%). • Among those who thought that the economy had grown weaker over the last 12 months, people were more likely to say this was a result of UK Government policies (54%) than Scottish Government policies (19%). Similarly, among those who thought that living standards had fallen, the policies of the UK Government were more likely to be 'blamed' (57%) than those of the Scottish Government (17%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of people in 2019 (65%) were satisfied with how the National Health Service is running, while one-fifth (20%) were dissatisfied. • Despite overall satisfaction being high, when asked if the standard of the health service had increased or fallen in the last year, 45% of people thought the standard had fallen, 37% thought it had stayed the same and 9% thought it had increased. • Of those who thought the standard of the health service had increased, over half (51%) said this was a result of Scottish Government policies, compared with 11% who said it was a result of UK Government policies. • Among those who thought the standard of the health service had fallen, around one-fifth (19%) said this was a result of Scottish Government policies compared with 44% who thought it was a result of UK Government policies.
<h3>Views on level of tax and spend and government priorities</h3>	<h3>Political engagement</h3>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over half of people in Scotland (55%) thought the government should increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits, compared with 37% who thought taxation and spending should be kept the same and 4% who thought taxation and spending should be reduced. • Over half of people (55%) agreed that the government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off, compared with one-fifth (20%) who disagreed that they should. • Asked to choose what they thought the Scottish Government's priorities should be in 2019, the three priorities selected most often were: to help the economy to grow faster (23%), improve standards of education (18%), and improve people's health (17%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large majority thought it was important to vote in Scottish Parliament elections (94%), local council elections (91%) and UK Parliament elections (89%). • Around a quarter of people said they talk about politics every day (24%), 29% talk about it less often but at least a few times a week, around a fifth (21%) talk about it at least a few times a month, while 8% talk about it a few times a year. Around a fifth (17%) never talk about politics. • The most common way people had registered what they thought about an issue was by signing a petition, with 45% having done so in the last few years. Around 3 in 10 (28%) people had contacted their local council and 21% had given money to a campaign or organisation. Two-thirds of people (67%) had done at least one of the civic activities listed.

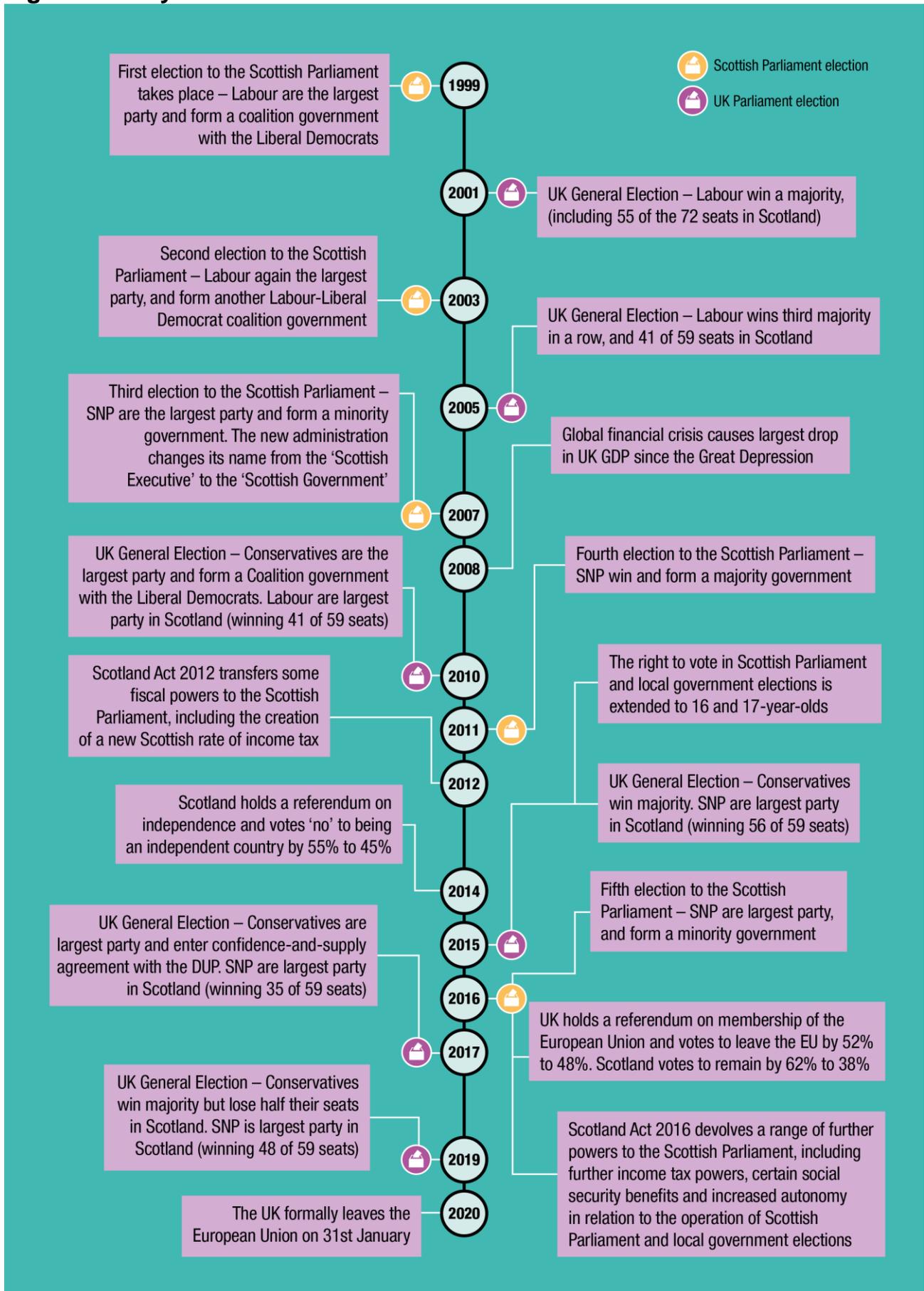
Chapter 1 – Introduction

This report presents findings from the 2019 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSA), conducted between August 2019 and March 2020. It covers attitudes to government and public services and seeks to answer the following key questions:

- How have attitudes to government, the health service, the economy and standards of living changed over time?
- What factors are related to trust in government and who people think has, and ought to have, most influence over the way Scotland is run?
- What are people's views on who is responsible for changes in the NHS, the economy and standards of living?
- How engaged the Scottish public are politically – do they talk about politics with their friends, register what they think about an issue or consider it important to vote in elections?

This year's survey marks a milestone for SSA because it is the 20th anniversary of the survey. In that time the political and constitutional landscape of Scotland has changed markedly. Figure 1.1 provides a timeline of the key events that have occurred since SSA first started in 1999.

Figure 1.1 Key events 1999 to 2019



Political and constitutional context

There have been marked changes in the political and constitutional landscape since SSA first started 20 years ago. The Scottish Parliament was established in May 1999 and the first election returned a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition.

In the second election to the Scottish Parliament in 2003 another Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition was formed. Since then voting patterns have shifted noticeably, and the Scottish National Party (SNP) has been the largest party in each of the subsequent Scottish Parliament elections, forming minority governments in 2007 and 2016 and a majority government in 2011.

The 2007 Scottish Parliament election that returned an SNP minority government was an historic event in Scottish politics for several reasons. This was the first change in the governing party in the Scottish Parliament since its establishment in 1999. It was also the first time since devolution that two different political parties led the administrations in Edinburgh and in London. It was the first election of a government with a manifesto commitment to hold a referendum on independence.

The global financial crisis of 2008 caused a worldwide recession and, until the coronavirus pandemic, what was the largest drop in UK GDP since the Great Depression.¹

The 2010 UK General Election returned a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, the first UK coalition government in post-war history. It was also the first UK election since the creation of the Scottish Parliament not to return a Labour government. UK General Elections in both 2015 and again in 2017 returned Conservative governments but with the latter being a minority Conservative government.

The Scotland Act 2012 devolved further powers to the Scottish Parliament and meant it would be responsible for raising around a third of its annual budget. New fiscal powers included a Scottish rate of income tax, borrowing powers for the Scottish Government and the power to introduce new taxes subject to agreement with the UK Government. As part of the Act, Scottish Ministers were also given powers relating to the misuse of drugs, the power to set the national speed limit and powers relating to the administration of elections to the Scottish Parliament.

A referendum on whether Scotland should be an independent country took place in 2014 with 55% voting 'no' and 45% voting 'yes'. Following the referendum, the Smith Commission for further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament was established. The Scotland Act 2016 followed, transferring to the Scottish Parliament a further range of new powers, including the ability to set the rates and thresholds of income tax, control over certain aspects of welfare policy and benefits, as well as management of the Crown Estate and Air Passenger Duty.

¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/bulletins/gdpfirstquarterlyestimateuk/apriltojune2020>

The referendum on the UK's membership of the EU in 2016 led to renewed constitutional debate in Scotland, with the majority (62%) of those voting in Scotland voting to remain compared with the overall majority across the UK (52%) voting to leave.

The ongoing Brexit process that started after the 2016 referendum also provides an important political context for SSA 2019. The fieldwork period, which began in August 2019, spanned a period of considerable upheaval, including UK Parliamentary deadlock over EU exit legislation, the prorogation of the UK Parliament, and its subsequent reversal following legal challenge, and the calling of a December general election. At that election, the Conservative Party increased its majority, while at the same time, the SNP increased its seat share in Scotland (winning 48 of 59 seats).

Following the SNP's strong performance at the general election, the Scottish Government requested the transfer of powers to the Scottish Parliament to allow for a second independence referendum, arguing that the election result and the fact that a majority of those who voted in Scotland had voted to remain in the European Union in the 2016 referendum gave the Scottish Parliament a mandate to hold a second independence referendum. In January 2020, the Prime Minister wrote to the First Minister refusing the request. The new majority UK Government broke the previous UK Parliamentary deadlock on Brexit, and the UK officially left the EU on 31st January 2020.

Economic context

The early 2000s saw the continuation of relatively high economic growth, although unemployment was higher than current standards. However, falls in global productivity, the financial crisis in 2008 and sovereign debt crises in the Eurozone in the early 2010s have seen a protracted period of lower growth, accompanied by a period of lower interest rates. More recently, there has been increased uncertainty for the economy associated with the UK's exit from the EU and the potential implications for international trade, investment and movement of people.

The Scottish economy slowed in 2019, with growth of 0.7% relative to 1.7% in 2018 and 1.1% in 2017,² which was an improvement on some of the quarters in 2015/6 where the economy either stagnated or in some cases contracted. This growth has been found across a broad range of economic sectors, including services, construction and production sectors.³ The pattern of growth was also relatively volatile during 2019 with economic activity influenced by the Brexit deadlines in March and October. The labour market in Scotland performed strongly through

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/first-estimate-of-gdp-2020-q2/>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2019/06/state-economy-june-2019/documents/office-chief-economic-adviser-state-economy/office-chief-economic-adviser-state-economy/govscot%3Adocument/office-chief-economic-adviser-state-economy.pdf>

2019 by historical standards, with the Scottish employment rate reaching a record high (75.9%) and unemployment a record low (3.2%) during the year.⁴

The National Health Service in Scotland

The National Health Service (NHS) in Scotland, as in other areas of the UK, faces challenges from an increased demand for its services. This is caused by many factors, including an ageing population that require a greater amount of healthcare services than their younger counterparts. This rising demand puts pressure on the ability of the NHS in Scotland to meet its waiting time targets, two out of eight of which were missed in 2018/19.⁵ Audit Scotland highlighted that the Scottish Government's 2020 Vision for healthcare will not be met on time, and mentioned the pace of integration of health and social care has been too slow.⁶ However they also mentioned that, despite funding pressures, patients' experience of hospital care has improved with over 8 in 10 (86%) rating their full inpatient experience very positively in 2018.^{7,8}

Survey Methodology

Run annually by the Scottish Centre for Social Research since 1999, the Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey provides a robust and reliable picture of changing public attitudes over time. 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, but for many questions the time series stretch back to 1999. SSA has, therefore, tracked changing attitudes to government and public services since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and throughout the past 20 years which has seen both constitutional changes and the economic downturn of 2008.

SSA is a face-to-face survey which uses a random sample of all those aged 16 and over living anywhere in Scotland (including the Highlands and islands). Fieldwork for SSA 2019 began on 30th August 2019 and ceased on 18th March 2020, slightly earlier than planned due to the COVID-19 outbreak. A pause in fieldwork took place for five weeks between 6th November 2019 and 12th December 2019 inclusive because of the General Election.

The SSA 2019 sample size was 1022 completed interviews⁹ with an overall response rate of 41%, from an issued sample of 2790 addresses. Data are weighted in order to correct for non-response bias and over-sampling, and to ensure that they reflect the age-sex profile of the Scottish population. Further

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/state-economy-february-2020/pages/1/>

⁵ https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2019/nr_191024_nhs_overview.pdf

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/inpatient-experience-survey-2018-national-results/>

⁹ This excludes the 295 addresses that were out of scope.

technical details about the survey are published in the separate Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2019 technical report at www.gov.scot.

Analysis

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 shown in this publication are calculated using unrounded figures and may differ from the rounded figures shown in the text.

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 and is not intended to imply substantive importance. Further details of significance testing and analysis are included in the separate technical report.

This 20th anniversary SSA publication presents time series data for each question, and sub-group analysis is focused on which groups may have driven changes in attitudes more than others over time for selected questions.

Full data tables for both the time series data and the 2019 sub-group analysis are available as 'supporting files' to this publication.

Fieldwork timing

This report discusses findings from 1999 through to 2019 which has seen a number of Scottish Parliament elections taking place in the same year as SSA collected data from people across Scotland. Elections to the Scottish Parliament were held in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2016. In each case, the election took place in the May of that year and the fieldwork for SSA began after the election, usually between May and July and running for the remainder of the year. So in each case, SSA data for Scottish Parliament election years reflects public attitudes after the new administration has been established. Similarly in the years when a UK General Election was held - 2001, 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2017 – SSA fieldwork started in June or July of those years after the election was held and continued for the remainder of the year. However, as discussed above, in 2019 fieldwork started in August and then was paused during the time of the December UK General Election, leading to fieldwork being delayed and completed in March 2020.

Table 1.1: Election dates in comparison with SSA fieldwork dates 1999 - 2019

Election	SSA Fieldwork
1999 Scottish Parliament and local government elections (May)	May to August 1999
2001 UK general election (June)	June to November 2001
2003 Scottish Parliament and local government elections (May)	May to October 2003
2005 UK general election (May)	July to December 2005
2007 Scottish Parliament and local government elections (May)	May to November 2007
2010 UK general election (May)	June to October 2010
2011 Scottish Parliament election (May)	June to October 2011
2012 Scottish local government elections (May)	August to November 2012
2015 UK General Election (May)	July 2015 to January 2016
2016 Scottish Parliament Election (May)	July 2016 to December 2016
2017 Scottish local government elections (May) 2017 UK General Election (June)	July 2017 to February 2018
2019 UK General Election (December)	August 2019 to March 2020

Chapter 2 – Attitudes to government

This chapter presents findings on attitudes to government in 2019. It describes how the attitudes of people in Scotland towards Scottish, UK and local government have changed since the advent of devolution in 1999.¹⁰ The findings cover:

- Trust in the UK and Scottish Governments to act in Scotland's best long-term interest and trust in local, Scottish and UK Governments to make fair decisions
- Perceptions of the extent to which government at local, Scottish, and UK level is good at listening before taking decisions
- Views of the extent to which the Scottish Parliament gives ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed
- Views on whether having a Scottish Parliament gives Scotland a stronger voice in the UK
- Perceptions of which level of government has, and ought to have, the most influence over how Scotland is run

In this 20th anniversary publication, subgroup analysis has focused on the extent to which the attitudes of particular subgroups have driven overall recorded trends over time for selected questions. Full subgroup breakdowns for 2019 data are available in the 'Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2019: Chapter 2 subgroup variation tables' Excel file published as a 'supporting file' alongside this report.

Trust in Scottish Government and UK Government to work in Scotland's best interests

Since 1999, SSA has asked respondents the degree to which they trust the Scottish Government and UK Government to work in Scotland's best interests.¹¹ As demonstrated by Table 2.1 below, in 2019, 15% reported that they trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests 'just about always', with a further 46% trusting the Scottish Government to do so 'most of the time'. By comparison, 2% reported trusting the UK Government to work in Scotland's best interests 'just about always', with an additional 13% saying that they trusted the UK Government to do so 'most of the time'. Over one-third (37%) said they trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests either 'only some of the time' or 'almost never', while over four-fifths (83%) said this of the UK Government.

¹⁰ The full time series data is available in the 'Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2019: Time series data' Excel file published as a 'supporting file' alongside this report.

¹¹ The following two questions were asked sequentially, with the same set of answer options presented to respondents on a showcard at each question: '*How much do you trust the **UK Government** to work in Scotland's best long-term interest?*', followed by '*Still using the card, how much do you trust the **Scottish Government** to work in Scotland's best interests?*'

Table 2.1: Trust in Scottish Government and UK Government to work in Scotland’s best interests (2019)

	Scottish Government (%)	UK Government (%)
Just about always	15	2
Most of the time	46	13
Only some of the time	27	40
Almost never	10	43
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1022	1022

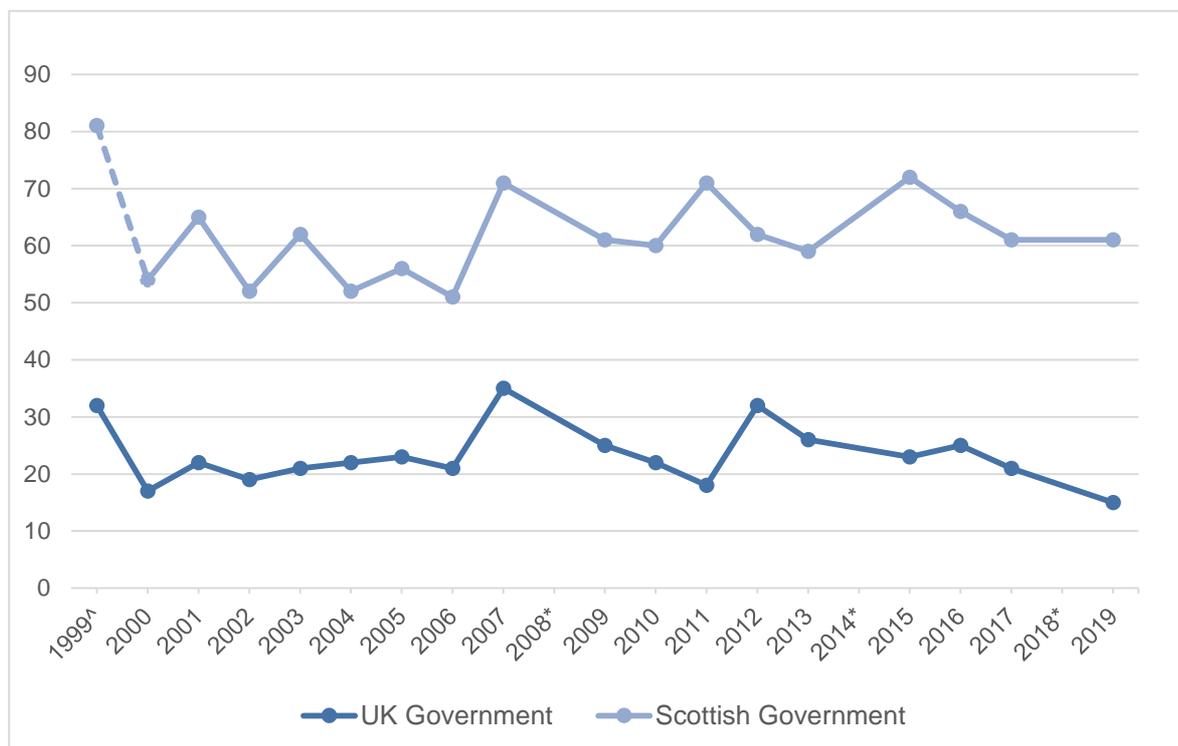
Base: all respondents

To illustrate how attitudes have changed during this period, Figure 2.1 plots the proportion of those who said they trust the Scottish and UK Governments either ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ between 1999 and 2019. Asked prospectively in 1999 ‘how much would you trust a Scottish parliament to work in Scotland’s best interests’, just over four-fifths said that they would ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’. Since 2000, trust in the Scottish Government has fluctuated between a low of just over a half in 2006 to a high of 72% in 2015.

Trust in the Scottish Government has regularly peaked in Scottish Parliament election years, with an apparent ‘election bounce’ observed in 2003, 2007, and 2011. In the most recent Scottish election year, 2016, this effect was not observed, however high levels of trust in the Scottish Government were registered in 2015 – the year immediately following the Scottish independence referendum and the year of the UK Parliament election which saw the SNP win 56 of 59 seats. With just under three-quarters (72%) reporting that they trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ in 2015, this remains the high-water mark for trust in the Scottish Government since 2000.¹² Levels of trust fell to around two-thirds in 2016, dropping again to around three-fifths (61%) in 2017, and remaining the same in 2019.

¹² The question in 1999 was asked prospectively as data collection occurred in the first four months of the Scottish Parliament and asked: ‘How much would you trust a Scottish parliament to work in Scotland’s best interests?’

Figure 2.1: Trust in Scottish Government and UK Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ (1999-2019)^



Base: all respondents

[^]In 1999 this question was asked prospectively: ‘How much would you trust a Scottish parliament to work in Scotland’s best interests?’ From 2000-2004 the question asked: ‘How much do you trust the Scottish Parliament...?’ and from 2005 onwards asked: ‘How much do you trust the Scottish Executive/Government...?’

*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

Over the same period, trust in the UK Government to work in Scotland’s best long-term interests has consistently been measured at a lower level. The proportion of those who trust the UK Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ remained relatively stable between 2000 and 2006 at around 1 in 5, in comparison with levels of trust in the Scottish Parliament during this time which fluctuated around peaks in 2001 and 2003. In 2007, levels of trust in the UK Government also peaked at a high point across all years at just over one-third (35%). While trust in the Scottish Government rose in Scottish Parliament election years throughout the 2000s, a similar variation in levels of trust in the UK Government was not observed in years where a UK election was held, with no recorded peak in 2005 or 2010. Following the peak in 2007 in levels of trust in the UK Government to work in Scotland’s best interests, levels steadily declined to just under one-fifth in 2011. The proportion who trusted the UK Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ then increased somewhat to just over 3 in 10 in 2012. Levels of trust have since fallen away, with the latest figure of 15% marking a two decade low in trust in the UK Government on this measure.

Have the views of particular subgroups driven attitudinal changes over time in levels of trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests?

In order to explore whether particular subgroups may be driving the trends described above, subgroup analysis was conducted on the questions on levels of trust in the Scottish and UK Governments at four distinct points in time: 2000 (the first year of SSA data collection since the commencement of Scottish Parliament business); 2007 (the year of the third Scottish Parliament election, from which the SNP emerged as the largest party at Holyrood); 2015 (the first year of data collection following the Scottish independence referendum held in the previous September); and 2019 (the most recent year of data collection).

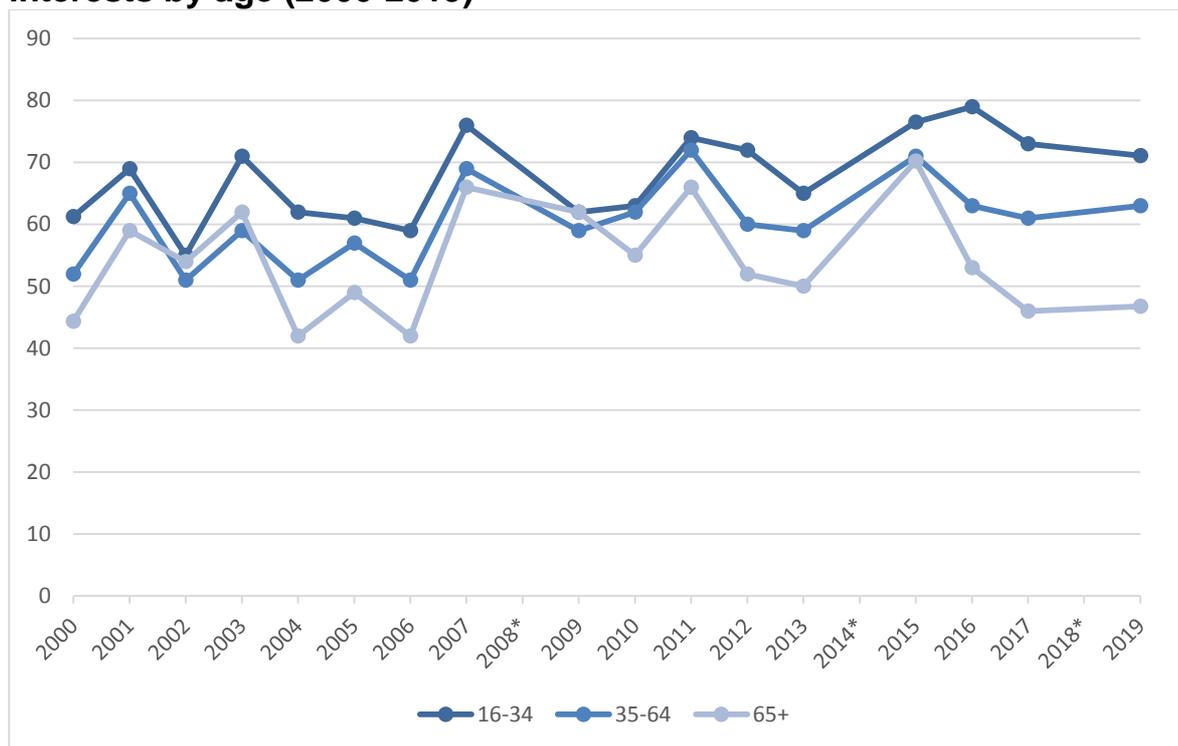
Demographics

Three demographic variables were shown to be associated with the changes in levels of trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests across this time period: age, ability to live on present income, and education. According to 2019 SSA data, those in younger age groups¹³ were more likely than their older counterparts to state that they trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests either 'just about always' or 'most of the time'. Figure 2.2 shows this pattern has been in evidence since 2000, when 61% of those aged 18 to 34 years old reported trusting the Scottish Government 'just about always' or 'most of the time' compared with 44% of those aged 65 and over. The increase in levels of trust shown in 2007 and 2015 was more marked among those aged 65 and over compared with those in the youngest age group, leading to a narrowing of the gap between the age groups, so that in 2015, 77% of those aged 18 to 34 years old trusted the Scottish Government 'just about always' or 'most of the time' compared with 70% of those aged 65 and over. The latest figures suggest that views diverged once more between 2015 and 2019. In 2019, while trust in the Scottish Government on this measure fell back among those in the youngest age group by just 5 percentage points compared with 2015, the equivalent drop among those in the oldest age group was 23 percentage points – resulting in a 24-percentage point gap in levels of trust in the Scottish Government between those in the youngest age group (71%) and those in the oldest age group (47%).¹⁴

¹³ From 2016, those aged 16 and over were included in the SSA sample. Pre-2016, the sample was composed of those aged 18 and over. Thus, for the purposes of analysis, the youngest age group in 2000, 2007, and 2015 consists of those aged 18-34, while in 2019 the youngest age group includes those aged 16 and 17.

¹⁴ A similar pattern is observable when comparing those in the 35-44 age bracket.

Figure 2.2: Trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests by age (2000-2019)



Base: all respondents

Analysis of the relationship between levels of trust in the Scottish Government to act in Scotland’s best interest and actual reported income showed that the views of all income groups have moved in a similar direction and at a similar pace during the past two decades. However, when how people **feel** about their income is examined, a pattern emerges once more of an attitudinal gap narrowing between 2000 and 2015 and subsequently widening.¹⁵ Fifty-eight percent of those who in 2000 reported living comfortably on their present income trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests either ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’, while among those struggling on their present income the figure was 46%. Although a gap of a comparable magnitude was observable in 2007, SSA data from 2015 show that a similar proportion (around three-quarters) of those struggling on their household income trusted the Scottish Government as those who were living comfortably. Between 2015 and 2019 the decline in trust was most marked among those who were struggling on their present income. While under two-thirds of those living comfortably reported trusting the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests, the equivalent proportion among those struggling had fallen back by 30 percent – creating a gap of 19 percentage points in levels of trust in the Scottish Government between those living comfortably on their present income (64%) and those struggling (45%).

¹⁵ From 1999 to 2009 the question answer categories, once collapsed, were: living comfortably on present income, coping, and finding it difficult on present income. These were changed from 2010 onwards to: living comfortably on present income, neither comfortable nor struggling, struggling on present income.

A similar picture emerges when examining trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests by educational level. In 2000, a gap of 18 percentage points was observable between levels of trust in the Scottish Government among those holding a degree-level qualification or above (63%) and those with no formal qualifications (45%). Although levels of trust had increased among both groups by 2007 (to 77% among those with a degree or above and 63% among those with no formal qualifications) and were measured at a similar level once more in 2015, in 2019 while trust in government has remained at over 7 in 10 (72%) among those with at least a degree-level qualification, among those with no formal qualifications trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests has fallen to 42%, resulting in the emergence of a 30-percentage point gap between the two groups.

Constitutional preference and party identification

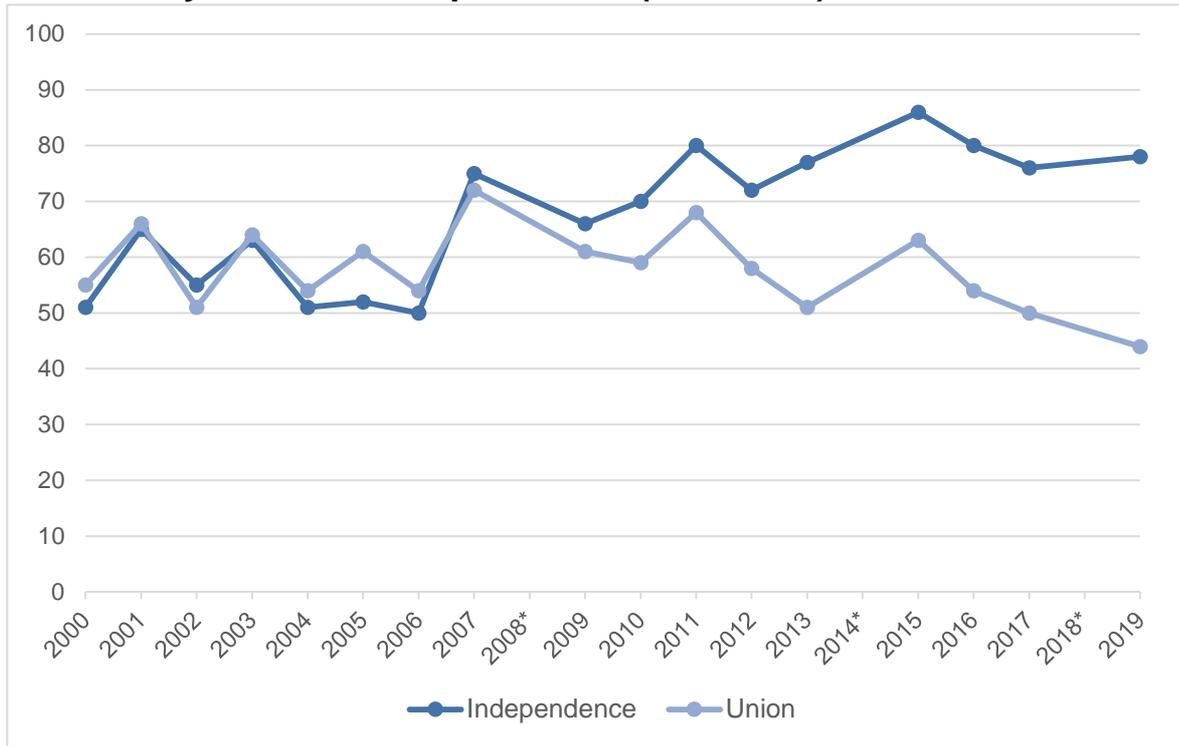
In addition to looking at whether the views of particular demographic subgroups were driving attitudinal changes over time, analysis across the time series also showed that levels of trust in the Scottish Government were associated with constitutional preference, party identification and EU membership.

As Figure 2.3 shows, levels of trust in the Scottish Government to act in Scotland's best interests between 2000 and 2004 were similar for both those who indicated a preference for independence¹⁶ and those who did not, before diverging slightly in 2005 and realigning in 2006. In 2007, levels of trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests either 'just about always' or 'most of the time' rose to around three-quarters irrespective of their preference towards Scotland's constitutional future.

Since 2007, however, a divergence in attitudes has been observed between these groups – among those who indicated a preference for independence, by 2015 trust in the Scottish Government had increased to 86%, while among those who indicated a preference for remaining part of the UK trust had fallen back somewhat to 63%. SSA 2019 data suggest a continuation of this divergence; while trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests is lower among both groups than was the case in 2015, the magnitude of this decline was greater among those who indicated that they wish Scotland to remain part of the UK (among whom trust in the Scottish Government now stands at 44%) than among those who indicated a preference for independence (78% of whom suggest that they trust the Scottish Government). This has resulted in a 34-percentage point gap in levels of trust between these two groups.

¹⁶ The constitutional preference data comes from a five-option question that has been included in SSA since 1999. The two response options that pick up a preference for independence (with or without EU membership), and the three categories that pick up a preference for the union (with the Scottish Parliament having taxation powers, not having taxation powers, or no Scottish Parliament) are combined in the analysis.

Figure 2.3: Trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests by constitutional preference (2000-2019)

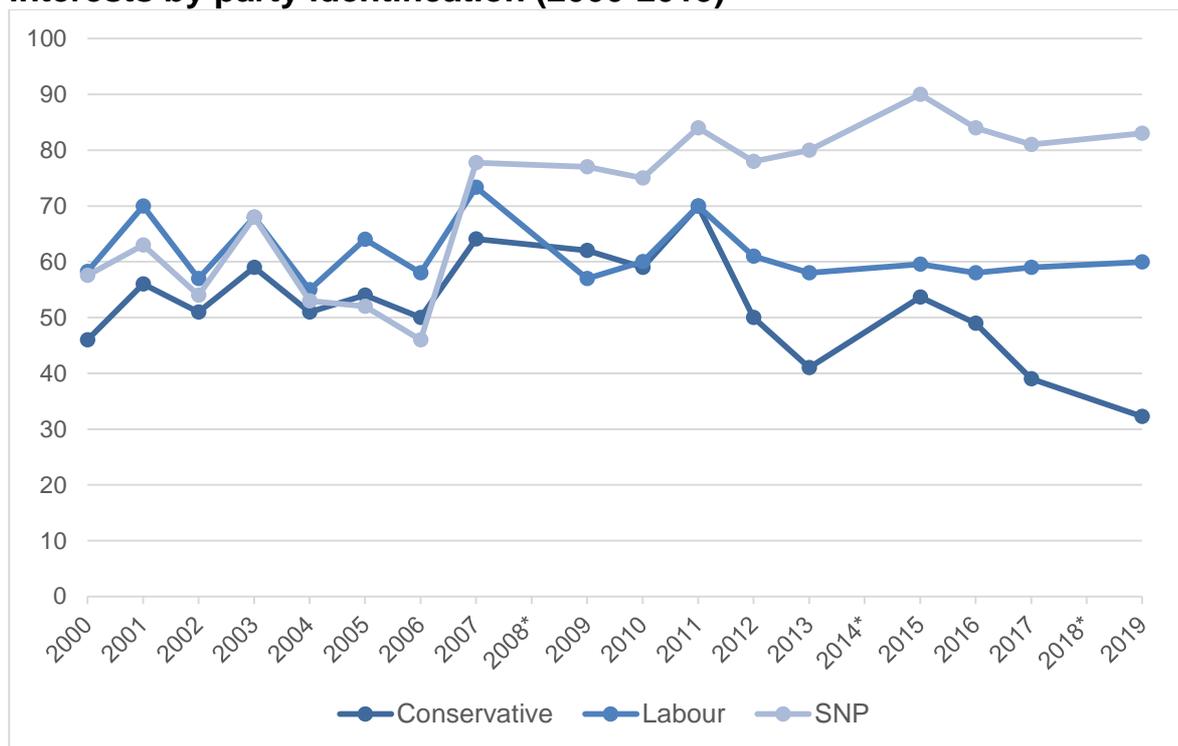


Base: all respondents

*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

A similar pattern can be observed in levels of trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests according to people’s party identification. Figure 2.4 shows that between 2000 and 2007, similar levels of trust were observed among SNP, Labour and Conservative supporters. From 2007 to 2015, however, while trust in the Scottish Government among SNP supporters had risen from 78% to 90%, trust among Labour supporters had fallen back from 73% to 60% and among Conservative supporters from 64% to 54%. According to the most recent data, levels of trust among SNP supporters have remained relatively stable at over four-fifths (83%). Meanwhile, trust among Labour supporters has held up at around three-fifths (60%), while trust among Conservative supporters has declined to around one-third (32%).

Figure 2.4: Trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests by party identification (2000-2019)



Base: all respondents

*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

European Union membership

SSA has also carried a range of questions designed to measure people’s views on Britain’s relationship with the European Union (EU) on a regular basis over the past two decades. In a similar vein to the item on constitutional preference described above, the long-running question which asks respondents to select from a list of five options has been chosen here for analysis. Respondents were asked to choose the option that best reflects what they feel Britain’s future relationship with the EU should look like. Having undergone a minor wording change to reflect the outcome of the 2016 EU referendum,¹⁷ the question wording in 2019 was:

Leaving aside the result of the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, what do you think Britain's policy should be...

*...should it leave the European Union,
 stay in the EU and try to **reduce** the EU's powers,
 stay in the EU and keep the EU's powers as they are,
 stay in the EU and try to **increase** the EU's powers,
 or, work for the formation of a single European government?*

¹⁷ Prior to 2016, the question stem read ‘Do you think Britain's long-term policy should be...’. Response options remain unchanged.

In order to understand the nature of the relationship between trust in the Scottish Government and attitudes towards the European Union, the responses of those who indicated that their preferred policy would be to 'leave the European Union' – i.e. those who selected the first option when asked about their attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the European Union – were compared with the responses of those who selected one of the remaining four options.

In 2000, a difference of around 16 percentage points was apparent in levels of trust in the Scottish Government between those who expressed a preference for leaving the EU (41%) and those who wanted to remain (with the EU's powers either reduced, increased or staying the same) or form a single European government (56%). However, by 2015 this difference had disappeared, with those who suggested that Britain should leave the EU reporting similar levels of trust in the Scottish Government (70%) as their counterparts who wanted to remain (with the EU's powers either reduced, increased or staying the same) or form a single European government (73%).

In 2019, however, while levels of trust among those who wanted to remain (with the EU's powers either reduced, increased or staying the same) or form a single European government remained relatively stable (at 68%) when compared with 2015 figures, among those who indicated a preference for leaving the EU the proportion who trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests had fallen by 30 percentage points to around 2 in 5 (40%).

Have particular subgroups driven attitudinal changes over time in levels of trust in the UK Government to work in Scotland's best interests?

On the issue of trust in the UK Government to work in Scotland's best long-term interests, the trend analysis shows that the levels of trust were relatively stable throughout the 2000s at between one-fifth and one-quarter. A peak of 35% was reached in 2007 before a decline in levels of trust to a low of 15% recorded in 2019 (see Figure 2.1). Analysis was carried out to explore whether these changes were more likely among particular demographic groups than others.

Demographics

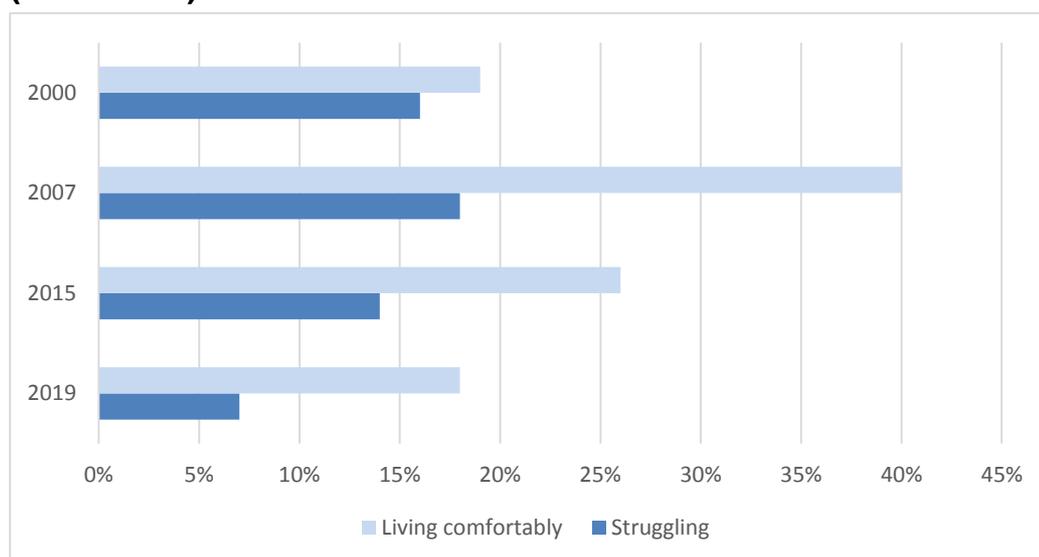
While levels of trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests varied by age and education, there was little evidence of a similar relationship between levels of trust in the UK Government and age or educational level. Rather, attitudes have shifted at a similar pace among different age groups and those with differing levels of educational attainment.

As is the case with levels of trust in the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests, when levels of trust are examined in accordance with how people feel about their household income, an attitudinal gap emerged over time (see Figure 2.5). In 2000 levels of trust in the UK Government were broadly similar between those who reported living comfortably on their present income and those who were struggling to do so. Between 2000 and 2007 however the proportion of those who were living comfortably on their present income that trusted the UK

Government to work in Scotland’s best interests either ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ doubled from 19% to 40%, whereas levels of trust among those who were struggling remained stable (16% in 2000 compared with 18% in 2007).

Despite levels of trust in the UK Government having declined by 14 percentage points among those who reported living comfortably on their present income between 2007 and 2015, members of this group remained more likely to assert that they trusted the UK Government to work in Scotland’s best interests (26%) than those who were struggling (14%). In 2019 this gap persists, although trust in the UK Government has fallen back further among both groups to around 1 in 5 (18%) of those living comfortably and less than 1 in 10 (7%) of those struggling on their present income.

Figure 2.5: Trust in the UK Government by feelings about household income (2000-2019)



Base: all respondents

Constitutional preference and party identification

While those who express a preference for Scotland to be an independent country (on the five-point item on constitutional preference discussed above) were more likely to indicate that they trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests than their counterparts, who express a preference for Scotland to remain part of the UK, the opposite was the case when it came to levels of trust in the UK Government.

Levels of trust in the UK Government have been consistently higher since 2000 among those who believe Scotland should remain part of the UK compared with those who expressed a preference for independence. In 2000 those who believed that Scotland should remain part of the UK (22%) were more than twice as likely as their counterparts who expressed a preference for independence (10%) to have said they trusted the UK Government. Although in 2007 trust in the UK Government peaked among both groups this increase was greater among those who favoured Scotland remaining part of the UK. The result of this development was the attitudinal gap between those on both sides of the constitutional debate increasing

to 29 percentage points by 2015. The decline in levels of trust in the UK Government to work in Scotland's best interests between 2015 and 2019 has been more marked among those who believe Scotland should remain part of the UK (from 35% in 2015 to 27% in 2019) whereas the proportion of those who expressed a preference for independence that trust the UK Government to work in Scotland's best interests has remained the same at just over 1 in 20 (6%).

This pattern was to some extent mirrored when examining the distribution of responses to the question of trust in the UK Government by party identification. The attitudes of SNP supporters follow a similar trajectory over time to those who believe Scotland should be an independent country. Meanwhile, having been relatively unified in 2000 and 2007, views among Labour and Conservative supporters can be seen to have diverged in 2015 (following the result of the 2015 general election at which the Conservatives won an overall majority). In 2015 trust in the UK Government was down by 19 percentage points on 2007 figures among Labour supporters, yet 11 percentage points up on the equivalent figure among Conservatives. While the scale of these differences has remained relatively stable in 2019, trust in the UK Government has fallen among supporters of all three major parties since 2015.

European Union membership

While in both 2000 and 2015 a difference of 11 percentage points was observable in levels of trust in the UK Government between those who expressed a preference for leaving the European Union and wanted to remain (with the EU's powers either reduced, increased or staying the same) or form a single European government, it was among those who expressed a preference for leaving the EU that trust in the UK Government was lowest. In 2019, however, this position reversed to the extent that a gap of around 12 percentage points was recorded in levels of trust in the UK Government between those who expressed a preference for leaving the EU and those who wanted to remain (with the EU's powers either reduced, increased or staying the same) or form a single European government— with levels of trust in 2019 twice as high among the former group (26%) as among the latter group (13%).

Trust in Scottish Government, UK Government, and local councils to make fair decisions

In addition to being asked about the extent to which they trust the Scottish Government and UK Government to work in Scotland's best interests, respondents were also asked about their level of trust in three levels of government to make 'fair decisions':

*How much do you trust the **UK Government/Scottish Government/local council** to make fair decisions? By fair decisions I mean decisions that are fair to different groups of people in the UK / Scotland / your local area*

Table 2.2 below shows that in 2019 while less than 1 in 20 trust any of the three institutions 'a great deal' to make fair decisions, just over a third trust the Scottish

Government to make fair decisions either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ while the equivalent proportion for local councils stands at around one-quarter and for the UK Government at just over 1 in 10. Just over one-fifth (22%) reported that they trust the Scottish Government to make fair decisions either ‘not very much’ or ‘not at all’, while a similar proportion (23%) said the same of their local council. Meanwhile, just over a half (51%) said that they trust the UK Government to make fair decisions either ‘not very much’ or ‘not at all’.

Table 2.2: Trust in Scottish Government, UK Government, and local councils to make fair decisions (2019)

	Scottish Government (%)	UK Government (%)	Local Council (%)
A great deal	4	1	3
Quite a lot	33	11	25
Some	39	36	39
Not very much	17	33	16
Not at all	5	18	7
Don't know	1	1	9
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1022</i>	<i>1022</i>	<i>1022</i>

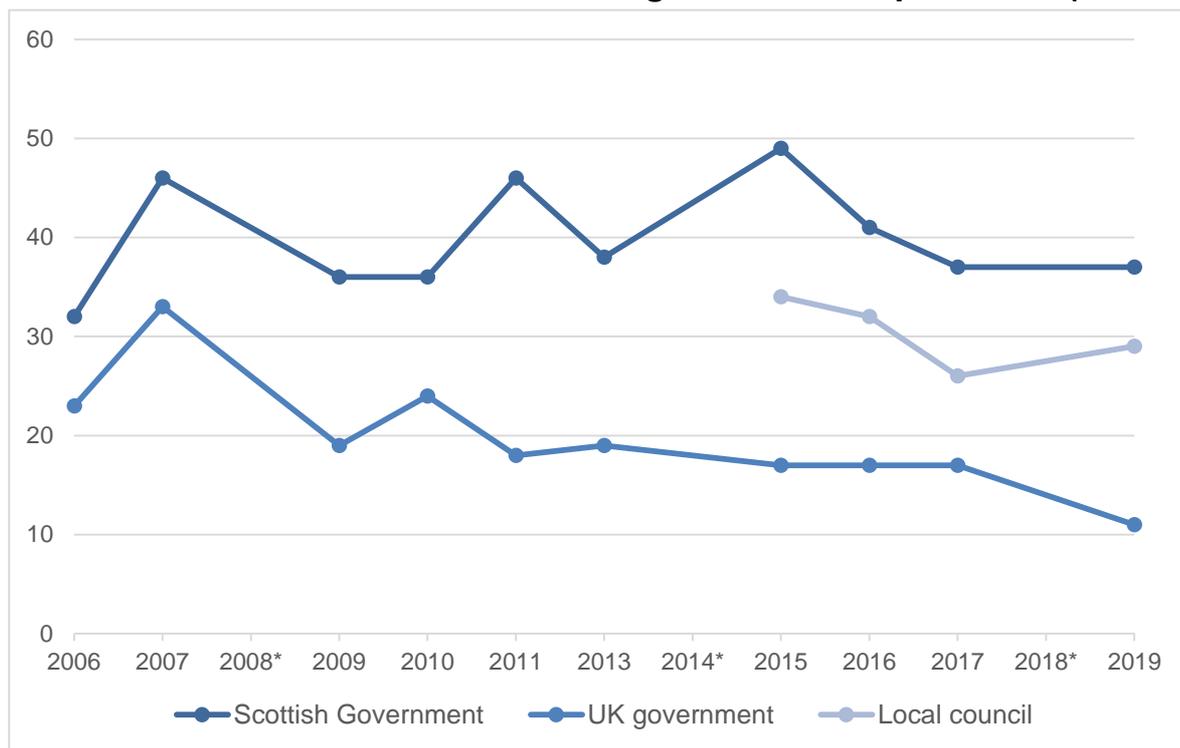
Base: all respondents

Figure 2.6 demonstrates how the proportion who trust each level of government to make fair decisions either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ shifted between 2006 and 2015.¹⁸ Trust in the Scottish Government over this period fluctuated between a low of just under one-third (32%) in 2006 and a high of just under a half (49%) in 2015. Once again, the proportion who trust the Scottish Government to make fair decisions has been registered at a consistently higher level than the proportion who trust the UK Government to do so, which over the same period fluctuated between a low of under one-fifth (17%) in 2015 and a high of one-third (33%) in 2007.

Despite the variance seen between 2006 and 2015, the level of trust in the Scottish Government to make fair decisions remained steady at 37% between 2017 and 2019. The level of trust in the UK Government however fell to a record low of 11% in 2019. Meanwhile, the proportion who trust their local council to make fair decisions lies in between the equivalent figure for the Scottish and UK Governments in each year since this question was first asked. Trust in local councils to make fair decisions declined from just over one-third in 2015 to around a quarter in 2017 but has remained relatively steady at 29% in 2019.

¹⁸ The two questions on trust in the Scottish Government and UK Government to make fair decisions have been carried on SSA since 2006, while the additional item on trust at a local government level was first asked in 2015.

Figure 2.6: Proportion who trust Scottish Government, UK Government, and local council to make fair decisions ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ (2006-2019)



Base: all who said they trusted the Scottish Government, UK Government and local council ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ to make fair decisions

*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

How good is government at listening before it takes decisions?

Since 2004, SSA has included questions assessing public perceptions of how good different levels of government are at listening to people’s views as part of the decision-making process. SSA asked its respondents in turn, how good the Scottish Government, UK Government, and local councils are at ‘listening to people’s views before it takes decisions’, with the four answer options ranging from ‘very good’ to ‘not at all good’.

Table 2.3 below shows that in 2019 fewer than 1 in 10 considered that government at any level is ‘very good’ at listening to people before taking decisions (ranging from 7% who felt that the Scottish Government is ‘very good’ at listening to people before taking decisions to just 1% in respect of the UK Government). Forty-four per cent viewed the Scottish Government as being ‘quite good’ at listening to people’s views before taking decisions, while 39% expressed this view of local councils and 14% of the UK Government.

Meanwhile, just over 2 in 5 believed that the Scottish Government is either ‘not very good’ or ‘not at all good’ at engaging with the public before taking decisions, with a similar proportion offering this opinion of their local council. The proportion who believed that the UK Government is either ‘not very good’ or ‘not at all good’ at listening to people before taking decisions was over four-fifths.

Table 2.3: How good the Scottish Government, UK Government, and local councils are at listening to people before taking decisions (2019)

	Scottish Government (%)	UK Government (%)	Local council (%)
Very good	7	1	6
Quite good	44	14	39
Not very good	31	48	27
Not at all good	12	33	14
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1022</i>	<i>1022</i>	<i>1022</i>

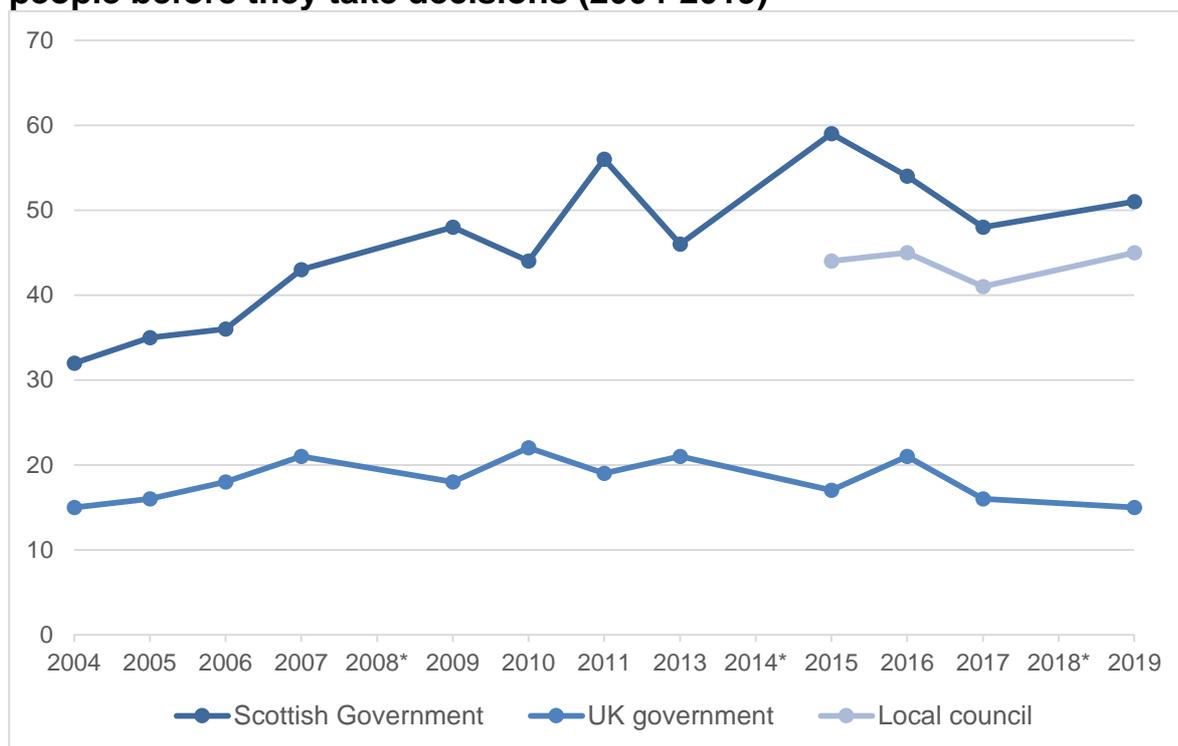
Base: all respondents

SSA has carried the questions measuring attitudes towards how good the Scottish and UK Governments are at listening to people since 2004, allowing a review of how attitudes in this area have shifted during the past 15 years.¹⁹

As illustrated by Figure 2.7, although the proportion who believed that the Scottish Government is either ‘very good’ or ‘quite good’ at listening to people’s views before taking decisions fell to just over a half in 2019 from a peak of around three-fifths in 2015, there has been a general upward shift in the proportion of those who adopt this stance since 2004 when the figure stood at just under one-third. Meanwhile, the proportion who felt that the UK Government is either ‘very good’ or ‘quite good’ at listening to people before it takes decisions has remained consistently lower during the same period, fluctuating between a high of 22% in 2010 and a low of 15% registered in both the first reading in 2004 and the most recent reading in 2019.

¹⁹ The SSA question measuring perceptions of how good local government is at listening to people before taking decisions has only been asked of SSA respondents on a regular basis since 2015 (with one prior reading in 2010).

Figure 2.7: Proportion who feel that the Scottish Government, UK Government, and local councils are ‘very good’ or ‘quite good’ at listening to people before they take decisions (2004-2019)



Base: all who said that the Scottish Government, UK Government and local councils are ‘very good’ or ‘quite good’ at listening to people before they take decisions

*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

Does the Scottish Parliament give people more say in how Scotland is governed and a stronger voice in the UK?

Since 1999, SSA has carried two questions measuring public perceptions of the political impact of the Scottish Parliament. These questions read as follows:²⁰

*Do you think that having a Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people...
...more say in how Scotland is governed,
less say,
or, is it making no difference?*

and

*Do you think that having a Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland...
...a stronger voice in the United Kingdom,
a weaker voice in the United Kingdom,
or, is it making no difference?*

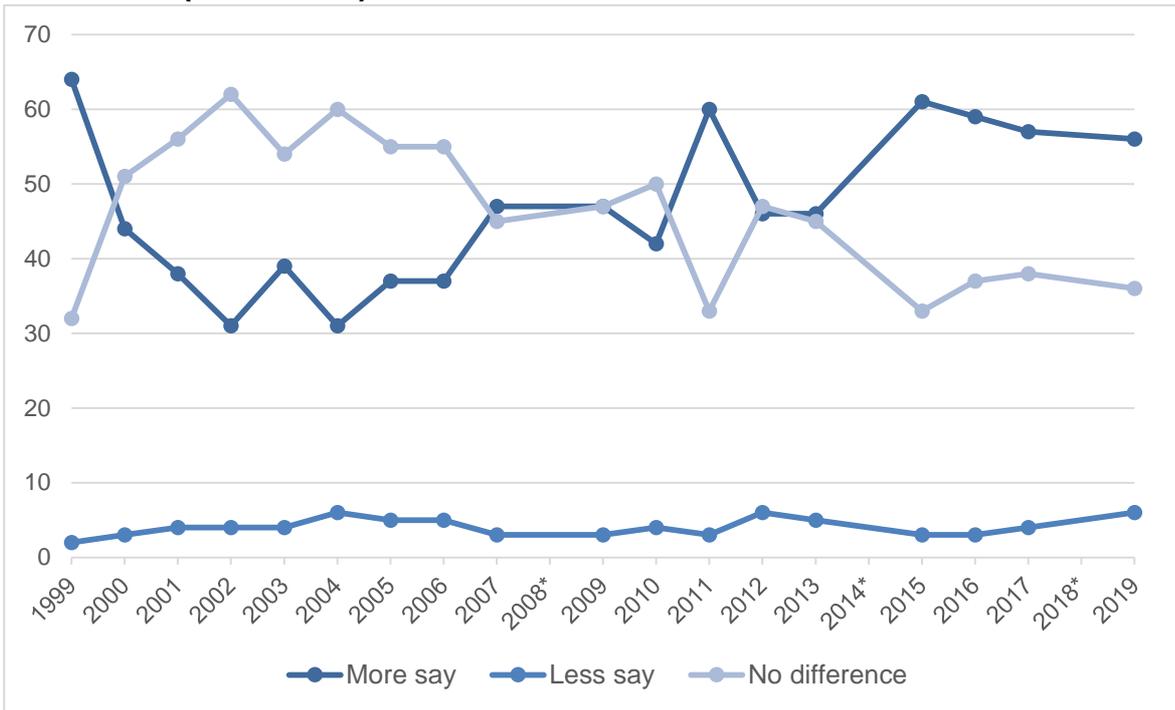
²⁰ In the case of both items, half the sample were presented with each question preceded by the phrase ‘From what you have seen and heard so far, do you think that having...’ and half with ‘Do you think that having...’. Figures discussed here are based on the combined pattern of responses to both forms of each question.

The responses to both questions, in 2019, indicated that a majority felt that the Scottish Parliament is having a positive impact upon the political landscape in Scotland. In 2019, 56% felt that the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed, while 36% believed that the Scottish Parliament makes no difference to how much say ordinary people have in how Scotland is governed with only around 1 in 20 believing that the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people less say in how Scotland is governed. Meanwhile, just over three-fifths feel that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK, with just under one-third thinking that the Scottish Parliament makes no difference to how strong Scotland's voice is in the UK, (again with only around 1 in 20 feeling that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a weaker voice in the UK).

Both of these questions have been on SSA on a regular basis since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, enabling the tracking of public attitudes towards the institution across the course of its life so far. As Figures 2.8 and 2.9 demonstrate, it has not always been the case that a majority have viewed the Scottish Parliament as having a positive impact upon government in Scotland. Expectations were high in 1999 that the Scottish Parliament would give ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed, or would give Scotland a stronger voice in the UK, but the proportion who thought that was the case had halved by 2002.

Since around 2004, however, there has been a general upward trend in both the proportion who believe that the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed and the proportion who feel that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK. As was seen to be the case with levels of trust in the Scottish government, the Scottish election years of 2003, 2007 and 2011 also show an 'election bounce' in the proportion of positive responses about the impact of the Scottish Parliament.

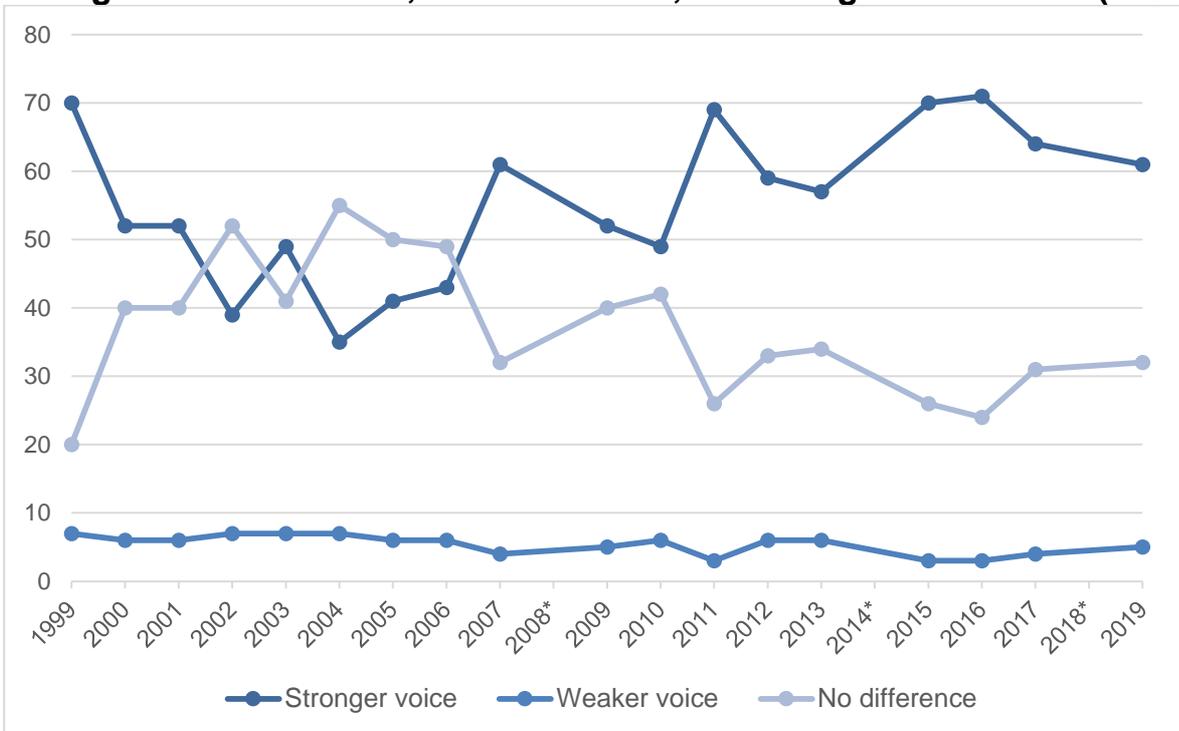
Figure 2.8: Views on whether the Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed, less say, or making no difference (1999-2019)



Base: all respondents

*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

Figure 2.9: Views on whether the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK, a weaker voice, or making no difference (1999-2019)



Base: all respondents

*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

Both of these measures saw peaks in 2011 and in the years following the 2014 Scottish independence referendum – in 2015, 61% believed that the Scottish Parliament was giving ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed, while in 2016 71% felt that the institution was giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK. These figures have since fallen somewhat, however in both cases around 3 in 5 viewed the Scottish Parliament as having a positive effect upon the Scottish political environment in 2019.

Have particular subgroups driven changes over time in attitudes to whether the Scottish Parliament gives Scotland a stronger voice in the UK?

This section explores whether there are changes in attitudes among particular subgroups that are potentially driving these overall changes in attitudes. The proportion who believed that having a Scottish Parliament has given Scotland a stronger voice in the UK has shifted over time and the nature and extent of this shift differs according to a number of key demographics: age, income and education; and by party identification and interest in politics.

Demographics

Across 2000, 2007, 2015 and 2019 younger people were more likely than older people to believe that the Scottish Parliament was giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK. Between 2000 and 2015, the increase in the overall proportion who felt the Scottish Parliament was giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK, was seen across all age groups. However, 2019 figures show that the decline in the proportion believing that the Scottish Parliament gives Scotland a stronger voice in the UK was not seen uniformly across all age groups. The proportion of those who felt that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK has fallen among a number of age groups, but it was among the youngest age group that this drop was particularly marked. Indeed, among the youngest age group the proportion who view the Scottish Parliament as giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK fell by 15 percentage points, from 73% in 2015 to 58% in 2019 – the same level as that registered in 2000.

The long-term trend from 2000 to 2015 of an increase in the proportion of people in Scotland who believe that having a Scottish Parliament gives Scotland a stronger voice in the UK was also not expressed uniformly across groups with different levels of household income. While attitudes appeared broadly similar across these groups immediately following the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 2000, by 2015 the data showed that those in the highest income group were more likely to believe that the Scottish Parliament was giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK (74%) than those in the lowest income group (63%). In 2019, while support for this stance remained at a similar level among those in the highest income group, among those in the lowest income group the proportion who believed that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK had slipped back to 57%, resulting in an attitudinal gap of around 16 percentage points between the two groups.

A similar pattern emerges when examining the distribution of attitudes towards whether the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK by how people feel about their present income. In 2000 just over half of both those living comfortably and those struggling on their present income felt that the Scottish Parliament was enhancing Scotland's voice in the UK. Although no significant difference between these groups was observed in either 2007 or 2015, by 2019 there was a 13-percentage point gap between those living comfortably on their present income and those finding it difficult to do so, with 64% of the former group stating that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK compared with 53% of the latter group.²¹

The distribution over time of attitudes towards whether the Scottish Parliament has enhanced Scotland's voice in the UK by education shows that those with higher educational qualifications have been consistently more likely to state that the Scottish Parliament gives Scotland a stronger voice in the UK than their counterparts with fewer or no formal qualifications. This gap in attitudes has remained fairly stable around 10 percentage points with the exception of 2007, where the increase in the proportion believing that the Scottish Parliament gives Scotland a stronger voice in the UK was observed more markedly among those with at least a degree-level qualification compared with those with no formal qualifications, leading to a 17-percentage point gap between these two groups.

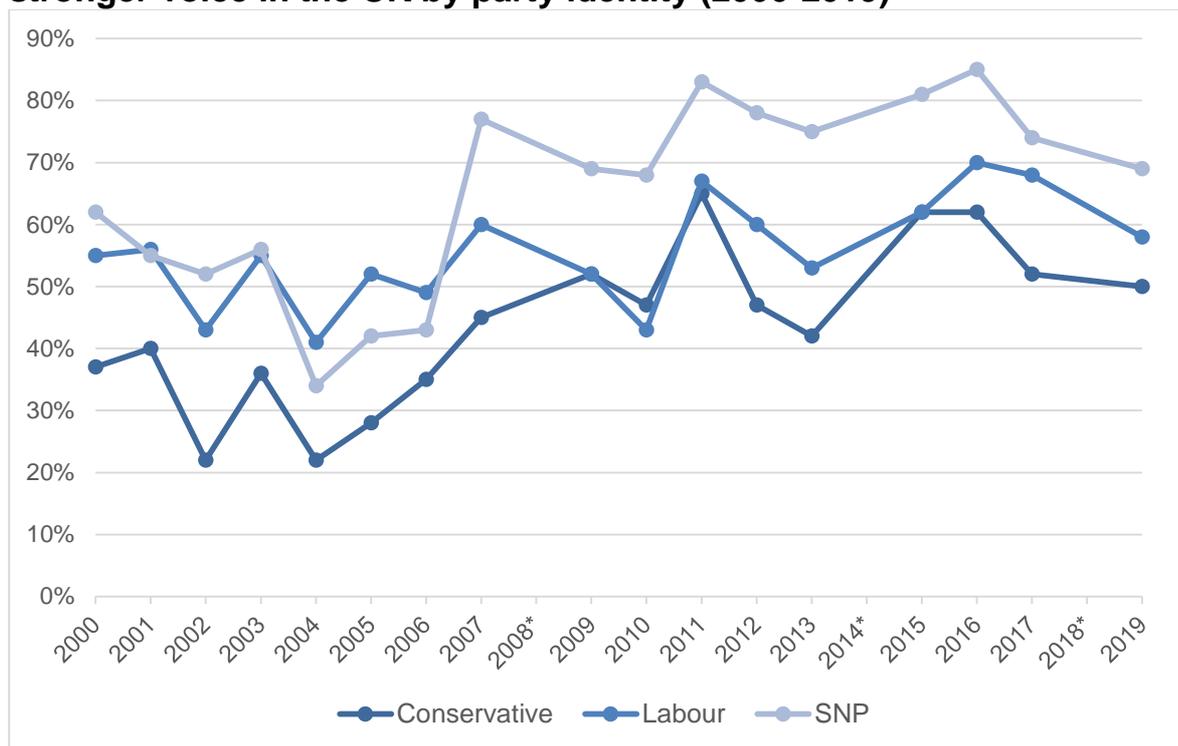
Party identification

While the proportion who believed that the Scottish Parliament is enhancing Scotland's voice in the UK has increased among supporters of all three major political parties in Scotland, SNP supporters have been consistently more likely to state that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK since 2007 (in 2019, 69% of SNP supporters said that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK, 58% of Labour supporters and 50% of Conservative supporters).

As illustrated by Figure 2.10, the attitudes of supporters of all three main parties have fluctuated between 2000 and 2019. Among SNP and Conservative supporters, however, attitudes have fluctuated to a greater extent than among Labour supporters, with a rise in the proportion of those stating that the Scottish Parliament is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK among supporters of these two parties rising from the lowest point in 2004 (22% among Conservative supporters and 34% among SNP supporters) to a peak of 62% among Conservative supporters and 85% among SNP supporters in 2016. There was then a subsequent reduction in the proportion of both SNP and Conservative supporters adopting this stance recorded between 2015 and 2019.

²¹ Differences by whether living comfortably or struggling on current income were marginally significant.

Figure 2.10: Views on whether the Scottish Parliament has given Scotland a stronger voice in the UK by party identity (2000-2019)



Base: all respondents

*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

Interest in politics

A shifting association between attitudes on the influence of the Scottish Parliament and reported levels of interest in politics is also notable across the past two decades. Each year, SSA asks respondents:

How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics...

*...a great deal,
quite a lot,
some,
not very much,
or, none at all?*

In 2000 around half (52%) of those who indicated that they had either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of interest in politics felt that the Scottish Parliament was giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK, a similar proportion to that registered among those who reported having either ‘not very much’ interest in politics or ‘none at all’. However, by 2015, attitudes had diverged to the extent that 76% of those with either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of interest in politics felt that the Scottish Parliament was providing Scotland with a stronger voice in the UK, while the equivalent figure among those with either ‘not very much’ interest in politics or ‘none at all’, stood at 57% – a gap of 18 percentage points.

Between 2015 and 2019 there has been a decline in the prevalence of this view among both groups, but this has been sharper among those with little or no interest

in politics. As a result, a 28-percentage point gap in attitudes towards the influence of the Scottish Parliament now exists between those with either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of interest in politics (71% of whom feel that the Scottish Parliament is enhancing Scotland’s voice in the UK) and those with either ‘not very much’ interest in politics or ‘none at all’ (among whom the equivalent figure stands at 43%).

Who has and who ought to have most influence over the way Scotland is run?

In addition to questions on trust in the Scottish and UK Governments and the perceived impact of the Scottish Parliament, SSA carries two questions which measure views on which institution *does* have, and which *ought to* have, the most influence over political decisions affecting Scotland. Respondents are first asked which political institution they feel ‘*has* the most influence over the way Scotland is run’, and then asked which institution they believe ‘*ought to have* the most influence over the way Scotland is run’, with the following possible answer options: ‘the Scottish Government’, ‘the UK Government at Westminster’, ‘local councils in Scotland’, or ‘the European Union’.

As Table 2.4 below illustrates, in 2019, 42% of people felt that the UK Government *has* the most influence over how Scotland is run, while a similar proportion (40%) felt that the Scottish Government *has* the most influence over how Scotland is run (under 1 in 10 believed that local councils have or that the EU has the most influence over the way Scotland is run, at 7% and 6% respectively).

Meanwhile, almost three-quarters (73%) felt that the Scottish Government *ought to have* the most influence over how Scotland is run, with 15% believing the UK Government *ought to have* the most influence (once again, under 1 in 10 believe that local councils (8%) should have the most influence, with only 1% believing that the EU should have the most influence over how Scotland is run).

Table 2.4: Perceptions of which political institution has, and ought to have, the most influence over the way Scotland is run (2019)

	Who <i>has</i> most influence (%)	Who <i>ought to have</i> most influence (%)
Scottish Government	40	73
UK Government	42	15
Local councils	7	8
The EU	6	1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1022	1022

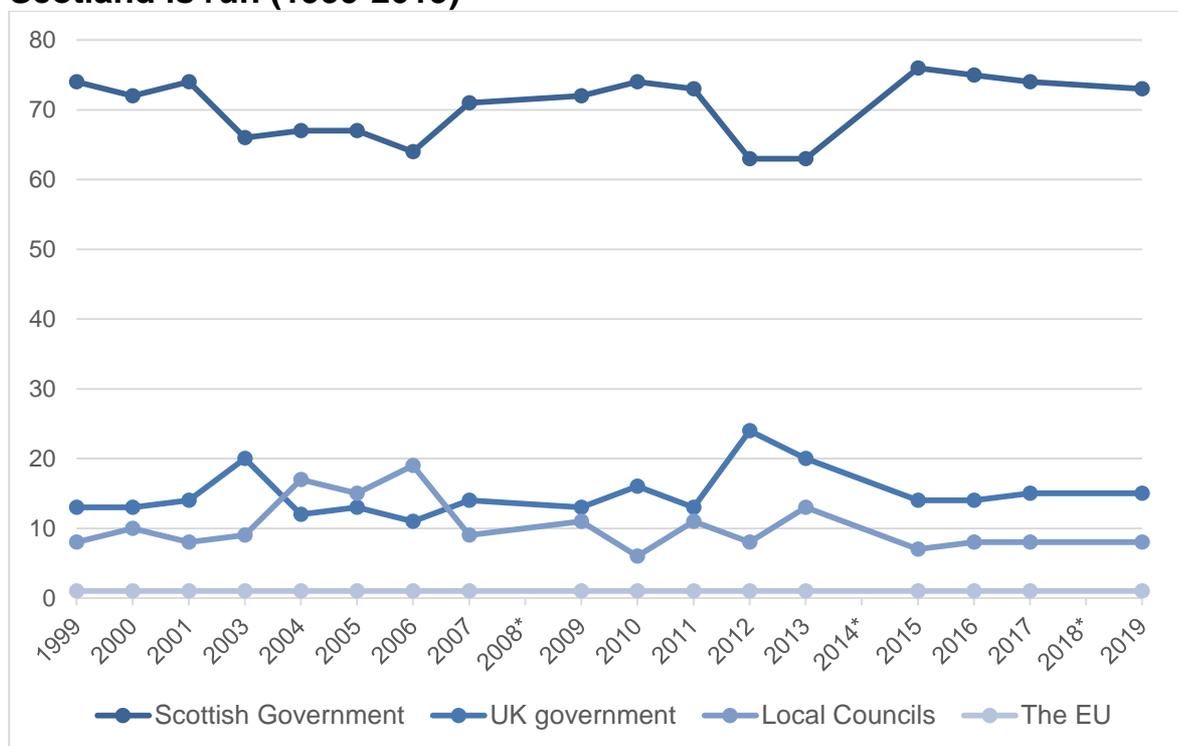
Base: all respondents

In terms of satisfaction with the distribution of institutional power in Scotland, around three-quarters (73%) of those who believed the Scottish Government *has* the most influence over the way Scotland is run also felt that the Scottish

Government *ought to have* the most influence. However, just under one-fifth (18%) of those who believed that the UK Government *has* the most influence over the way Scotland is run also said that it should have, while over three-quarters (77%) of those who saw the UK Government as having the most influence felt that it is the Scottish Government that *ought to have* the most influence over how Scotland is run.

The patterns of response to these two questions from 1999 to 2019 are illustrated in Figures 2.11 and 2.12. As Figure 2.11 shows, attitudes towards which political institution *ought to have* the most influence over how Scotland is run have remained relatively stable across the past two decades, with the Scottish Government typically being favoured by between two-thirds and three-quarters, and the UK Government typically being selected by between around 1 in 5 and 1 in 10 (occasionally being favoured by fewer people than 'local councils in Scotland' during the mid-2000s).

Figure 2.11: Perceptions of who *ought to have* the most influence over how Scotland is run (1999-2019)



Base: all respondents

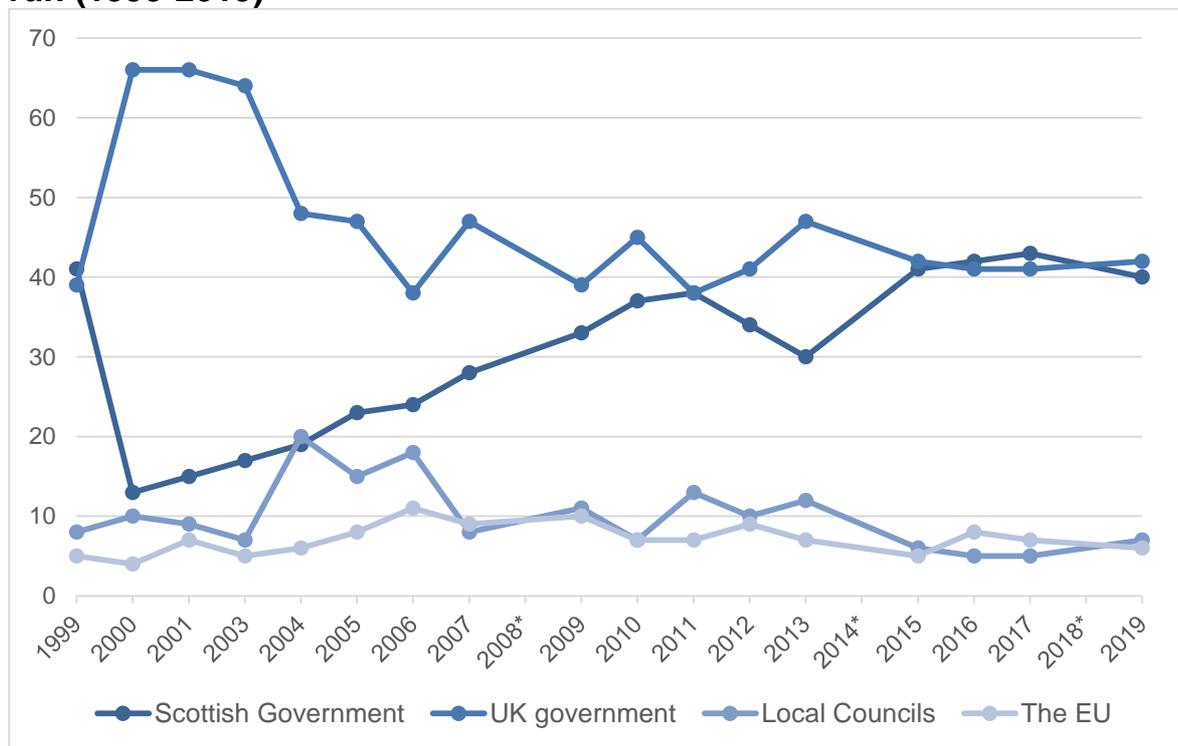
*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

In contrast, as shown by Figure 2.12, views on which body *has* the most influence over how Scotland is run have varied considerably over the past twenty years. In 1999, when the question was phrased prospectively in anticipation of the commencement of Scottish Parliament business,²² similar proportions believed that

²² The question as presented to respondents in 1999 read 'When the new parliament starts work, which of the following do you think will have most influence over the way Scotland is run?'

the Scottish Government and the UK Government would exercise the most influence over how Scotland is run.

Figure 2.12: Perceptions of who *has* the most influence over how Scotland is run (1999-2019)



Base: all respondents

*No data was collected in 2008, 2014 or 2018

However, during the early part of the 2000s attitudes diverged, with around two-thirds adopting the view that the UK Government had most influence over how Scotland was run and less than one-fifth believing that the Scottish Government had the most influence over how Scotland is run. From 2004 onwards opinions began to converge once more, to the extent that by 2011 – the year in which the first SNP majority was elected at Holyrood – the same proportion (just under 4 in 10) believed that the Scottish Government held the most influence over how Scotland was run as felt that the UK Government held the most influence. In both 2012 and 2013 the proportion who believed the UK Government had the most influence increased (to 47% in 2013), but, following the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 and the UK General Election in 2015, the proportion fell away once more to around 4 in 10. Since then the proportion who believe that influence lies mostly at Holyrood, and the proportion who feel that influence lies mostly in Westminster, have remained fairly even.

Have particular subgroups driven changes over time in attitudes on who has the most influence over how Scotland is run?

On the issue of the role that the Scottish Government plays in the governance of Scotland, as the trend analysis discussed above shows, in the year 2000 around five times as many people believed that the UK Government had the most influence over the way Scotland is run as felt that the Scottish Government played the most

influential role in the governance of Scotland. In 2019, data indicate that a similar proportion (around 40%) now identify the Scottish Government as having the most influence over how Scotland is run as point to the UK Government as being the most influential political institution (42%). But are these changes in attitudes seen across all demographic groups, or were some groups more likely than others to have shown a change?

Demographics

The proportion believing that the Scottish Government has the most influence over how Scotland is run has shifted over time and the nature and extent of this shift differs according to a number of key demographics: age, feelings about living on present income and education. As Table 2.5 below shows, differences in perceptions of who has the most influence over how Scotland is run were discernible by age group in 2019 – while younger members of the population were more likely to feel that the UK Government rather than the Scottish Government exercises the most influence over how Scotland is run, older members of the population were more likely to feel that it is the Scottish Government that has the most influence.

Perceptions of which institution has the most influence over the way Scotland is run shifted in a similar direction between 2000 and 2015 among both younger and older age groups. More recently, however, figures suggest an increased divergence in perceptions of influence of the Scottish Government between young and old. Between 2015 and 2019, while the proportion of those aged 65 and over who felt that the Scottish Government has the most influence over the way Scotland is run rose from 43% to around a half (49%), the equivalent figure among the youngest age group declined from 32% to 27%, leading to an attitudinal gap of 22 percentage points between the two groups.

Table 2.5: Perceptions of who has the most influence over the way Scotland is run by age (2019)

	Scottish Government (%)	UK Government (%)	Unweighted base	Weighted base
16-34	27	48	182	300
35-44	43	50	130	151
45-54	42	45	183	176
55-64	47	33	186	164
65+	49	33	341	232

Base: all respondents

There were differences in levels of perceived influence of the Scottish Government by how people report they are managing on their present income. The proportion who perceived the Scottish Government to have the most influence over how

Scotland is run was higher in 2019 than was the case in 2000 among both those who reported living comfortably on their present income and those who were struggling. However, while in 2000 the proportion of those who felt that the Scottish Government exerted the most influence over how Scotland is run was similar among both groups, in 2007 a gap of 9 percentage points was registered between those living comfortably and those struggling on their present income. While no significant difference was observed in 2015 between these two groups, in 2019 45% of those living comfortably perceived the Scottish Government to be the most influential body compared with 27% of those struggling resulting in an attitudinal gap of 18 percentage points between the two groups.

Meanwhile, this pattern appears to be reversed in the case of perceptions of the influence of the UK Government. While the proportion of those who point to Westminster as exercising the most influence over the way Scotland is run fell between 2000 and 2015 at a similar rate among both those who reported living comfortably on their present income and those who reported struggling to do so, in 2019 the proportion of those who identified the UK Government as the most influential institution among those struggling on their present income has increased from 42% in 2015 to 56%, while remaining at a similar level (38%) among those who report living comfortably.

In 2019, those with at least a degree-level qualification were more likely to feel that the Scottish Government has the most influence over how Scotland is run (47%) than their counterparts with no formal qualifications (35%). Meanwhile, a higher proportion of those with a degree-level qualification felt that it was the Scottish Parliament that exercises the most influence over how Scotland is run (47%) than believed it was the UK Government that did so (40%), while among those with no formal qualifications the UK Government was perceived to have the most influence by a greater proportion (40%) than thought the Scottish Government did (35%).

Since 2000 the proportion who believe that it is the Scottish Government that holds the most influence over how Scotland is run has increased across the educational spectrum, while the proportion that believe it is the UK Government that is most influential has decreased. While in 2007 a gap of 15 percentage points existed between those educated to degree-level and those with no formal qualifications in perceptions of influence of the Scottish Government, by 2015 attitudes appeared to have somewhat converged. However, in 2019, a gap of 12 percentage points emerged once more between the two groups. Conversely, perceptions on the influence of the UK Government in how Scotland is run have been relatively consistent among those with a degree-level qualification and those with no formal qualifications, with the 2019 data measuring the proportion of those who view Westminster as having most influence over how Scotland is run at 40% among both groups.

Constitutional preference and party identification

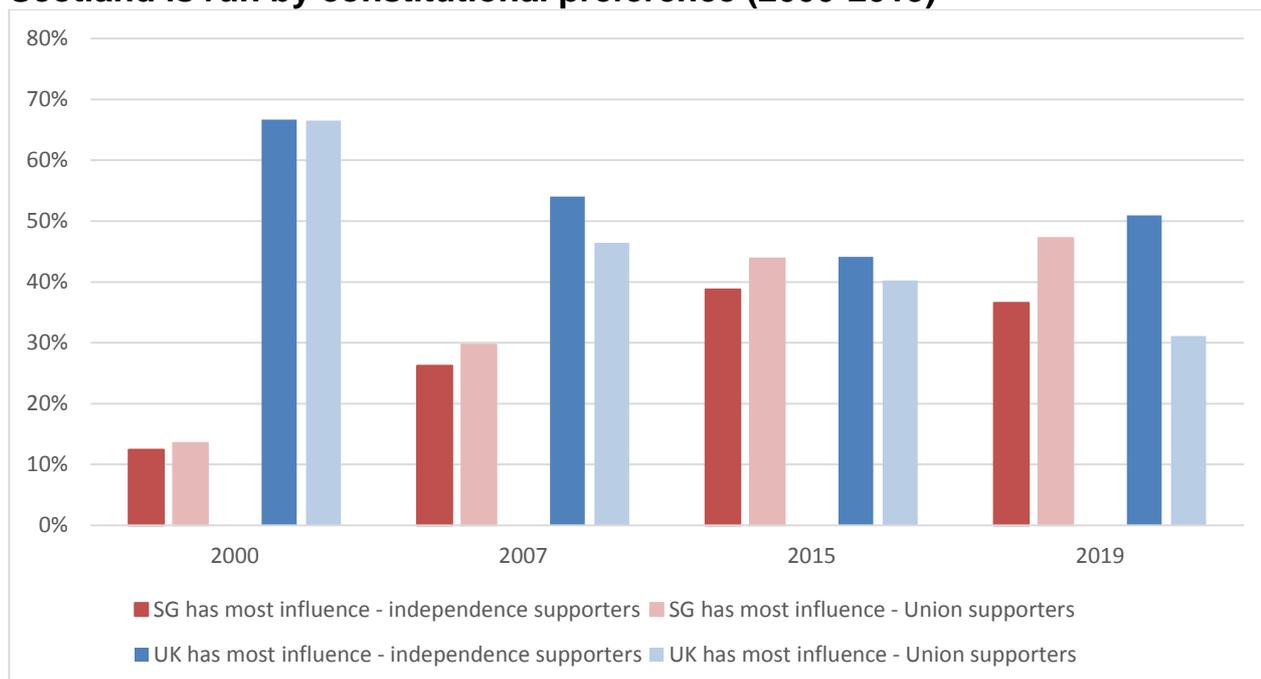
Differences in views on which institution exercises the most power over how Scotland is run were observable in 2019 between those on both sides of the debate about Scotland's constitutional future. While a higher proportion of those who

indicate a preference for an independent Scotland point to the UK Government (51%) rather than the Scottish Government (37%) as holding the most influence over how Scotland is run, among those who indicate a preference for Scotland remaining part of the UK a higher proportion believe that the Scottish Government has the most say (47%) than feel the UK Government does so (31%).

This divergence in attitudes towards which institution holds the most power over how Scotland is run was not present at the beginning of the life of the Scottish Parliament. As Figure 2.13 demonstrates, in 2000 just over 1 in 10 of those on both sides of the constitutional debate felt that the Scottish Government was the most influential body. From 2000 to 2015, similar increases were seen among both those who support independence, and those who would prefer Scotland remain part of the UK, in the proportions believing that the Scottish Government has most say over how Scotland is governed. In 2019 the data show that while the increase in the proportion of those who feel that the Scottish Parliament has the most influence has slowed among both groups, there now exists a 11 percentage point gap between those who indicate support for an independent Scotland and those who believe Scotland should remain a part of the UK, with the latter group more likely than the former to view Holyrood as having the most influence over how Scotland is run.

Meanwhile, in 2000 around two-thirds of both those who expressed a preference for independence and those who believed that Scotland should remain a part of the UK identified the UK Government as the institution with the most influence over the way Scotland is run. By 2007, while the proportion among those who support independence had fallen to 54%, among supporters of the union the proportion had dropped to 46%. In 2015 attitudes appeared to have converged once more, but 2019 data show that while the proportion of those who believe the UK Government has the most influence over how Scotland is run has continued to fall among those who indicate a preference for Scotland remaining part of the UK (to 31%), it has risen once more among those who indicate a preference for an independent Scotland (51%) – resulting in a 20-percentage point gap between the two groups on this measure.

Figure 2.13: Perceptions of who has the most influence over the way Scotland is run by constitutional preference (2000-2019)



Base: all respondents

Once again, this pattern is largely reflected in the distribution of responses to the question on perceived institutional influence by party identification. In 2019 Conservative supporters were more likely to say that the Scottish Parliament (59%) has the most influence over the way Scotland is run than the UK Government (23%), while among SNP supporters the inverse is the case (with 51% identifying the UK Government as having the most influence and 38% viewing the Scottish Government as having the most influence). Among Labour supporters' opinion was more evenly split, although a higher proportion point to the UK Government (44%) rather than the Scottish Government (37%) as being the most influential.

While belief that the Scottish Government exercises the most influence over how Scotland is run has risen relatively steadily across each of the four time points among Conservative supporters, among both Labour and SNP supporters this rise appears to have halted between 2015 and 2019. Meanwhile, the proportion of Conservative supporters who perceived the UK Government to hold the most influence over how Scotland is run fell by 15 percentage points between 2015 and 2019, while among SNP supporters the proportion taking this view has increased by 8 percentage points across the same period, leading to a 28-percentage point gap between them.

European Union

Perceptions of who has the most influence over the way Scotland is run also varied by attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the European Union. When analysing attitudes towards institutional influence by views on what the UK's future relationship with the EU should look like, 2019 data show that those who believe Britain should leave the EU were more likely to point to the Scottish Government

(47%) as opposed to the UK Government (32%) as having the most influence over how Scotland is run, while perceptions among those who take an alternative stance were more evenly balanced (at 40% and 44% respectively).

Attitudes have shifted more rapidly among those who believe Britain should leave the EU than among their counterparts since the commencement of Scottish Parliament business. While perceptions of the influence of both the Scottish Government and the UK Government were broadly similar among both groups in 2000, the proportion who felt that the Scottish Government has the most influence over how Scotland is run, among those who back the UK's departure from the EU, has increased by 37 percentage points between 2000 and 2019 compared with a shift of 26 percentage points among those who believe Britain should seek to remain in the EU. Meanwhile, the proportion who perceive the UK Government as having the most influence among those who back leave has shifted by 33 percentage points, while among those who adopt an alternative stance the equivalent shift measures 24 points.

Interest in politics

2019 data show that levels of reported interest in politics is associated with perceived levels of influence over how Scotland is run – particularly that of the Scottish Government. The proportion of those who believed the UK Government has the most influence over how Scotland is run was 39% among both those who reported having either 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of interest in politics and those who have either 'not very much' interest or 'none at all'. However, the equivalent proportions of those who believed the Scottish Government has the most influence over how Scotland is run were 50% among those with 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of interest, and 31% among those with 'not very much' interest or 'none at all'. Attitudes between these two groups have diverged since the first year of Scottish Government business, when the equivalent figures were 16% and 10% respectively.

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

This chapter presents views on the level of tax and spend, government priorities, the health service and the economy. The findings cover the following areas:

- Attitudes towards the level of taxation and government spending
- Attitudes towards the redistribution of income
- Priorities for government action
- Level of satisfaction with the health service, whether standards have improved or fallen and who is responsible for this
- Perceived changes to the economy and standard of living in Scotland and who is responsible for this

There are time series for all of the questions included in this chapter. For each of the questions, subgroup analysis focuses on the extent to which the attitudes of particular subgroups have driven overall recorded trends over time.²³

Attitudes towards the level of taxation and government spending

In 2019 respondents were asked about their views on what the government's policy on taxation and spending should be, a question that has appeared regularly on SSA over the previous 20 years. The exact wording of the question is:

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

Answer options were:

- 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

The majority (55%) of people in Scotland felt that taxation and spending should be increased, with just under 4 in 10 (37%) feeling it should be kept the same, and 4% thinking taxes and spending should be reduced. These results represent very little change from when the question was last asked in 2017, where the proportion who thought that taxation and spending should increase, be kept the same and be reduced was 56%, 33% and 2% respectively.

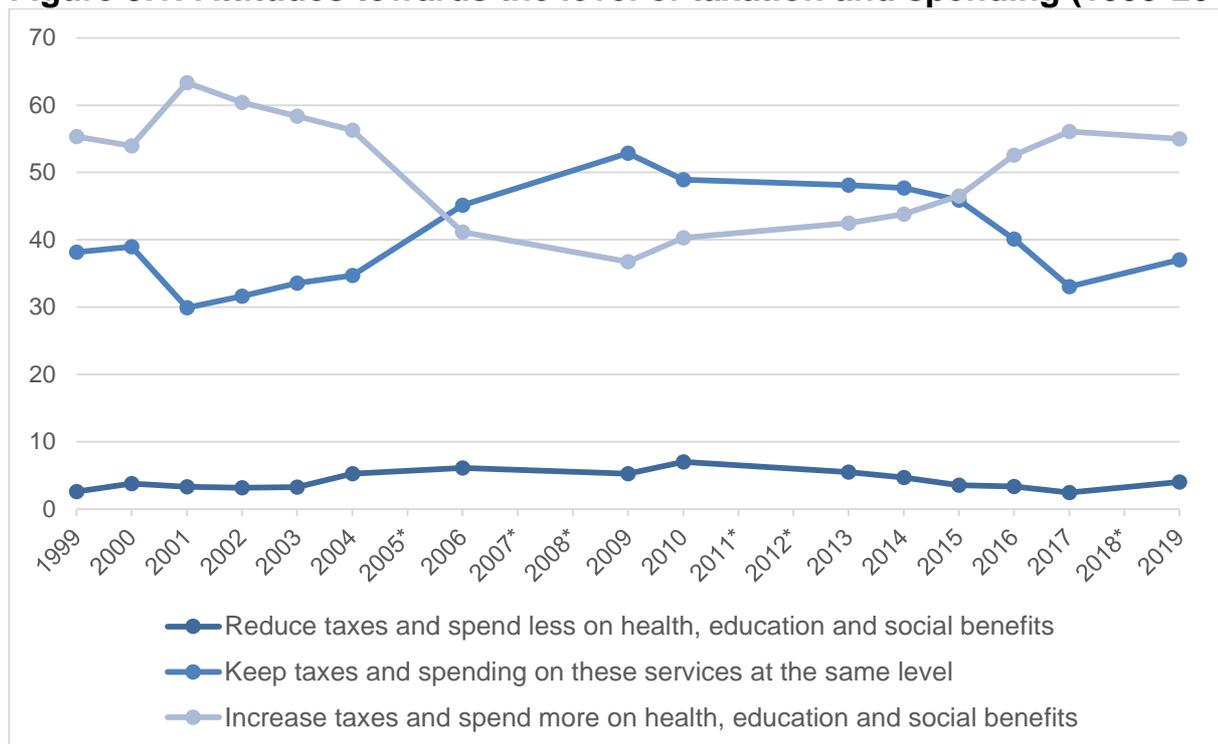
²³ Full sub-group breakdowns for 2019 data are available in the 'Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2019: Chapter 3 subgroup variation tables' Excel file published as a 'supporting file' alongside this report

Figure 3.1 shows how attitudes to taxation and spending have changed over the past 20 years. Reducing the level of taxation and spending has consistently been the least popular response option with the proportion selecting this option never higher than 1 in 10. However, the proportion believing that the level of taxation and spending should either be increased or kept the same has fluctuated over time. Interestingly attitudes in this area have come full circle over the past 20 years, with the proportions of each of the three possible responses to this question being almost identical in 1999 and 2019.

For the first five years the question was asked (1999-2004) the proportion that thought taxation and spending should be increased was higher than the proportion thinking it should be kept the same. This changed in 2006 when for the first time the proportion who thought taxation and spending should be kept the same (45%) was higher than the proportion who thought taxation and spending should be increased (41%).

In 2009, the first survey after the 2008 financial crisis, the proportion who thought taxation and spending should be kept the same reached a peak of 53% and has steadily reduced since then with those who thought taxation and spending should be increased again becoming predominant after 2015.

Figure 3.1: Attitudes towards the level of taxation and spending (1999-2019)



Base: all respondents

*Data not collected in these years

Have particular subgroups driven attitudinal changes over time in levels of support for increasing taxation and spending?

Changes in the level of support for increasing taxation and spending over time have been driven by certain subgroups more than others. Exploring the decline in support for increasing taxation and spending between 2000 and 2009 showed that support declined more markedly among those who expressed a preference for remaining part of the UK, a decline of 21 percentage points compared with a decline of 9 percentage points among those who indicated support for independence. There was also a fall in support amongst people with different levels of political engagement. In general the more interested people were in politics the greater the fall in their level of support for increasing taxation and spending – support among those with ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of interest in politics fell by 24 percentage points between 2000 and 2009 from 66% to 42%, compared with a fall of 13 percentage points from 47% to 33% for those with ‘not very much’ or ‘none at all’.

After 2009, support for increasing taxation and spending has generally increased up to the latest data from 2019. In contrast to the preceding period, between 2000 and 2009, the rise in support for increasing taxation and spending between 2009 and 2019 was shown to be related to changes according to liberal-authoritarian attitudes.²⁴ The proportionate increase in the level of support for increasing taxation and spending was larger for those with the most liberal views than for those in the authoritarian group. Between 2009 and 2019, there was a 29-percentage point increase from 38% to 67% in the proportion of those with the most liberal views who supported the increase of taxation and spending compared with only a 12-percentage point increase from 36% to 48% among those in the authoritarian group.

Attitudes towards the redistribution of income

As well as being asked their attitudes towards taxation and spending, to gauge attitudes towards redistributive economic policies, respondents were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

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

As shown in Table 3.2 below, in 2019 the majority of people in Scotland (55%) agreed that the government should redistribute income from the better off to the

²⁴ Since 1999, the Scottish Social Attitudes survey has included an attitude scale which is designed to ascertain whether they are more inclined to the libertarian or the authoritarian end of the ideological spectrum. The scale consists of six statements to which the respondent is invited to “agree strongly”, “agree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “disagree” or “disagree strongly”. The scores to all the questions in the scale are added and then divided by the number of items in the scale, giving indices ranging from 1 to 6.

less well off, with one-fifth (20%) disagreeing that they should and just under a quarter (24%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

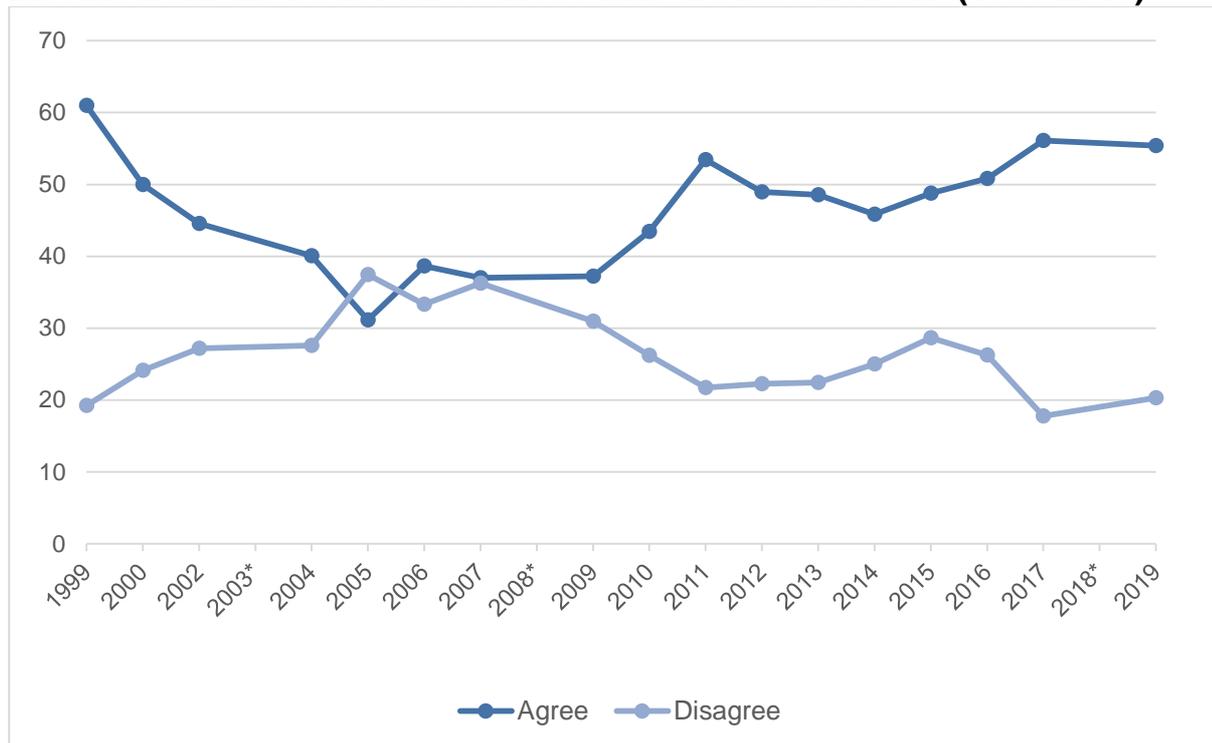
Table 3.1: ‘Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off’ (2019)

	%
Agree strongly	26
Agree	30
Neither	24
Disagree	13
Disagree strongly	7
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1022</i>

Base: all respondents

The question on redistribution has been asked frequently since SSA started in 1999. Figure 3.2 shows how views on the issue have changed over time. Agreement with the statement was at its highest level when the question was first asked in 1999 then steadily declined until 2005, when for the first time the proportion disagreeing (37%) that the government should redistribute income to the less well-off was higher than the proportion agreeing (31%). Views remained stable up to 2009 but following the UK General Election in 2010 there was an increase until 2011 followed by a stabilisation in the proportions agreeing with the statement at around half of the population. This was matched by a roughly equal decline in the numbers disagreeing that the government should redistribute income to the less well off, with a fall of 20 percentage points between 2005 and 2017 from 37% to 18%.

Figure 3.2: Whether agree or disagree that ‘Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off’ (1999-2019)



Base: all respondents

*Data not collected in these years

Have particular subgroups driven changes over time in attitudes to whether government should redistribute income?

If these changes are examined in more detail, it is evident that certain groups are associated with these changes in attitudes over time. Between 2000 and 2005 there was an increase in the proportion of people disagreeing that the government should redistribute income to the less well-off and this increase was greater among those on the right of the political spectrum compared with those on the left.²⁵ In 2000, 50% of those on the right disagreed compared with 67% in 2005, the equivalent figures for those on the left were 3% and 7% respectively. Similar relationships were seen in the steady decrease in the proportion disagreeing between 2005 and 2019. The level of change in disagreement among those on the right and the centre of the political spectrum was greater in this period than for those on the left. As such, it appears that those on the left of the political spectrum have been more consistent in their views on redistribution over time, and it is fluctuations in others' opinions that were driving the overall change.

²⁵ Since 1999, the Scottish Social Attitudes survey has included an attitude scale which aims to measure respondents' underlying political views and whether these are situated to the left or right of the political spectrum. The scale consists of five statements to which the respondent is invited to "agree strongly", "agree", "neither agree nor disagree", "disagree" or "disagree strongly". The scores to all the questions in the scale are added and then divided by the number of items in the scale, giving indices ranging from 1 (left) to 5 (right).

Interestingly, between 2005 and 2019 there were no clear differences in the level of change in disagreement by household income or whether someone felt they were struggling on their current income, although in 2019 there were significant differences by household income and whether someone was comfortable or struggling on their present income. Those in the lowest income group (61%) and those struggling on their present income (71%) were more likely to say that the government should redistribute income to the less well off than those in the highest income group (53%) and those who said they were living comfortably (54%).

Priorities for government action

Respondents were asked what they think should be the Scottish Government's highest priority, that is the most important thing it should try and do. Multiple response options were given across a variety of areas, including the option to write in a priority that had not been listed. Table 3.2 below shows that in 2019 'help the economy grow' topped the list of priorities at 23%, followed by 'improve standards of education' at 18% and 'improve people's health' at 17%.

Table 3.2: What should be the highest priority for the Scottish Government? (2019)

	%
Help the economy grow	23
Improve standards of education	18
Improve people's health	17
Improve housing	11
Reduce inequality	10
Reduce environmental problems	8
Cut crime	7
Improve public transport	3
Other (Write in)	4
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1022</i>

Base: all respondents

How did attitudes differ between subgroups in 2019?

There were interesting differences in the order of priorities between certain subgroups in 2019. There was a difference between the views of men and women in relation to the top overall priority of helping the economy grow, as 27% of men chose this as the highest priority compared with only 19% of women. Those in the lowest income group were more likely to select cutting crime as a government priority than those on higher incomes, 13% of the former selected this compared

with between 4% and 6% of those with higher household incomes. This was also the case for Conservative supporters – 16% of whom placed cutting crime as their first priority compared with fewer than 1 in 10 of those identifying with other political parties.

As might be expected, there were some noticeable differences between how people ranked government priorities and their position on the liberal-authoritarian scale. These were evident in the less commonly chosen responses. Although the top three priorities of both groups were the same as the wider population, those with the most liberal views were much more likely than authoritarians to select 'reduce environmental problems', with 13% of them choosing it as a priority compared with less than 5% of those in the authoritarian group. This contrasts with 'cutting crime', where 12% of authoritarians selected this compared with only 1% of liberals.

Table 3.3 shows responses to this question since it was first asked on SSA in 2004. It should be noted that any comparisons with previous years must be caveated as the wording of one answer option changed in 2019 (from 'improve the environment' to 'reduce environmental problems') and a new answer option (reduce inequality) was introduced from 2015. However, while keeping this in mind, there are noticeable changes in how people have ordered government priorities both from the last time this question was asked in 2017 and since it was first asked in 2004.

Table 3.3: What should be the Scottish Government's highest priority? (2004-2019)²⁶

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Help the economy to grow faster	16	18	14	16	33	37	36	35	32	22	23
Cut crime	22	23	24	27	17	18	17	10	4	5	7
Improve people's health	27	26	24	17	13	15	16	18	17	19	17
Improve standards of education	17	15	16	12	15	12	15	18	22	26	18
Improve housing	12	10	12	16	13	9	11	13	15	15	11
Improve the environment*	4	4	6	5	3	3	2	1	1	2	8*
Improve public transport	1	1	2	1	1	1	*	1	2	1	3
Reduce inequality	n/a	4	7	10							
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1637	1549	1594	1508	1482	1495	1197	1497	1288	1234	1022

Base: all respondents

*Prior to 2019 the answer option was 'improve the environment', in 2019 the wording changed to 'reduce environmental problems'

As would be expected, there was a change in the ordering of priorities after the financial crisis of 2008. 'Helping the economy grow' became the top priority for people in Scotland in 2009 and has remained so, apart from in 2017 where it was second priority. While 'cutting crime' was consistently one of the top two priorities before 2009 the proportion choosing it has steadily decreased since then and remains low in 2019 at 7%. Since 'reduce inequality' was introduced as an answer option in 2015 the numbers selecting it as a priority have steadily increased by 3 percentage points each year the question has been asked: 1 in 10 (10%) chose it in 2019 compared with 4% in 2015.

'Improving standards of education' did appear to be on a steady upward trajectory from only 12% selecting it as a priority in 2010 to it being the top priority at 26% in 2017. However, this steady rise has not continued into 2019, as the proportion of those selecting education fell by 8 percentage points between 2017 and 2019 to 18%, returning to the level recorded between 2004 and 2013. One priority that has

²⁶ Prior to 2009 the question asked about the 'Scottish Executive'

increased markedly is ‘reduce environmental problems’, increasing 6 percentage points to 8% between 2017 and 2019. This is the highest it has been since the question was first asked in 2004, and contrasts with the low proportion of people prioritising the environment from 2009 onwards. However, it is not possible to say whether this is associated with the change of wording in 2019 from ‘improve the environment’ to ‘reduce environmental problems’.

Level of satisfaction with the health service

To determine people’s attitudes towards the health service in Scotland, respondents were asked both whether they were satisfied with the way the NHS runs and whether they thought the standard of the health service had increased or fallen from this time last year. As can be seen in Table 3.4 below, in general, people in Scotland in 2019 were satisfied with the way the NHS is running.

Table 3.4: All in all, how satisfied or dissatisfied would you say you are with the way in which the National Health Service runs nowadays? (2019)

	%
Very satisfied	16
Quite satisfied	48
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	14
Quite dissatisfied	14
Very dissatisfied	6
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1022</i>

Base: all respondents

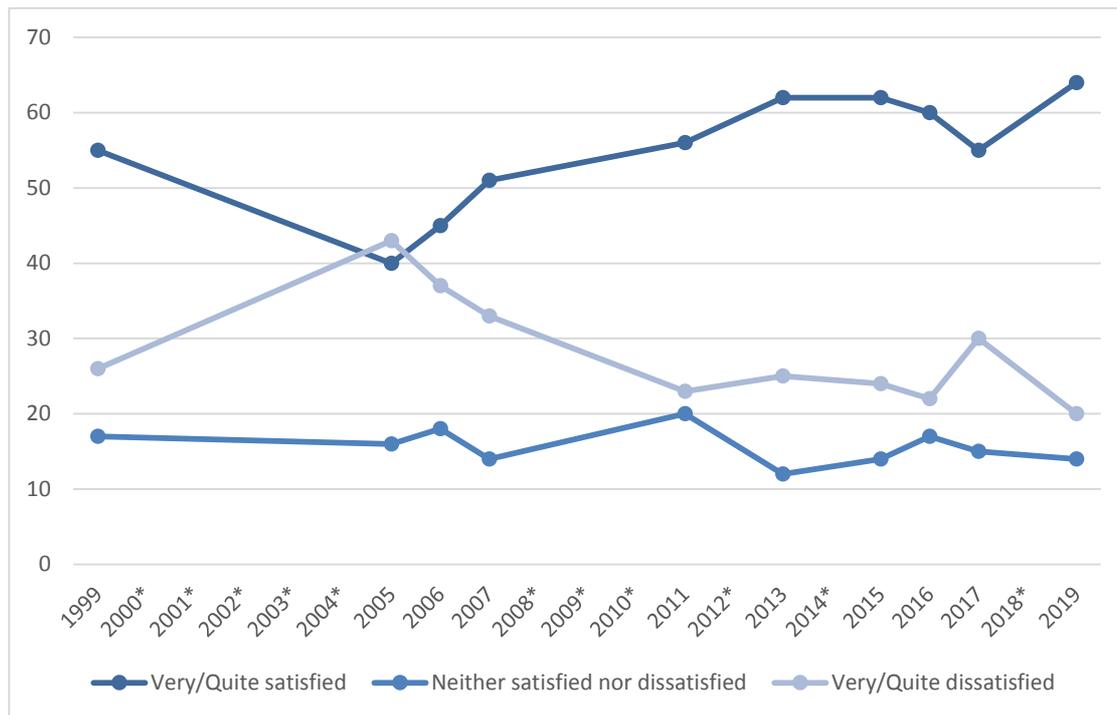
In 2019, over three times as many people were satisfied (65%) with the way the health service is run than were dissatisfied (20%). Satisfaction with the NHS was associated with whether people were struggling or comfortable on their present income. Those who reported that they were ‘struggling’ or ‘really struggling’ on their present income were more likely to say they were ‘very’ or ‘quite dissatisfied’ with the NHS compared with those who were living comfortably on their present income, 28% of the former reported being ‘very’ or ‘quite dissatisfied’ compared with 18% of the latter.²⁷

Figure 3.3 shows changes in the responses to this question since it was first asked in 1999. Between 1999 and 2005, levels of satisfaction declined from 55% to 40%, while at the same time levels of dissatisfaction increased from 26% to 43%. Satisfaction with the health service then steadily increased from 2006 and in 2019 the gap between those saying they were ‘very’ or ‘quite satisfied’ with the health service and those saying they were ‘very’ or ‘quite dissatisfied’ stood at 45

²⁷ Differences by whether people are struggling or comfortable on their present income were marginally significant.

percentage points, the widest it has ever been. The only year where people have been more dissatisfied than satisfied with the health service was 2005, since then there has been a steady increase in satisfaction up to 2013 when it plateaued. The difference between satisfaction and dissatisfaction increased markedly between 2006 and 2011 from 8 to 33 percentage points and has remained fairly high since then. In 2017 levels of satisfaction with the NHS declined, but this reversed in 2019 when satisfaction levels returned to a similar level to that recorded from 2013 to 2016.

Figure 3.3: All in all, how satisfied or dissatisfied would you say you are with the way in which the National Health Service runs nowadays? (1999-2019)



Base: all respondents

*Data not collected in these years

Have particular subgroups driven attitudinal changes over time in levels of satisfaction with the way the NHS is run?

Exploring the increase in levels of satisfaction between 2005 and 2019 shows that the increase was similar across groups although there were two noticeable differences. Levels of satisfaction with the health service did increase more among men than women between 2005 and 2011: a 20-percentage point increase among men (from 40% to 60%) compared with a 13 percentage point increase among women (from 40% to 52%). However between 2011 and 2019 this trend was reversed and levels of satisfaction increased by 14 percentage points among women (from 52% to 67%) and by 2 percentage points among men (from 60% to 62%). There was also a party-political difference in the increase in the levels of satisfaction with the NHS from 2011 onwards. Between 2011 and 2019 the level of increase in satisfaction among those identifying with a political party was greatest among SNP supporters at 12 percentage points (from 57% to 69%), while the

proportion of Conservatives' stating they were satisfied with the health service remained consistent during the same period (65% in 2011 and 64% in 2019).

Standards in the health service

As well as asking about their satisfaction with the health service, respondents were also asked whether they thought the standard of the health service had increased or fallen in the past year. The most common response (see Table 3.5 below) was that the standard of the health service had stayed the same (37%), but people were more likely to say the standard had fallen 'a little' or 'a lot' (45%) than to say that it had increased 'a little' or 'a lot' (9%).

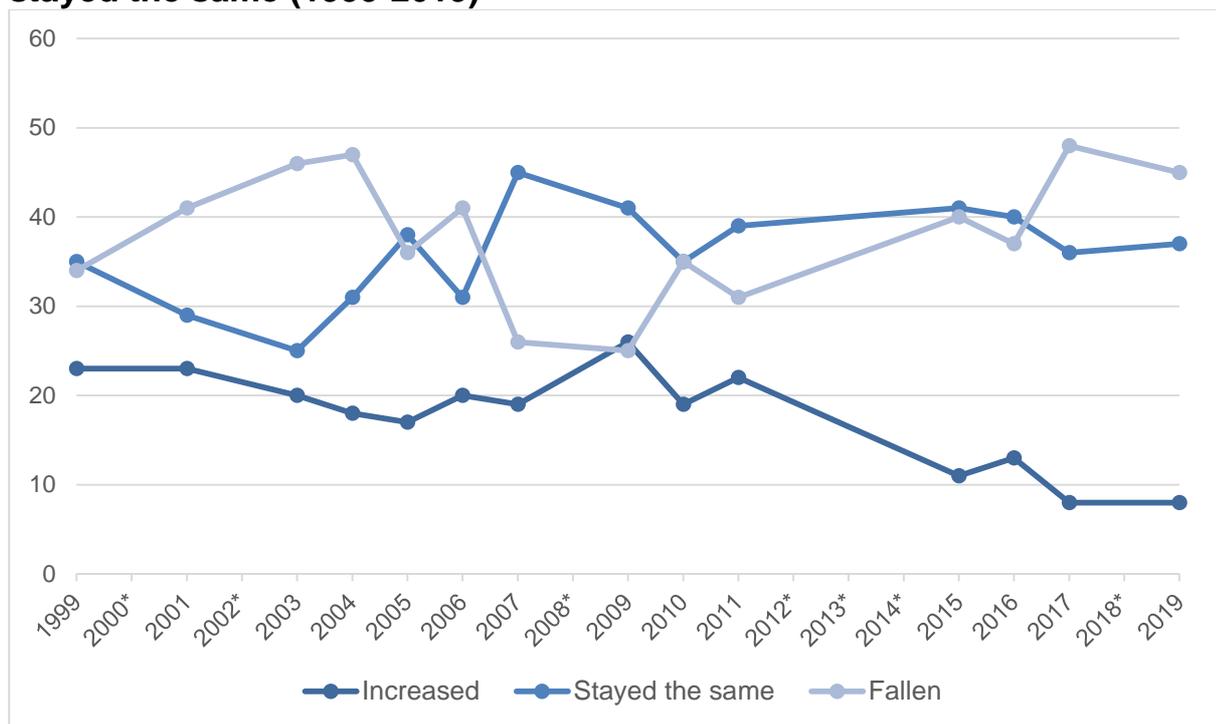
Table 3.5: Thinking back over the last twelve months, would you say that since then the standard of the health service in Scotland has increased or fallen? (2019)

	%
Increased a lot	1
Increased a little	7
Stayed the same	37
Fallen a little	31
Fallen a lot	14
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1022</i>

Base: all respondents

As Figure 3.4 demonstrates, 2009 was something of a turning point regarding attitudes in this area: it was the only year in which the proportion stating that the standard of the health service had increased 'a little' or 'a lot' (26%) was higher than the proportion stating that it had fallen 'a little' or 'a lot' (25%). Since 2009 there has been a steady increase in the proportion stating that the standard of the health service has fallen in the past year and a steady decrease in the proportion stating that it has increased, while the proportion saying it has stayed the same has been fairly consistent after peaking in 2007. 'Stayed the same' was the most popular response from 2007 to 2016, after which it was overtaken by fallen 'a little' or 'a lot'. In general, between 1999 and 2011 the proportion stating that the standard of the health service had increased was around 20%, but since 2015 this has declined steadily over time and since 2015 has been closer to 10%, a trend which the 2019 figure continues.

Figure 3.4: Whether the standard of the health service has increased, fallen or stayed the same (1999-2019)



Base: all respondents

*Data not collected in these years

A person’s satisfaction with the health service was related to whether they felt the standard of the health service increased or fell in the previous year, as shown in Table 3.7 below. Over 8 in 10 (82%) who said that the standard of the health service had increased in the past year were either ‘very’ or ‘quite satisfied’ with the NHS. However, even among those who said that the standard had fallen, 51% were still either ‘very’ or ‘quite satisfied’ with the NHS. Around a third (32%) of those who felt that the standard of the NHS had fallen in the past year were ‘quite’ or ‘very dissatisfied’ with the NHS, this compares with only 8% who thought that the standard of the NHS had increased in the past year. The majority (78%) of those who felt that the standard of the NHS had ‘stayed the same’ were also satisfied with it, compared with only 9% who were dissatisfied.

Table 3.6 Satisfaction with the health service by views on whether the standard of the health service has increased/stayed the same/fallen in the past year (2019)

	Increased a lot/little	Stayed the same	Fallen a little/lot
	%	%	%
Very satisfied	36	23	8
Quite satisfied	47	55	43
Neither satisfied/dissatisfied	10	12	16
Quite dissatisfied	5	8	21
Very dissatisfied	3	1	12
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>381</i>	<i>464</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>371</i>	<i>483</i>

Base: all respondents

Have particular subgroups driven changes over time in attitudes to the standard of the health service?

Since 2009, the proportion of people saying that the standard of the health service increased has fallen from 26% to 8% in 2019. There was a clear relationship between this decline and age, with the decrease in the proportion of people saying that the health service has improved falling further among older people compared with younger people. In 2009 a third (33%) of those aged 65 and over stated that the standard of the health service had increased compared with 21% of those aged 18 to 34 years old, whereas in 2019 this attitudinal gap has narrowed so that there was very little difference by age group in the proportions saying that the standard of the health service had increased.

Perceived responsibility for changes in standards in the health service in Scotland?

As well as being asked what they thought had happened to the standard of the health service in the past year, respondents were also asked:

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

These findings show the extent to which the public holds the Scottish Government responsible for the performance of the health service. In 2019, around 3 in 10 (29%) thought that the changes in standards in the health service in Scotland were

‘mainly the result of the UK Government’s policies’ and a similar proportion thought they were ‘mainly the result of the Scottish Government’s policies’ (31%).

Examining the views of people who think standards are improving and those who think standards are falling separately reveals a ‘reverse symmetry’ in views with the Scottish Government’s policies appearing to get most of ‘the credit’ from people who say standards are increasing, and the UK Government’s policies appearing to get most of ‘the blame’ from those who think standards have fallen. Just over half (51%) of those who thought the standard of the health service had increased in the past year said this was mainly the result of Scottish Government policies, compared with just over 1 in 10 (11%) who said this was mainly the result of UK Government policies (see Table 3.7 below). This contrasts with which administration’s policies people ‘blame’ for a fall in standards in the health service with over 4 in 10 (44%) who thought standards in the health service had fallen in the past year believing this was mainly the result of UK Government policies compared with just under a fifth (19%) who believed this was mainly the result of Scottish Government policies.

Table 3.7: Perceived responsibility for changes in standards in the health service (2019)

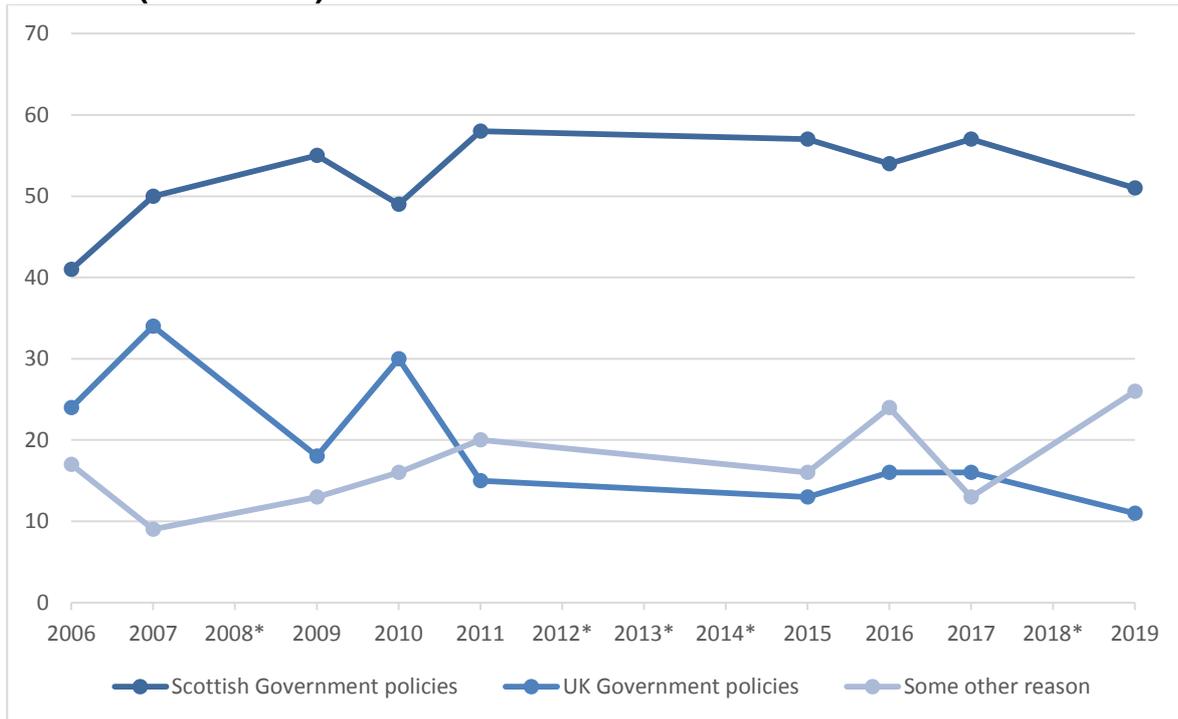
	Credit for increased standards in the NHS	Blame for decreased standards in the NHS
	%	%
Scottish Government policies	51	19
UK Government policies	11	44
Some other reason	26	18
(Both UK Government and Scottish Government policies)^	7	15
<i>Weighted bases</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>464</i>
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>483</i>

^ This answer option was not shown to respondents but was recorded where respondents gave this as a spontaneous response.

Base: all those who said the standard of health service had either increased or fallen

Figure 3.5 shows the changes over time in the views of those who thought standards in the health service had increased in the past year and whether they thought this was mainly the result of UK Government or Scottish Government policies (2006 to 2019). The proportion who thought that the Scottish Government’s policies were mainly responsible for the increase in standards in the health service steadily increased from 2006 to 2011. Since 2011, consistently over half of those who thought the standard of the health service had increased have ‘credited’ the Scottish Government’s policies for this increase. The proportion ‘crediting’ the UK Government’s policies fluctuated from 2006 to 2011 before stabilising in the low to mid-teens (11% to 16%) after 2011.

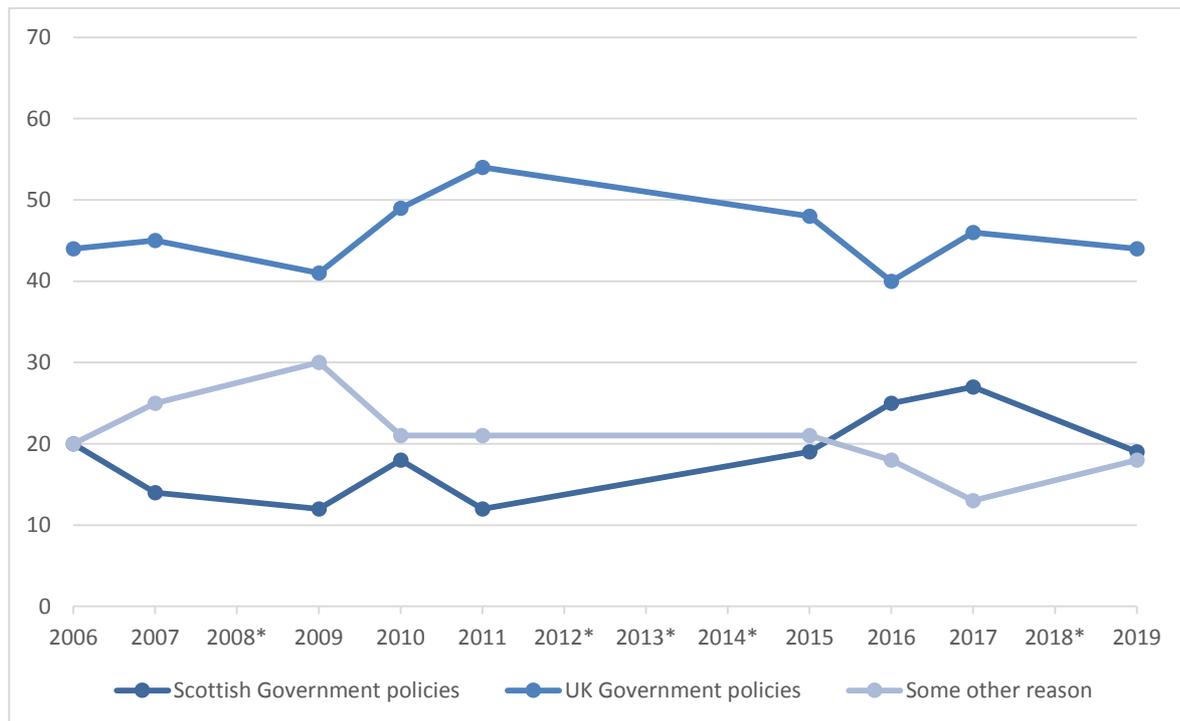
Figure 3.5: Perceived responsibility for an increase in standards in the health service (2006-2019)



Base: all who said the standard of the health service had increased
 *Data not collected in these years

Figure 3.6 shows changes among those who thought that standards had fallen in the health service by who believed this was due to UK Government or Scottish Government policies from when the questions were first asked in 2006. Just as the proportion who thought that the Scottish Government’s policies were responsible for an increase in standards in the health service reached a peak in 2011, so did the proportion who thought that the UK Government’s policies were responsible for a fall in standards in the health service. With the exception of this peak in 2011, the proportions believing that the UK Government’s policies were responsible for a fall in standards have been between 40% and 50%, and the 44% figure recorded in 2019 was in line with these previous results. There was an increase in the proportion of people in Scotland who believed that Scottish Government policies were responsible for a fall in standards between 2015 (19%) and 2017 (27%) but at 19% the proportion believing that the Scottish Government’s policies were responsible for a fall in standards in 2019 has returned to the 2015 level. With the exception of 2016 and 2017, the proportion believing that Scottish Government policies were responsible for a fall in standards has been 20% or below each year the question has been asked.

Figure 3.6: Perceived responsibility for a fall in the standard of the health service (2006-2019)



Base: all who said the standard of the health service had fallen

*Data not collected in these years

Views on the economy and standard of living

Respondents were asked both whether Scotland’s economy had become stronger or weaker in the previous year and if their standard of living had increased or fallen in the same period. More people (42%) thought the Scottish economy was weaker than at the same time last year than thought it was stronger (17%), though 28% thought it had stayed the same (see Table 3.8).

Table 3.8: Has Scotland’s economy got stronger or weaker over the last 12 months? (2019)

	%
A lot stronger	2
A little stronger	15
Stayed the same	28
A little weaker	34
A lot weaker	8
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1022</i>

Base: all respondents

Respondents were also asked whether the standard of living in Scotland had increased or fallen in the previous year. Table 3.9 below shows that around half (49%) of people in Scotland felt the general standard of living had fallen ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ in the past year compared with 16% who thought it had increased.

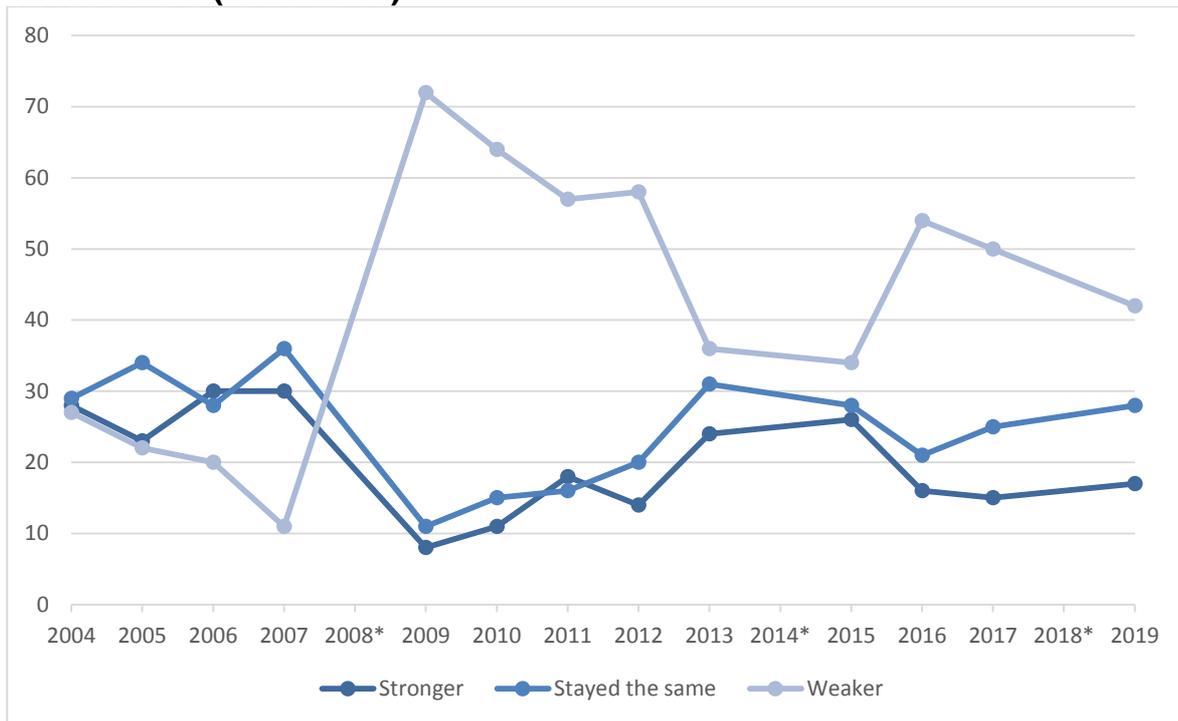
Table 3.9: Has the general standard of living in Scotland increased or fallen over the last 12 months? (2019)

	%
Increased a lot	3
Increased a little	13
Stayed the same	30
Fallen a little	35
Fallen a lot	15
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1022</i>

Base: all respondents

Figures 3.7 and 3.8 show changes over time in responses to the questions on the strength of the economy (since 2004) and the standard of living (since 1999). As would be expected, after the financial crisis of 2008 the proportion of people who said that the economy had grown weaker and that the standard of living had fallen in Scotland grew markedly.

Figure 3.7 Has the economy in Scotland got weaker or stronger over the last 12 months? (2004-2019)

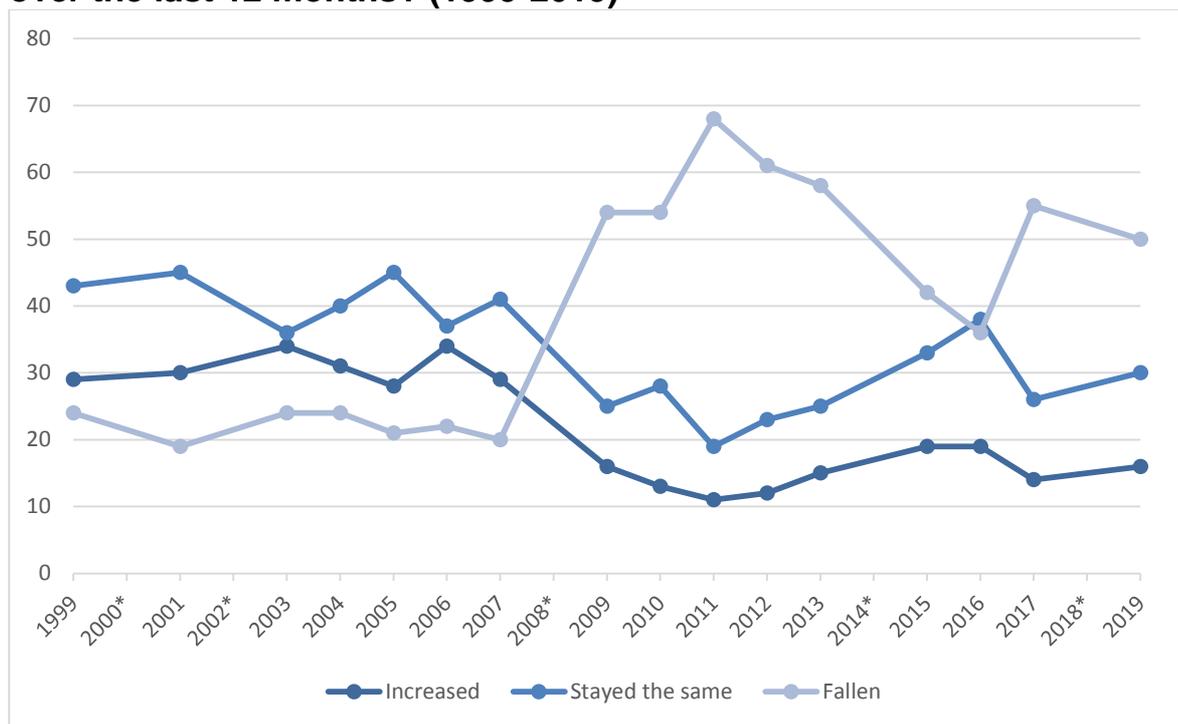


Base: all respondents

*Question was not asked in 2008, 2014 and 2018

The proportion saying that the economy had grown weaker peaked in 2009 (72%), slightly earlier than the peak in the proportion saying the standard of living had fallen in 2011 (68%). Since these peaks the proportion saying that the economy had grown weaker steadily fell up until 2015, then rose 20 percentage points between 2015 and 2016 from 34% to 54%, which may be explained by the economic uncertainty in the wake of the Brexit referendum. The proportion saying that the economy has grown weaker has steadily declined from 54% in 2016 to 42% in 2019. Between 2011 and 2016, the proportion saying that the standard of living had fallen steadily decreased to 36% in 2016. There was then an increase of 19 percentage points to 55% in 2017 with levels staying at a similar level in 2019 (50%).

Figure 3.8: Has the general standard of living in Scotland increased or fallen over the last 12 months? (1999-2019)



Base: all respondents

*Question was not asked in 2000, 2002, 2008, 2014 and 2018

Have particular subgroups driven changes over time in attitudes to the economy and standard of living?

Exploring the changes in the proportion saying that the economy had grown weaker or the standard of living had fallen up until 2009, certain demographic relationships in the change are evident. For both questions the higher the household income the greater the increase in the proportion saying that either the economy had grown weaker or that the standard of living had fallen. For example, there was a 47-percentage point increase between 2001 and 2009 in the proportion of those in the highest income group who thought the standard of living had fallen compared with only a 29-percentage point increase among those in the lowest income group.

There was a relationship between age and views on whether the economy had grown stronger or weaker, with the younger age groups showing a greater change over time in the proportion thinking the economy had grown weaker. There was no similar relationship found between age and the proportion saying the standard of living had fallen in the same period. In 2004, 20% of those aged 18 to 34 years old compared with 29% of those aged 65 and over thought the economy had grown weaker in the previous 12 months. These proportions increased by 54 percentage points among the youngest age group compared with a 30-percentage point increase among the oldest age group between 2004 and 2009.

Just as the increase between 2004 and 2009 in the proportion thinking the economy had got weaker in the past year was greater among younger people, so was the decline in the proportion thinking it had got weaker between 2009 and 2019. The proportion of the youngest age group who thought the economy had

weakened declined from 75% in 2009 to 36% in 2019, a 39-percentage point drop, compared with a 15-percentage point drop among those aged 65 and over. The decline was also greater among those in the highest income group (a 41-percentage point decline) compared with those in the lowest income group (a 23 percentage point decline). There was a 45-percentage point decline in the proportion of those with degree-level qualifications who thought the economy had got weaker, compared with only an 11-percentage point drop among those with no formal qualifications. In 2009, a similar proportion of people who were struggling on their present income and those who were comfortable said that the economy had grown weaker, whereas in 2019, 53% of those struggling on their current income thought the economy had grown weaker in the past year compared with 40% of those who were living comfortably. There was no great difference in the change by political party affiliation, though there was something of a right-left split. The proportion of those on the right of the political spectrum who said that the economy had grown weaker in the past year fell by a greater amount (39 percentage points) than for those on the left (24 percentage points).

Between 2009 and 2019, although the proportion of people who felt that the standard of living had fallen remained relatively stable (54% in 2009 compared with 49% in 2019), there was, however, noticeable differences in the change in the proportion of people who identified with different political parties. The proportion of SNP supporters who felt the standard of living had fallen decreased between 2009 and 2019 by 8 percentage points, whereas for Conservatives the proportion fell by 16 percentage points.

Perceived responsibility for changes to the economy and living standards?

SSA 2019 also asked respondents whether perceived changes in the economy and standard of living were mainly the result of the UK Government's policies, the Scottish Government's policies or for some other reason. In 2019, the same proportion thought that recent economic performance was 'mainly the result of the UK Government's policies' as thought it was 'mainly the result of the Scottish Government's policies' (31%). Whereas nearly 4 in 10 (38%) thought that changes in living standards were 'mainly the result of the UK Government's policies' compared with a quarter (25%) who thought they were 'mainly the result of Scottish Government's policies'.

SSA findings from 2006 onwards have shown that those who believed that the economy is getting stronger and the standard of living is increasing were more likely to 'credit' this to Scottish Government than to UK Government policies. However, among those who thought things were getting worse, the reverse was the case, with relatively few people 'blaming' the Scottish Government's policies. This pattern was also observed in SSA 2019 with a stronger economy and an increased standard of living being viewed as more likely to be the result of Scottish Government policies than UK Government policies.

Table 3.10 below shows that the distribution of responses was broadly similar among those who thought the economy had become weaker or the standard of

living had decreased, with over half of people in Scotland believing they were the result of UK Government policies. However, there was a divergence in whose policies people ‘credited’ for a stronger economy compared with who they ‘credited’ for an increased standard of living. The Scottish Government’s policies were more likely to be viewed as responsible for a stronger economy (68%) than an increased standard of living (44%), and people were more likely to say that an increase in the standard of living was mainly the result of ‘some another reason’ (28%) besides Scottish or UK Government policies than they were when it came to a stronger economy (15%).

Table 3.10: Perceived responsibility for changes in the economy and standard of living (2019)

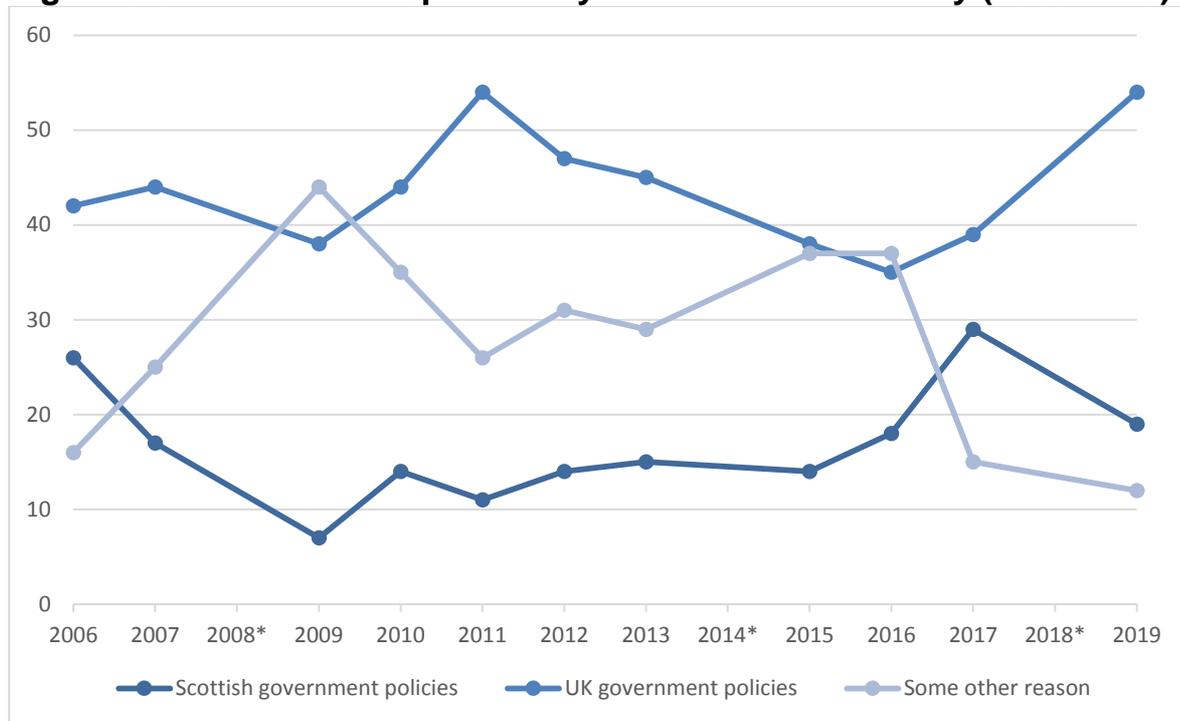
	Credit for stronger economy	Credit for increased standard of living	Blamed for weaker economy	Blamed for decreased standard of living
	%	%	%	%
Scottish Government policies	68	44	19	17
UK Government policies	11	19	54	57
Some other reason	15	28	12	12
Both Westminster and SG	4	4	14	13
<i>Weighted bases</i>	<i>178</i>	<i>159</i>	<i>425</i>	<i>503</i>
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>161</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>441</i>	<i>507</i>

Base: all who said economy had grown stronger/weaker and all who said standard of living had increased/decreased in last year

Figure 3.9 and Figure 3.10 show whether people believe that UK Government or Scottish Government policies are responsible for the economy growing weaker or the standard of living falling since the questions were first asked in 2006. After the financial crisis of 2008, there was an increase in the proportion of people who believed that the weaker economy or the fall in living standards was mainly the result of UK Government policies. People in Scotland have been consistently more likely to believe that UK Government policies were responsible for a fall in standards of living than they have been to believe that UK Government policies were responsible for a weaker economy. The gap between the proportion who believed that UK Government and Scottish Government policies were responsible for a weaker economy steadily decreased after the Conservative-Liberal Democrat

Coalition was elected in 2010, becoming closest in 2017 (39% 'blaming' the UK Government compared with 29% 'blaming' the Scottish Government) before diverging again in 2019, where 54% believed that UK Government policies compared with only 19% who believed Scottish Government policies were responsible for a weaker economy.

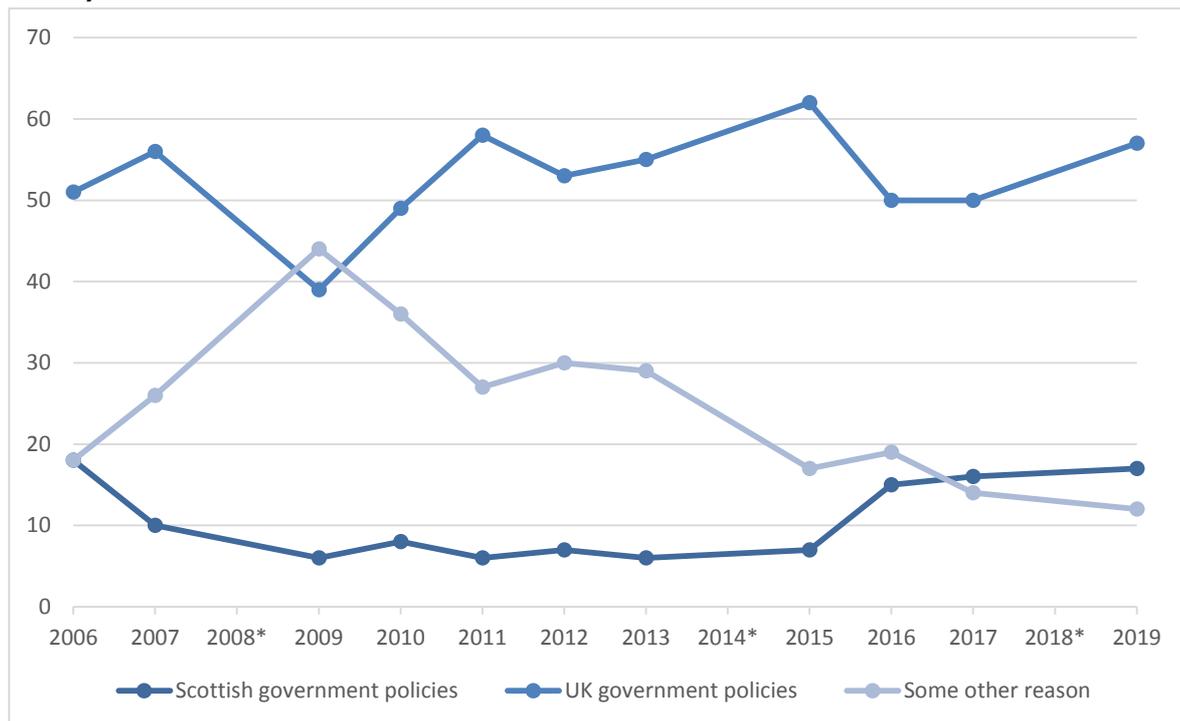
Figure 3.9: Perceived responsibility for a weaker economy (2006-2019)



Base: all who said economy had grown weaker

*Question was not asked in 2008, 2014 and 2018

Figure 3.10: Perceived responsibility for a fall in the standard of living (2006-2019)

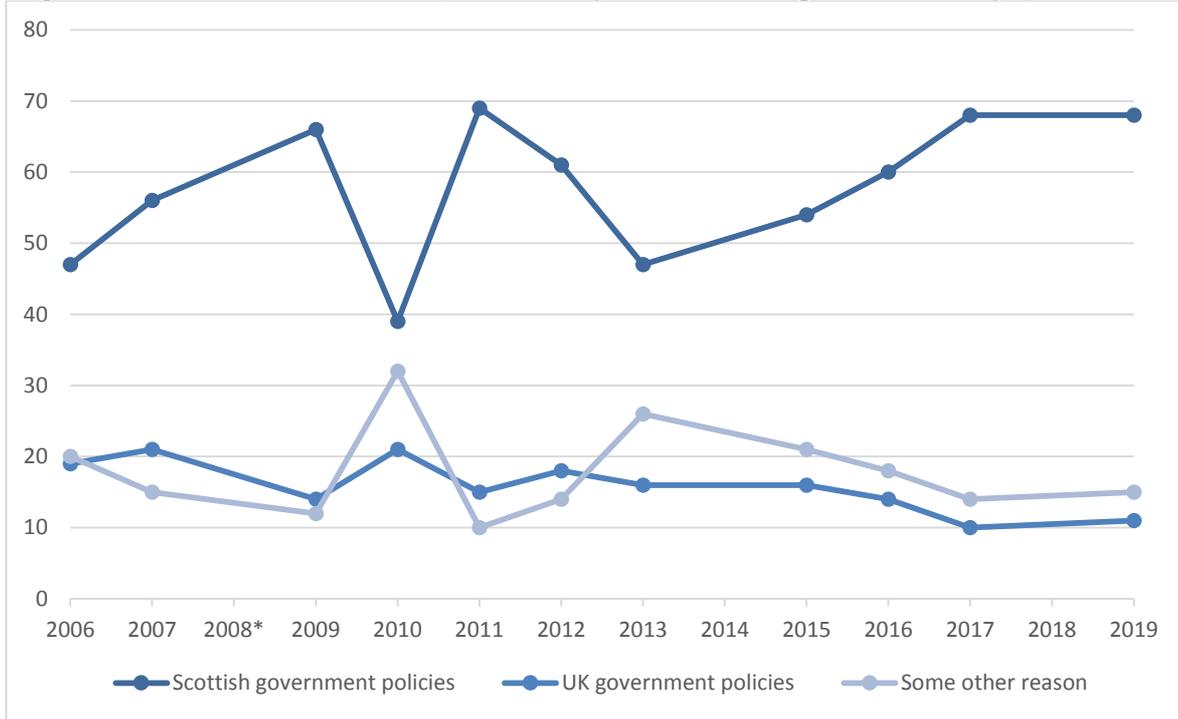


Base: all who said standard of living had fallen

*Question was not asked in 2008, 2014 and 2018

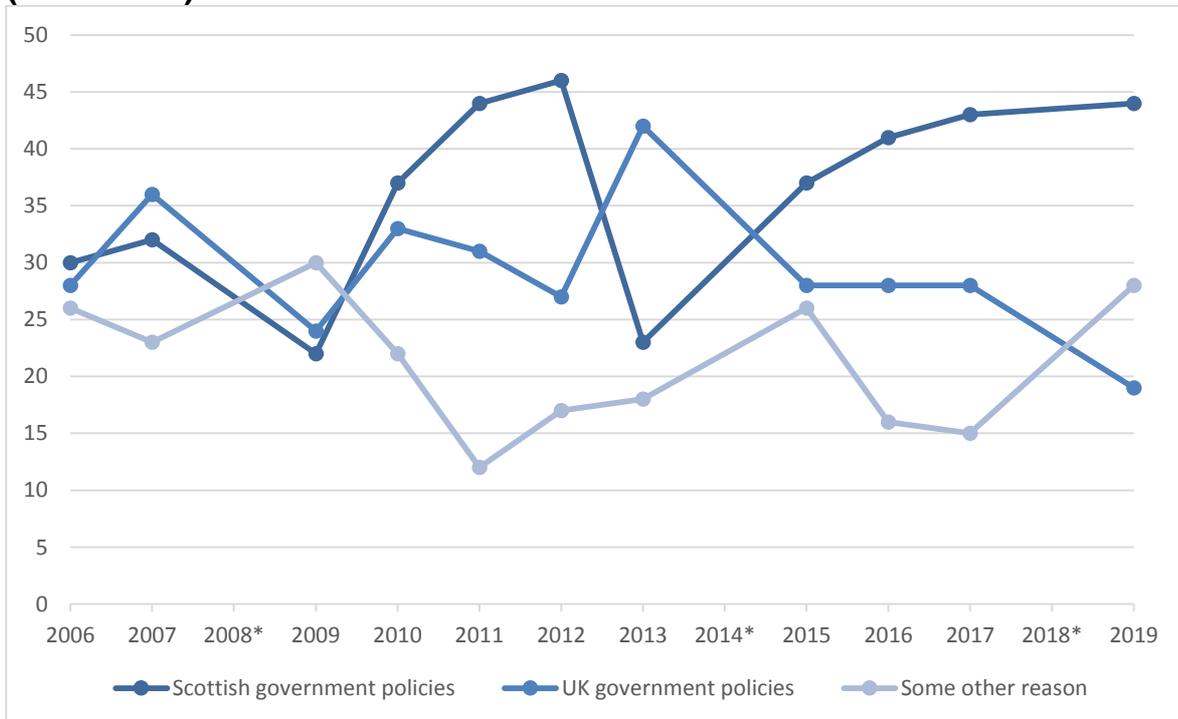
Figures 3.11 and 3.12 show the figures on whether people believe that UK Government or Scottish Government policies are responsible for the economy growing stronger or the standard of living increasing since 2006. A higher proportion of those who believe that the economy has grown stronger believe that this is mainly due to Scottish Government policies than believe this is due to UK Government policies. The proportion of those who believed that the stronger economy is mainly due to UK Government policies was around 1 in 5 between 2006 and 2010, which saw the first Coalition government. Since 2010 there has been a steady decline to around 1 in 10 in more recent years. The proportion of those who believed that the stronger economy was mainly due to Scottish Government policies has fluctuated more often but has increased steadily since 2013, from just under a half (47%) to just over two-thirds (68%) in 2019.

Figure 3.11: Perceived responsibility for a stronger economy (2006-2019)



Base: all who said economy had grown stronger
 *Question was not asked in 2008, 2014 and 2018

Figure 3.12: Perceived responsibility for an increased standard of living (2006-2019)



Base: all who said standard of living had increased
 *Data not collected in these years

The figures for the standard of living, on the other hand, have generally been much closer. The proportions who believe that an increase in the standard of living is mainly the result of UK Government or Scottish Government policies were similar

between 2006 and 2010. However, in 2011 and 2012, a higher proportion believed increases in the standard of living were mainly the result of Scottish Government policies. There was a peak in the proportion who believed that increases in the standard of living were mainly the result of UK Government policies in 2013, when 42% of people 'credited' the UK Government's policies for an increase in the standard of living compared with 23% who 'credited' the Scottish Government. But since 2015, a higher proportion have consistently believed that Scottish Government policies are responsible for increases in the standard of living compared with UK Government policies. The proportion believing that UK Government policies are responsible for an increase in the standard of living has declined from a high of 42% in 2013 to just 19% in 2019 when 44% believed that Scottish Government policies were responsible for an increase in the standard of living.

Chapter 4 – Political engagement

This chapter presents findings on political and civic engagement in 2019. The findings cover:

- people’s views on the importance of voting in UK, Scottish Parliament and local elections (and time series data);
- a new question on how often people talked about government and politics with family and friends; and
- levels of participation in civic/political activities (and time series data).

Where time series data are available, the subgroup analysis focuses on the extent to which the attitudes of particular subgroups have driven overall recorded trends over time. For the new question on how often people talk about government and politics with family and friends subgroup analysis is discussed for the 2019 data.²⁸

Importance of voting

A key component of people’s engagement with politics is how important they consider it to be to vote in elections. Three elections that Scottish citizens are eligible to vote in are UK Parliament general elections, elections to the Scottish Parliament and local council elections. People were asked how important they thought it was to vote in each of these elections, on a scale ranging from ‘very important’ to ‘not important at all’. The results for each of these questions are shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: How important do you think it is to vote in UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament and local elections (2019)

	UK Parliament	Scottish Parliament	Local elections
	%	%	%
Very important	71	75	68
Fairly important	18	19	23
Not very important	6	3	5
Not important at all	4	3	4
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1022</i>	<i>1022</i>	<i>1022</i>

Base: all respondents

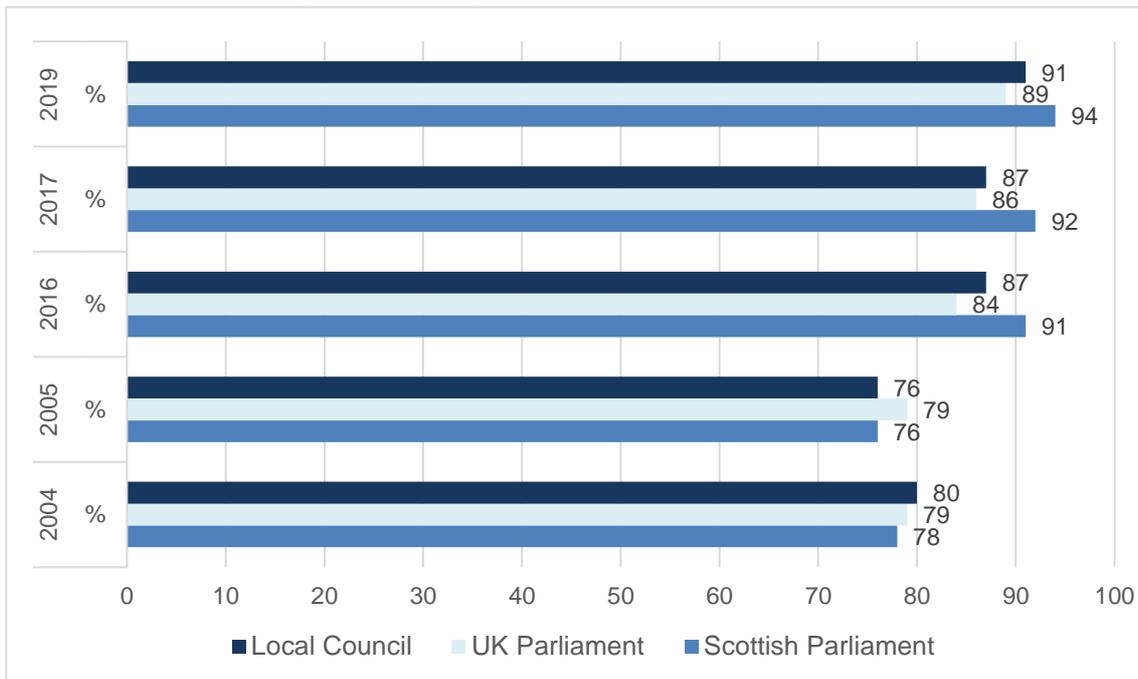
The majority of people thought it was very important to vote in each of the three elections. If the figures for ‘very’ and ‘fairly important’ are combined, the level of importance assigned to voting in each of the three elections is broadly similar but with voting in the Scottish Parliament election considered to be the most important

²⁸ Full sub-group breakdowns for 2019 data are available in the ‘Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2019: Chapter 4 subgroup variation tables’ Excel file published as a ‘supporting file’ alongside this report.

(94%), followed by voting in local elections (91%) and then UK general elections (89%).

Over time the proportion of people in Scotland who consider it important to vote in each of these elections has increased, though this change was greater for certain elections. Figure 4.1 shows these changes since the questions were first asked in 2004.

Figure 4.1: Proportion responding ‘very’ or ‘fairly important’: How important do you think it is to vote in UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament and local council elections (2004-2019)



Base: all respondents

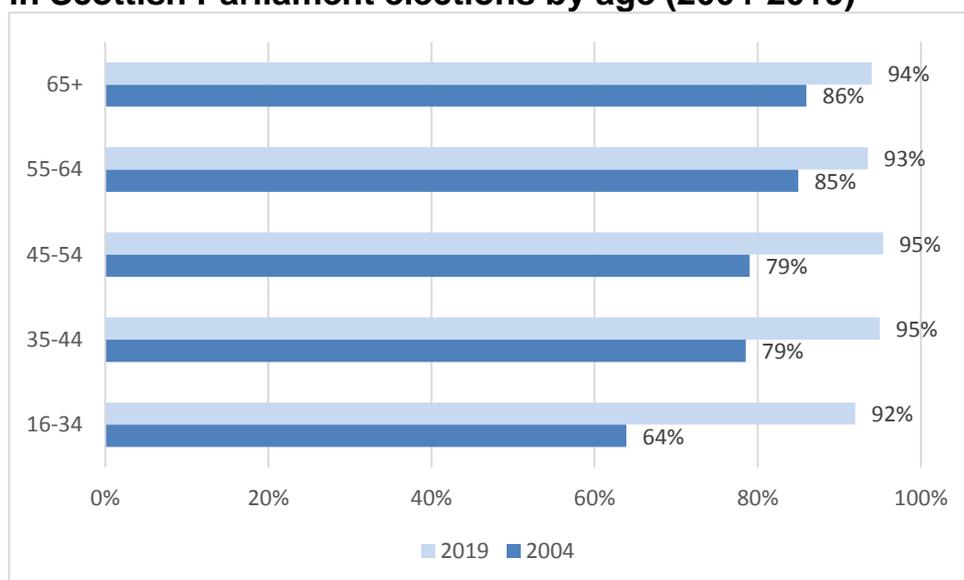
The proportion who considered it ‘very’ or ‘fairly important’ to vote in Scottish Parliament elections was similar in 2004 and 2005 but increased by 15 percentage points between 2005 and when the questions were reintroduced in 2016, rising from 76% to 91%. In comparison, the equivalent figures for UK general elections was a 5-percentage point increase from 79% to 84% and for local elections the increase was 11 percentage points from 76% to 87%. Therefore, in the decade-long interim between when the questions were asked in 2005 and when they were reintroduced in 2016, there has been a relatively large increase in the importance attached to voting in Scottish Parliament elections among people in Scotland.

Since 2016 the results for these questions have been fairly consistent, although the proportion of the population feeling it ‘very’ or ‘fairly important’ to vote in the three elections has increased very slightly, so the proportion of people in Scotland thinking it ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important to vote in each election was, in 2019, the highest it has been since the questions were first asked (94% for Scottish Parliament; 91% for local council; and 89% for UK general elections).

Have particular subgroups driven changes over time in attitudes to voting?

Exploring differences by subgroup from 2004, when the questions were first asked, to the latest figures for 2019 shows that the overall increase in the proportion of people in Scotland who thought it important to vote in these elections was driven by certain groups more than others. For the Scottish Parliament elections, the level of increase was greater among younger people and those who expressed a preference for independence. The proportion of those in the youngest age group who thought it important to vote in Scottish Parliament elections increased by 28 percentage points from 64% in 2004 to 92% in 2019, compared with an increase of 8 percentage points from 86% to 94% for the oldest age group in the same period. In 2004, around three-quarters (76%) of those who were independence supporters thought it important to vote in Scottish Parliament elections, whereas nearly all (97%) of those who expressed a preference for independence in 2019 do so, an increase of 21 percentage points. In comparison, the increase among those who expressed a preference for remaining part of the UK was 11 percentage points, rising from 80% to 92%.

Figure 4.2: Proportion of those who think it ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important to vote in Scottish Parliament elections by age (2004-2019)



Base: all respondents

Similar relationships were evident for UK general elections and local elections. The proportion of those in the youngest age group who thought it important to vote in UK general elections increased by 22 percentage points from 65% in 2004 to 87% in 2019, compared with an increase of 6 percentage points from 88% to 95% for those aged 65 and over. Similarly, the proportion of those in the youngest age group who thought it important to vote in local elections increased by 26 percentage points from 65% in 2004 to 91% in 2019, compared with a 4 percentage point increase from 88% to 91% for those aged 65 and over. The level of increase was also greater among those whose preference is independence compared with those who would prefer to remain as part of the UK for both UK and local council elections.

How often government and politics is talked about with family and friends

A new question in the 2019 survey asked people: ‘How much, if at all, do you talk with other people about government and politics?’ with responses ranging from ‘every day or nearly every day’ to ‘never or practically never’. The responses to this new question are summarised in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: How much, if at all, do you talk with other people about government and politics? (2019)

	%
Every day or nearly every day	24
Less often but at least a few times a week	29
Less often but at least a few times a month	21
Less often but at least a few times a year	8
Never or practically never	17
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1022

Base: all respondents

The most common response, selected by just under 3 in 10 people (29%), was that they talked about politics with other people less often (than every day) but at least a few times a week. Just under a quarter of people in Scotland reported talking about politics every day (24%), with just over 1 in 5 talking about it at least a few times a month (21%), and 17% never talking about politics with other people.

How did attitudes differ between subgroups in 2019?

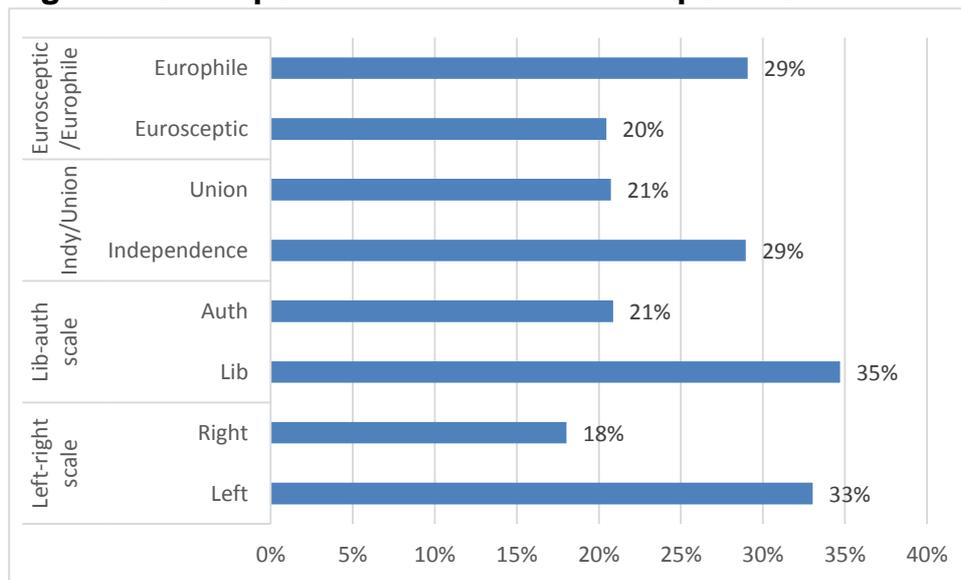
Men (28%) were more likely to talk about politics every day than women (21%) and how often people talked about politics was related to both their level of education and their household income.²⁹ In general, those with higher levels of education, and those on higher household incomes, were more likely to talk about politics with others every day. Around 3 in 10 (31%) of those with a degree-level qualification spoke about politics with others every day, compared with 17% of those with no formal qualifications who did so.

Unsurprisingly, a person’s level of interest in politics and whether they read a daily newspaper were also related to how often they talked about politics. Of those who read a broadsheet paper, 36% of them talked about politics with others every day compared with 23% who did not read a paper. More than 4 in 10 (43%) of those with ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of interest in politics spoke about it with others every day, compared with only 6% of those with ‘not very much’ or no interest in politics at all.

²⁹ Differences by household income were marginally significant.

As shown in Figure 4.3, the likelihood of someone talking about politics with other people every day was also related to their political orientation. A third (33%) of those on the left of the political spectrum spoke about politics ‘every day or nearly every day’ with others, compared with 18% of those on the right. Similarly, 35% of those with the most liberal views spoke about politics ‘every day or nearly every day’, compared with just over a fifth (21%) of those in the authoritarian group. There were also differences by attitudes towards the EU and Scottish Independence. Europhiles were more likely (29%) to speak about politics ‘every day or nearly every day’ than Eurosceptics (20%),³⁰ as were those who expressed a preference for independence (29%) compared with those who expressed a preference to remain in the UK (21%).

Figure 4.3: Proportion who talked about politics with others every day (2019)



Base: all respondents

Civic participation

As a way of measuring levels of civic participation, SSA has asked people in Scotland since 2004 whether they have done any of a range of activities to register what they thought about an issue. Before 2009, the question asked respondents whether they had **ever** done one of the activities listed, whereas from 2009 onwards the question wording changed to whether the respondent had done any of the activities **in the last few years**.

Table 4.3 below shows the most commonly selected responses in 2019 alongside the years from 2009 (when the question wording was amended). In 2019, people in Scotland were most likely to have signed a petition (including online petitions) at 45%; followed by 28% of people who had contacted their local council; 21% had

³⁰ Eurosceptics are those who chose either ‘leave the EU’ or ‘stay in the EU but reduce its powers’ at the 5-answer option question on views on what Britain’s policy should be on EU membership, as described in Chapter 2. Europhiles are those who chose the options stay in the EU keeping its powers the same, stay in the EU but increasing the EUs powers or working for the formation of a single European government.

given money to a campaign or organisation; 17% had contacted an MP or MSP: and 16% had attended a public meeting. A third of people (33%) had not done any of the civic activities listed.

Table 4.3: Have people done any of the activities listed in the last few years as a way of registering what they thought about an issue (2009, 2013, 2015 & 2019)

	2009* %	2013* %	2015* %	2019* %
Signed a petition (including online petitions)	28	38	43	45
Contacted my local council	23	26	27	28
Given money to a campaign or organisation	13	22	28	21
Contacted an MP or MSP	17	16	18	17
Attended a public meeting	14	15	18	16
No, have not done any of these	45	39	31	33
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1482	1497	1288	1022

* Responses sum to more than 100% because respondents could choose multiple options
Base: all respondents

The proportion of people in Scotland who have signed a petition, including online petitions, has increased by 16 percentage points from 28% in 2009 to 45% in 2019. The proportion who had given money to a campaign or organisation declined by 7 percentage points from a peak in 2015 of 28% to just over one-fifth (21%) in 2019. The proportion of people who have contacted their local council has increased gradually from 23% in 2009 to 28% in 2019,³¹ whereas the proportion contacting an MP/MSP or attended a public meeting has remained fairly stable since 2009. In 2019, around two-thirds of people in Scotland (67%) had done at least one of the civic activities on the list compared with a third of people (33%) who said they had not done any of the activities listed in the past few years. This represents an increase of 12 percentage points in the proportion who have done at least one of the activities since the question was first asked in 2009.

Have particular subgroups driven changes over time in the level of civic participation?

Exploring in more detail differences by subgroup between the years 2009 and 2019, show that certain groups were associated with changes in the level of civic participation more than others. The fall in the proportion of people who had done none of the activities listed was 12 percentage points between 2009 and 2019 but was greater among younger people and those with the most liberal views. In 2009, 51% of those aged 18 to 34 years old had not done any of the activities as a way of registering what they thought about an issue. This declined to 27% by 2019, a drop

³¹ This difference is statistically significant.

of 24 percentage points, compared with a decrease of only 4 percentage points for those aged 65 and over (47% in 2009 to 43% in 2019), resulting in a 12-percentage point gap between the two groups. Those with the most liberal views were consistently less likely than those in the authoritarian group to not have done any of these civic activities, however, between 2009 and 2019, there was a 23-percentage point decline from 40% to 17% in the level of non-participation among those in the liberal group compared with only a 6-percentage point decline from 48% to 42% among those in the authoritarian group.

The increase in the proportion of people in Scotland who had signed a petition was also driven by younger people, with an increase of 32 percentage points between 2009 and 2019 for those in the youngest age group, compared with an increase of 7 percentage points for those aged 65 and over. The level of increase was also higher for those with the most liberal views, as well as among those who took a greater interest in politics. In 2009, around a third (34%) of those in the liberal group had signed a petition which had increased to two-thirds (66%) by 2019, an increase of 32 percentage points, compared with only a 7-percentage point increase among those in the authoritarian group. Between 2009 and 2019, there was a 21-percentage point increase in the proportion of those with 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of interest in politics who had signed a petition compared with only a 10-percentage point increase for those with 'not very much' or 'none at all'. The general increase in the proportion of people who had signed a petition between 2009 and 2019 could have been the result of the increased prevalence of online petitions in this period, as well as the ease of sharing them on social media, though further research would be needed to determine how far this trend has influenced the increase.

The proportion of people in Scotland who had given money to a campaign or organisation increased by 8 percentage points between 2009 and 2019. This increase was higher among those with the most liberal views and those with a greater interest in politics. Between 2009 and 2019, the proportion of those with liberal views who said they had given to a campaign or organisation increased by 15 percentage points while in the same period the proportion of those in the authoritarian group remained the same. A similar relationship was seen between those with 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of interest in politics, among whom there was a 13-percentage point rise, compared with only a 3-percentage point rise among those with 'not very much' interest in politics or 'none at all'.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

SSA has tracked attitudes to government and public services since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. The past two decades have seen periods of economic, political and constitutional change, including the financial crisis of 2008, referendums on both Scottish independence and the UK's membership of the EU, the devolution of further powers to the Scottish Parliament, and the emergence of the SNP as the dominant political party of Scotland at both Holyrood and Westminster. SSA 2019 fieldwork took place before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, and thus represents the final reading of public attitudes before the social and political impacts of another major event become clear.

In 2019, a majority of people in Scotland trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests and perceived the Scottish Government to be good at listening before taking decisions. A majority also felt that the Scottish Parliament gives ordinary people more say in how Scotland is run and provides Scotland with a stronger voice in the UK. Although not reaching the heights of 2011 and 2015, levels of trust in the Scottish Government remained relatively stable between 2017 and 2019, while levels of trust in the UK Government fell. Those who identify as SNP supporters and those who believe that Scotland should be an independent country are more likely than their counterparts to display trust in the Scottish Government, a development that was not in evidence during the first decade of devolution.

Throughout the first ten years of devolution the UK Government was perceived to hold the most influence over how Scotland was run. However, in each of the years following the Scottish independence referendum, up to and including 2019, people have been equally likely to feel that the Scottish Government has the most influence over the way Scotland is run, as to feel that the UK Government does.

At the same time, around five times as many people in 2019 felt that the Scottish Government *ought* to have the most influence over the way Scotland is run as felt that the UK Government should exercise the most influence. In contrast to perceived levels of actual influence, and aside from a small drop in the proportion who believe the Scottish Government ought to have the most influence over how Scotland is run in the years prior to the 2014 independence referendum, this picture has remained relatively stable over the past two decades.

In 2019, over half of people in Scotland felt that taxation and government spending (on health, education and social benefits) should be increased, with a further 4 in 10 believing that the level of taxation and spending should be maintained at current levels. While the proportion who felt that the level of taxation and spending should be increased fell from over a half in 1999 to less than 4 in 10 a decade later, support for increased taxation and spending has since returned to 1999 levels. Similarly, while support for the principle of income redistribution declined during the first decade of devolution from over 6 in 10 in 1999 to less than 4 in 10 in 2009, the proportion who agree that government should redistribute income increased during the following years and now stands once again at over half.

Almost a quarter of people in Scotland in 2019 indicated that helping the economy grow should be the highest priority for the Scottish Government, followed by improving standards of education and improving people's health. Supporting economic growth has been registered as the top priority since the 2008 financial crisis, apart from in 2017, when improving standards of education was the top priority. Meanwhile, cutting crime which was consistently a high priority during the first decade of devolution has since declined, and has been selected as a priority by less than 1 in 10 since 2015.

In 2019, around two-thirds of people in Scotland were satisfied with the way in which the NHS runs – the highest level of satisfaction recorded by SSA since the advent of devolution. Despite this, almost half felt that the standard of the health service had fallen over the previous twelve months, with around 1 in 5 of those who perceive standards to have fallen blaming the policies of the Scottish Government and over 2 in 5 blaming the policies of the UK Government. Meanwhile, among those who perceive the standard of the health service in Scotland to have increased, over half credit the policies of the Scottish Government for this compared with around 1 in 10 who credit the policies of the UK Government.

Just over 2 in 5 in 2019 believed that the economy in Scotland was weaker than was the case twelve months previously, while a half felt that the general standard of living in Scotland had fallen over the same period. However, these were lower than the proportion of people who thought that the economy had grown weaker and the standard of living had fallen in Scotland in 2017 and also much lower than in 2009 following the global financial crisis. While, in 2019, around 1 in 5 of those who felt that the economy had weakened and the standard of living had fallen blamed the policies of the Scottish government, over half blamed the policies of the UK Government for this perceived decline. Meanwhile, those who believed that the economy had strengthened and that the standard of living had increased were once again more likely to credit the policies of the Scottish Government rather than the policies of the UK Government for this.

In 2019 almost 19 in 20 people in Scotland felt that it was important to vote in Scottish Parliament elections, with around 9 in 10 stating that it was important to vote in UK Government and local elections. The proportion stating that it is important to vote in Scottish Parliament elections has risen by 15 percentage points over the past 15 years, with large increases seen in particular among younger people and those who express a preference for independence.

Around one-quarter of people in Scotland reported discussing government and politics with other people nearly every day in 2019, with a further 3 in 10 doing so at least a few times a week. Meanwhile, two-thirds of people in Scotland reported having engaged in an activity to register what they thought about an issue. The most popular method of civic participation was signing a petition, followed by contacting one's local council and giving money to a campaign or organisation. The proportion who reported having engaged in at least one civic activity to demonstrate what they thought about an issue has increased by 12 percentage points over the past decade, with this increase notable among younger age groups in particular.

The past two decades have seen a number of major political and economic changes in Scotland. Throughout this period, levels of trust in the Scottish Government have remained relatively high, while during the past decade in particular perceptions of the impact of the Scottish Parliament have become increasingly positive. Satisfaction with the NHS has also increased over the past 15 years, reaching its highest recorded level in 2019. However, SSA data suggest that there are still some challenges for the Scottish Government; while pre-2008 people were consistently more likely to feel that the strength of the economy and the standard of living in Scotland were increasing than that they were decreasing, the reversal of this trend in the years since, while improving slightly in 2019, remains visible.

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