

Scottish social attitudes survey 2021/22:

Attitudes to Scotland's handling of the pandemic



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Key Findings

Views on the use of data and science during the pandemic:

- Around two thirds (67%) **trusted the data provided in Scotland during the pandemic about the spread of coronavirus** ‘a great deal/quite a lot’, revealing a good overall level of trust in the data.
- Overall, **people trusted the information provided by the Scottish Government** during the pandemic. While both were high, a lower proportion of people trusted information from the **Scottish Government** ‘just about always/most of the time’ (74%) compared with information given by **scientists** (81%).
- Just under three quarters (72%) of people felt that the degree of reliance **on evidence provided by scientists** to inform decisions during the pandemic was ‘about right’.
- Most felt that the **decisions made** were based on the right amount of reliance on **science and public opinion**. Although this figure was higher in terms of using scientific information to make decisions (72%) compared with relying on the views of the public (61%). A higher proportion felt that decisions made were influenced **too much by the views of the public** (17%) compared with those who felt that decisions were influenced too much by evidence provided by scientists (9%).
- Perceptions of the influence that **public views had on decision making during the pandemic** varied by household composition, age and previous coronavirus status.
 - Those who lived with at least one other person over the age of 16 were more likely to feel that the decisions made were influenced ‘far too much’ by the public than those who lived alone (6% and 1% respectively).
 - Those in the youngest age group were more likely to think that the decisions made were influenced ‘far/somewhat too much’ by the public than those aged 65+ (23% of those aged 16-24 compared with 10% of those aged 65+).
 - Just under a quarter (23%) of those who had tested positive for coronavirus felt that the decisions made were influenced ‘far/somewhat too much’ by the public compared with 13% of those who did not think they had ever had coronavirus.

Government procedural justice (relationship between authority and the people):

- Overall, just under two-thirds (65%) felt that the Scottish Government understood **the impact of the restrictions** on people's lives 'very/fairly well'. Women were more likely than men to have this perception (70% compared with 59%).
- Over two-fifths (44%) felt that the government had been 'very/fairly good' at **listening to people's views about how to best handle the coronavirus pandemic**, while a fifth (20%) felt they had been 'fairly/very bad'.
- Six in ten (60%) felt that the **Scottish Government had the interests of people like them at heart** 'a great deal/quite a lot', while 37% felt that the Scottish Government made its **decisions regardless of what people wanted** 'most of the time'. Those living in rural areas were more likely to think that the Scottish Government had the interests of people like them at heart when making decisions during the pandemic (65%) than those living in urban areas (57%).

Views on how properly prepared Scotland is for another pandemic:

- Nearly a third (31%) felt 'not at all/not very confident' that Scotland was properly prepared for another pandemic while over two thirds (68%) felt 'fairly/very confident' about this.
- When controlling for other variables, party political affiliation was found to be a key driver of **confidence in whether Scotland would be properly prepared for another pandemic**. The odds of a Conservative supporter saying that they felt 'not very/not at all confident' in Scotland's preparedness for another pandemic were almost four times greater (OR¹=3.6) than those whose affiliation was with the Scottish National Party (SNP) while the odds of a Labour supporter were almost three times greater (OR=2.7).
- The odds of people feeling 'not at all/not very confident' that Scotland would be properly prepared to deal with another pandemic were also higher among:
 - Those who felt that the Scottish Government is 'not at all/not very good' at listening to the views of the public before taking decisions
 - Those who trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests 'only some of the time/almost never'
 - Those who had/believed they have had coronavirus

¹ The Odds Ratio (OR) is a statistic that represents the likelihood of an individual having a score of '1' on the outcome variable (as opposed to '0') from their responses to the predictor variables. In this case the odds of a Conservative supporter being 'not very/not at all confident' in Scotland's preparedness for another pandemic (compared with a SNP supporter which is the base category). This is explained further in the SSA 2021/22 Attitudes to Scotland's handling of the pandemic - Technical information.

- Men
- Those who 'disagreed/disagreed strongly' that they had others in their area to turn to for support
- Age, household composition, highest educational qualification, SIMD quintile, urban/rural residence, levels of social trust and national identity were not found to be significant drivers of attitudes towards Scotland's preparedness to deal with a future pandemic.

Associations between trust, social support and attitudes towards the handling of the pandemic:

Most of the attitudes towards Scotland's handling of the pandemic varied according to people's general trust in others and perceptions of social support. For example, trust in the data provided during the pandemic and feeling that the Scottish Government understood the impact of the restrictions were higher among those who felt that 'most people can be trusted' and those who agreed that they had people in their area to turn to for support.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This report presents findings from the Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) 2021/22 conducted between the 21st October 2021 and the 27th March 2022. It focuses on the public's attitudes towards Scotland's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and seeks to address the following key questions:

- What attitudes do people in Scotland hold towards how well the Scottish Government handled the pandemic and how does this differ between different subgroups?
 - Did they think that decisions made during the pandemic were informed by science?
 - To what extent did they trust the information presented by the Scottish Government and scientists during the pandemic?
 - Did they feel that they were given a voice in policy decisions?
 - Did they feel that the views of ordinary people were taken into account?

- How do the people in Scotland evaluate Scotland's readiness to handle another pandemic in the future and to what extent is this likely influenced by people's political views, social trust and overall trust in the Scottish Government?

Context

Pandemic developments

Survey fieldwork coincided with a period of some variability with regards to the status of the coronavirus pandemic and the measures in place in Scotland during this time. Due to contextual changes in people's experiences of the pandemic occurring throughout the fieldwork period, responses to the survey may have been affected by when participants took part.

During the fieldwork period, the number of recorded daily positive coronavirus cases in Scotland fluctuated. On the 21st October 2021, 2,555 new positive cases were recorded. This rose to 23,539 in December 2021. The number of positive cases reported per day then fell to between 5,287 and 9,132 in early January and throughout February 2022, rising again in March 2022 to a peak of 15,278 before falling to around 7,800 by the end of the fieldwork period.² Between the week beginning the 25th October 2021 and the week beginning the 21st March 2022, 2,324 deaths involving Covid-19 were recorded.³

² [Data taken from the Public Health Scotland Covid-19 Daily Dashboard](#)

³ [Data taken from the National Records of Scotland weekly deaths involving COVID-19 in Scotland](#)

In late October 2021, the Delta strain of coronavirus was reported to be dominant in Scotland. Mitigations in place around the start of the fieldwork period included the continued use of face coverings in public places, self-isolation and booking of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests if an individual was symptomatic, tested positive on a lateral flow test, or was a close contact of someone who tested positive. Working from home was encouraged where possible and an enforceable Covid Status Certification system was in place at a number of indoor and outdoor event venues. Face coverings in schools remained in place, while some easing of testing rules related to international travel had been announced.⁴

During the survey fieldwork period, a number of changes took place in the development of the pandemic and the mitigations in place in Scotland at the time.⁵

- 25th October 2021: Expansion to the vaccination programme with invitations for booster vaccinations issued to those aged 60-69 and those aged 16 and over with underlying health conditions.
- 15th November 2021: The online vaccination portal was launched for more vulnerable groups to book a booster appointment.
- 3rd December 2021: Community transmission of Omicron was identified.
- 11th December 2021: All household contacts of confirmed Covid-19 cases were required to self-isolate, irrespective of vaccination status and/or a negative PCR result. Deferral of work Christmas parties was encouraged.
- 14th December 2021: Indoor household mixing was restricted to a maximum of three households, with lateral flow tests encouraged prior to meeting.
- 27th December 2021: The one metre physical distancing rule was reintroduced in indoor hospitality and leisure venues. Temporary nightclub closures began.
- 5th January 2022: Positive lateral flow tests no longer required a follow-up PCR. The self-isolation period was reduced for positive cases who tested negative on days 6 and 7.
- 17th January 2022: Large outdoor events resumed without physical distancing or limits on numbers.
- 24th January 2022: One metre distancing in hospitality and leisure settings was lifted. Non-professional indoor contact sports resumed.

⁴ [First Minister's statement to the Scottish Parliament on 26/10/21; Timeline of Coronavirus in Scotland by Scottish Parliament Information Centre](#)

⁵ [First Minister's statement to the Scottish Parliament on 26/10/21](#)

- 21st February 2022: It was announced that a second booster vaccination was to be offered to certain vulnerable groups.
- 28th February 2022: The requirement for face coverings in schools was lifted and the Covid Status Certification ended.
- 15th March 2022: A continuation of the legal requirement for face coverings on public transport and in most indoor public settings into April was announced, as was the end of free lateral flow testing from mid-April.
- 18th March 2022: All international travel restrictions into Scotland were lifted.

Other measures of public opinion

Regular polling work commissioned by the Scottish Government has shown that public opinion has varied over the fieldwork period. Results from the ‘Public attitudes to coronavirus’ polling found that between March and August 2021, the proportions that agreed they supported the way in which restrictions were handled in Scotland varied between just over half (54%) and two-thirds (66%).⁶ Notably, there was a decline in agreement that the restrictions and rules were working, from around six/seven in ten between March and mid-June to around four in ten in both late June and late August 2021.

In late August 2021, around four in ten (41%) felt that the easing of restrictions was ‘about right’ and three in ten (30%) felt that this was ‘a little/much too fast’. Two in ten (21%) felt that the pace was ‘much too slow/a little too slow’.

Support for the handling of the pandemic continued to demonstrate variability as time went on, with a high of 57% in agreement in late November/early December 2021, that decreased slightly to 52%-54% in January 2022.⁷ During the same period, around half (52-47%) agreed that they trusted the Scottish Government to decide when to lift/reimpose restrictions, while a general increase in agreement was reported from 30% in early September 2021, to 46% in late November 2021 that the restrictions and rules were working.

A ‘free-text’ open survey undertaken by the Scottish Government in January/February 2022, sought to gather opinion on how people were feeling at that point in the pandemic, including what measures had been easier/harder to follow and what would enable people to feel safer and more supported.⁸ The key findings included that a range of emotions were identified, from being angry/critical, fed up and/or worried to accepting of the situation and in some cases, optimistic or even positive. Motivations to stay safe included a desire to protect others. There remained some concern among these respondents, in early 2022, regarding the

⁶ Scottish Government - [Public attitudes to coronavirus: November](#)

⁷ Scottish Government - [Public attitudes to coronavirus: April](#)

⁸ Scottish Government - [Coronavirus and society: what matters to people in Scotland?](#)

clarity of the guidance available at that time and in relation to the potentially harmful impacts of pandemic mitigations.

Factors that may influence people's views on the pandemic

It is important to consider the factors that might have impacted on people's experiences of COVID-19. These may have influenced how people responded when answering questions about their attitudes towards the handling of the pandemic and Scotland's preparedness for another pandemic. For example, evidence shows that women were reporting higher levels of anxiety and other mental health conditions than men during the pandemic.⁹ There was also evidence during the pandemic in Scotland that women were more likely than men and young people to follow the public health guidelines and were more likely to believe that it is possible to catch coronavirus more than once.¹⁰ There was a higher COVID-19-related death rate for men than women of eighteen percentage points between March 2020 and January 2021, despite no evidence that men were more likely to catch the virus than women.¹¹

Younger adults (those aged 16-24) were more likely to have felt the brunt of rises in unemployment levels and falls in employment levels during the pandemic. The pandemic also exacerbated lower levels of financial security in this age group.¹² In contrast, older people were affected by a far greater risk of death from coronavirus with the associated impact on their lives and the impacts of missed healthcare as a result of the pandemic.¹³ Age inevitably impacted on people's experiences of the restrictions put in place during the pandemic. There is evidence that younger adults were more likely to report that lockdown was making their mental health worse or was leading to loneliness.¹⁴ Other research has found that over half of older people and two-thirds of older people who lived alone, which is a growing proportion of the older population, reported that the pandemic had made them lonelier.¹⁵

Those living in the most deprived areas were more adversely affected by the pandemic which widened educational and health inequalities. This was evident in differences in death rates for coronavirus which were twice as high for those living in the 20% most deprived areas than those living in the 20% least deprived areas.¹⁶

Another factor that may have influenced people's views on the pandemic relates to whether they lived in an urban or rural area. Although higher population density did not necessarily correlate to greater COVID-19 transmission rates, the greater population size and interconnectivity associated with urban areas meant that cities

⁹ [Differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on men and women](#)

¹⁰ [Covid-19 Health and Adherence Research in Scotland](#)

¹¹ [Differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on men and women](#)

¹² [The impacts of COVID-19 on equality in Scotland](#)

¹³ [The impacts of COVID-19 on equality in Scotland](#)

¹⁴ [Coronavirus and the social impacts on young people in Great Britain](#)

¹⁵ [The Big Survey 2021 by Age Scotland](#)

¹⁶ [The impacts of COVID-19 on equality in Scotland](#)

were more vulnerable to transmission compared with rural areas.¹⁷ It also meant that the measures implemented to stop the spread of the disease had varying levels of impact on people, such as the need to physically keep apart from others or limit the distance travelled from home. These measures are likely to have had a varying impact on urban and rural dwellers, as well as by socioeconomic status. For example, difficulties in accessing green space in cities.¹⁸ Whilst there is reason to believe that urban areas were generally worse affected than rural areas due to greater housing density and the strain of a higher volume of positive cases of coronavirus on healthcare services, research suggests that the pandemic also had a negative impact on hospital waiting times in rural and remote trusts.¹⁹ In addition, the pandemic was felt to exacerbate workforce and financial issues in healthcare in remote areas.²⁰ Research into the impact of the pandemic in rural areas also found there was a heightened sense of loneliness and isolation amongst inhabitants, particularly younger adults, and that they were also affected by issues such as poorer internet connectivity.²¹

Aim of these survey questions

Given the vast amount of information that has been made available to the public throughout the pandemic (from both experts and non-experts), the aim of asking these questions within SSA 2021/22 was to take a more reflective look at public views in Scotland on how policy decisions were communicated and the relationship between data and trust. Of particular interest was to examine how perceptions of this may differ among different groups of people in society. This will inform on-going Scottish Government planning around future pandemic response.

Survey Methodology

SSA has been run annually by the Scottish Centre for Social Research since 1999. This report presents findings from the Scottish Government module of questions concerning the public's attitudes towards Scotland's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 2021/2022 SSA survey was conducted as a telephone survey rather than face-to-face, as a result of coronavirus restrictions in place at the time. A random sample of all those aged 16 and over living anywhere in Scotland (including the Highlands and Islands) was interviewed. Fieldwork began on 21st October 2021 and ceased on 27th March 2022.

Letter invitations to take part were issued to 21,775 addresses, of which 1,349 households opted-in and 1,043 provided at least one interview. A maximum of two

¹⁷ [Covid-19 in an Urban World: policy brief](#)

¹⁸ [Lockdown highlights the value of green space in cities](#)

¹⁹ [Covid-19 in an Urban World: policy brief;](#)

[Rural, remote and at risk: why rural health service face a steep climb to recovery from COVID-19](#)

²⁰ [Rural, remote and at risk: why rural health service face a steep climb to recovery from COVID-19](#)

²¹ [Rural voices heard as first RuralCovidLife results published](#)

adults per household were invited to take part in the survey. A total of 1,130 interviews were achieved in total. Assuming 10% of addresses were ineligible²², these figures equate to an opt-in rate of 7% and a response rate among opted-in households of 77%. Data were weighted in order to correct for non-response bias and differential selection probabilities due to deliberate over-sampling of rural areas and those living in the most deprived areas, and to ensure that they reflected the age-sex profile of the Scottish population. Technical details about the survey are published in a separate Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2021/22 Attitudes to Scotland's handling of the pandemic - Technical information at www.gov.scot.

Question design

A set of questions were developed in order to capture public attitudes towards Scotland's handling of the pandemic in the three key areas:

- Trust in:
 - Decisions made by the Scottish Government during the pandemic including the extent to which decisions were informed by science
 - Information presented by the Scottish Government and the scientists
- Whether the public of Scotland feel that they were given a voice in policy decisions that were made / feel that the views of ordinary people were taken into account
- How the public evaluate Scotland's preparedness to handle another pandemic in the future

In order to inform the development of the final set of questions, all of the potential new questions were cognitively tested and/or piloted between July and September 2021. This formed part of wider testing for new questions across the modules of the Scottish Social Attitudes survey (SSA) 2021/22.

The aim of the cognitive testing²³ was to ask a sample of respondents (14 people) a sub-set of the full SSA questions being proposed, including 4 questions on Scotland's handling of the pandemic. This was followed by asking them a selection of probes to check whether they were interpreting the questions and associated answer options consistently. Adaptations were made to several questions as a result of the cognitive testing.

²² This refers to addresses that were vacant, derelict or ineligible for other reasons including buildings under construction, holiday homes, businesses, other non-residential (such as schools, offices and institutions), and addresses that had been demolished. Based on other similar surveys it was assumed that 10% of addresses would fall into this category.

²³ Cognitive testing / interviewing refers to "the practice of administering a survey questionnaire while collecting additional verbal information about the survey responses; this additional information is used to evaluate the quality of the response or to help determine whether the question is generating the sort of information that its author intends." Beatty, P., (2004), *The Dynamics of Cognitive Interviewing in Presser et al's Methods for Testing and Evaluating Survey Questionnaires*.

The survey pilot asked a sufficient sample some of the questions being proposed to establish whether respondents understood the questions in the context of the survey and/or raised any issues with these, and to look at the distribution of answers. The pilot sample consisted of 83 respondents out of a sample of 167 selected randomly from ScotCen panel members living in Scotland.²⁴ The pilot included 12 questions on views on Scotland's handling of the pandemic. The final 10 questions were decided upon based on the findings of the pilot. For the final set of questions asked on this module refer to Appendix A of this report.

Analysis

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

All differences described in the text (between different groups of people) are statistically significant at the 95% level or above, unless otherwise specified. This means that the probability of having found a difference of at least this size, if there was no actual difference in the population, is 5% or less. The term 'significant' is used in this report to refer to statistical significance; this is not intended to imply substantive importance.

Multiple logistic regression analysis was conducted for Chapter 4 of this report to find out which variables were key drivers of opinion regarding how prepared Scotland would be to deal with another pandemic.

Further details of the analysis are included in the separate technical report and full data tables are available as 'supporting files' to this publication. The Supplementary Tables to the main report show the results of the multiple logistic regression analysis of factors associated with views on Scotland's preparedness for another pandemic. The SSA 2021/22 Pandemic Handling Annex Tables provide the full tables for each of these chapters (2-4) cross-tabulated by the background analysis variables.²⁵ These can be referred to alongside the relevant chapters in this report. Whilst the annex tables follow the order/numbering of the chapters, the annex table numbers do not directly match the tables within the report. The annex tables

²⁴ ScotCen Panel members are recruited from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey (SSA) which interviews those aged 16 and over across Scotland (including the Highlands and Islands). Those interviewed as part of the SSA in 2015, 2016, 2017 were asked to join the Panel at the end of the SSA interview. Further information on the sample is included in the SSA 2021/22 Attitudes to Scotland's handling of the pandemic - Technical information.

²⁵ See the SSA 2021/22 Attitudes to Scotland's handling of the pandemic - Technical information for details of the background analysis variables. Where appropriate descriptions of these are appended as footnotes within this report.

provide a full breakdown of each of the questions asked in relation to Scotland's handling of the pandemic cross-tabulated by each of the sub-groups.

Chapter 2 – Views on the use of data and science during the pandemic

This chapter examines peoples' views on the use of data and science during the pandemic and how these attitudes differed by demographic and attitudinal variables. It addresses the following key questions:

- How much, if at all, did people trust the data provided during the pandemic about the spread of coronavirus?
- How much did people trust the information provided by scientists during the pandemic?
- How much did people trust the information provided by the Scottish Government during the pandemic?
- How much did people feel the Scottish Government relied on the evidence provided by scientists?
- How much did people feel the Scottish Government were influenced by the views of the public?

Levels of trust

Trust in the data provided about the spread of coronavirus

To determine the level of trust people had in the data available to them about the spread of coronavirus, all respondents were asked how much, if at all, they trusted the data provided during the pandemic. The responses to this question are summarised in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: How much, if at all, did you trust the data that was made available during the pandemic about the spread of coronavirus in Scotland?

	(%)
A great deal	37
Quite a lot	30
Somewhat	19
Not very much	10
Not at all	4
Don't know/Refusal	0
Weighted base	1130
Unweighted base	1130

Base: All respondents

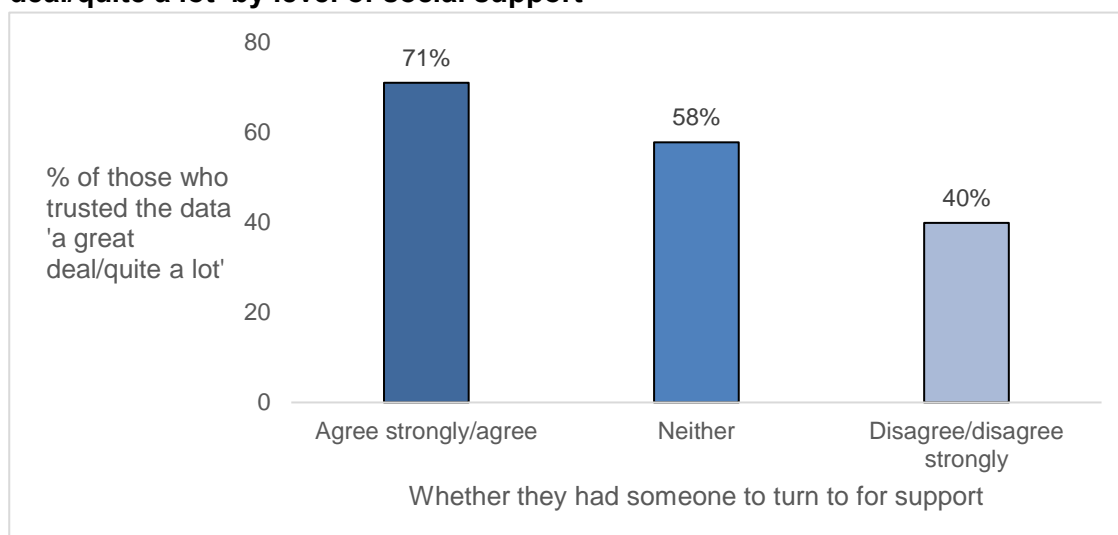
Overall, people trusted the data that was made available to them during the pandemic about the spread of coronavirus. Around two thirds (67%) trusted the data that was provided 'a great deal/quite a lot', compared with a fifth (19%) who trusted the given data 'somewhat', and 14% who trusted it 'not very much/not at all'.

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

Levels of trust in the data provided during the pandemic varied by attitudes towards trusting others and perceived feelings of social support. Those who felt most people can be trusted were more likely to trust the data provided during the pandemic 'a great deal/quite a lot' (79%) while this was lower among those who felt they 'can't be too careful in dealing with people' (49%).

Likewise, as reported in Figure 2.1, a difference was observed between those who said they 'agree/agree strongly' (71%) that they had someone to turn to for advice and support, and those who said they 'disagree/disagree strongly' (40%) that this was the case.

Figure 2.1: Percentage of those who trusted the data provided during the pandemic 'a great deal/quite a lot' by level of social support

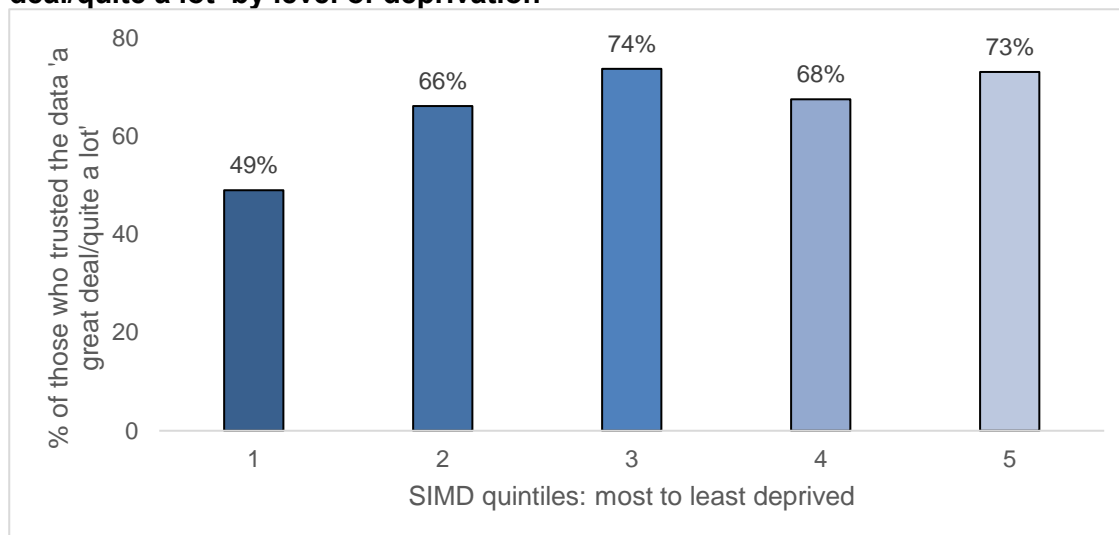


Base: All respondents

Results also varied by level of deprivation. As reported in Figure 2.2, those living in the most deprived areas of Scotland (SIMD1) were significantly less likely to trust the data provided 'a great deal/quite a lot' (49%) than those living in the other SIMD quintiles (66-74%).²⁶

²⁶ Area deprivation on SSA 2021/22 is measured using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020 divided into quintiles. SIMD 2020 measures the level of deprivation across Scotland – from the least deprived to the most deprived areas. It is based on 38 indicators in seven domains of: income, employment, health, education skills and training, housing, geographic access and crime. Further details are included in the separate technical report.

Figure 2.2: Percentage of those who trusted the data provided during the pandemic ‘a great deal/quite a lot’ by level of deprivation



Base: All respondents

There was also variation according to the level of educational attainment with those with a degree/higher education most likely to trust the data ‘a great deal/somewhat’ (73%) compared with those with highers/A levels (49%) or standard grades/GCSEs (40%). Those stating that they have no qualifications reported high levels of trust (67%) compared to those with lower level qualifications.

Trust in the information provided by scientists

People were asked how much they trusted the information provided by scientists during the pandemic. Table 2.2 summarises these responses.

Table 2.2: How much have you trusted the information provided by scientists during the pandemic?

	(%)
Just about always	47
Most of the time	34
Only some of the time	15
Almost never	3
Don't know/Refusal	1
Weighted base	1130
Unweighted base	1130

Base: All respondents

The results showed a high level of trust in the information given by scientists. The majority (81%) trusted the information provided by scientists during the pandemic ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’, with almost half (47%) feeling this way ‘just about always’. In comparison, 15% said they trusted the information given by

scientists 'only some of the time' while just 3% felt they 'almost never' trusted such information.

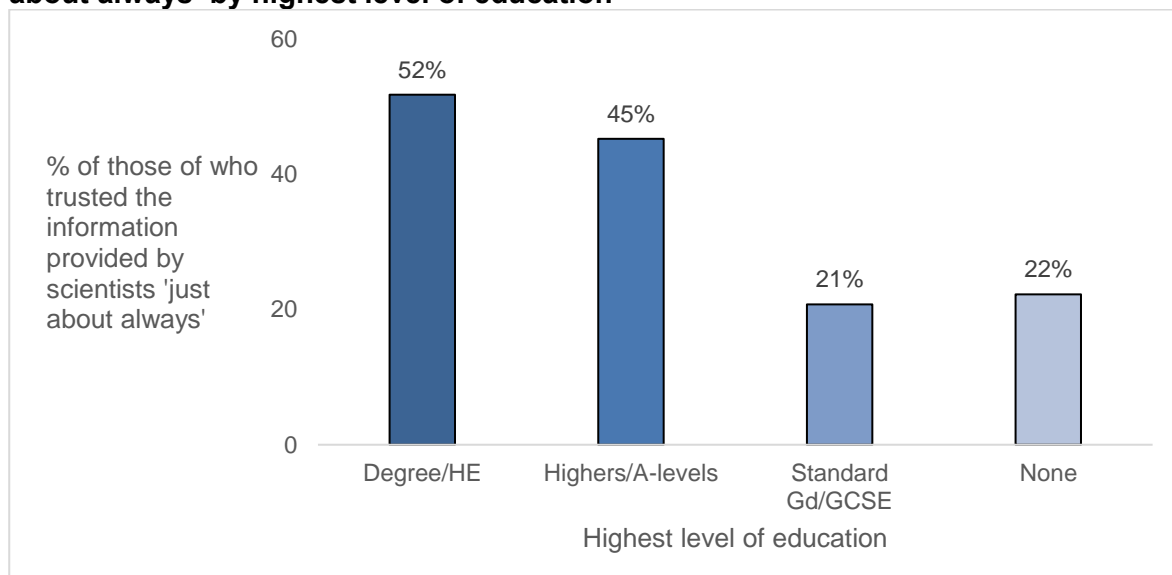
How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

There were again associations in the level of trust reported in the information provided by scientists by how generally trusting respondents were of others and how much social support they experienced. The vast majority of those who felt that most people can be trusted said they trusted the information provided by scientists 'just about always/most of the time' (89%), compared with two thirds (68%) of those who felt they 'can't be too careful in dealing with people'. Similarly, 84% of those who 'agree/agree strongly' that they had people to turn to reported that they trusted the information provided by scientists, whilst 65% of those who 'disagree/disagree strongly' that they had people to turn to trusted such information.

There was also an association between whether people had or suspected they had contracted Covid and levels of trust in information provided by scientists. Just under nine in ten (87%) of those who had Covid confirmed by test indicated that this was the case 'just about always/most of the time' compared with around eight in ten (81%) of those who did not think they had contracted Covid and around seven in ten (71%) of those who did but had not had it confirmed by a test.

In addition, as shown in Figure 2.3 below, just over half (52%) of those who held a degree/equivalent said they trusted the information provided by scientists 'just about always', compared with around one-fifth of those with Standard Grades or an equivalent qualification (21%) and of those with no qualifications (22%).

Figure 2.3: Percentage of those who trusted the information provided by scientists 'just about always' by highest level of education



Base: All respondents

Trust in the information provided by the Scottish Government

Attitudes towards the information provided during the pandemic by the Scottish Government were also measured. These responses are summarised in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: How much have you trusted the information provided by the Scottish Government during the pandemic?

	(%)
Just about always	38
Most of the time	36
Only some of the time	19
Almost never	7
Don't know/Refusal	1
Weighted base	1130
Unweighted base	1130

Base: All respondents

Just under two-fifths indicated that they trusted the information provided by the Scottish Government during the pandemic 'just about always' (38%) and a similar proportion (36%) said that they did so 'most of the time'. Smaller proportions indicated that they trusted such information from the Scottish Government 'only some of the time' (19%) or 'almost never' (7%).

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

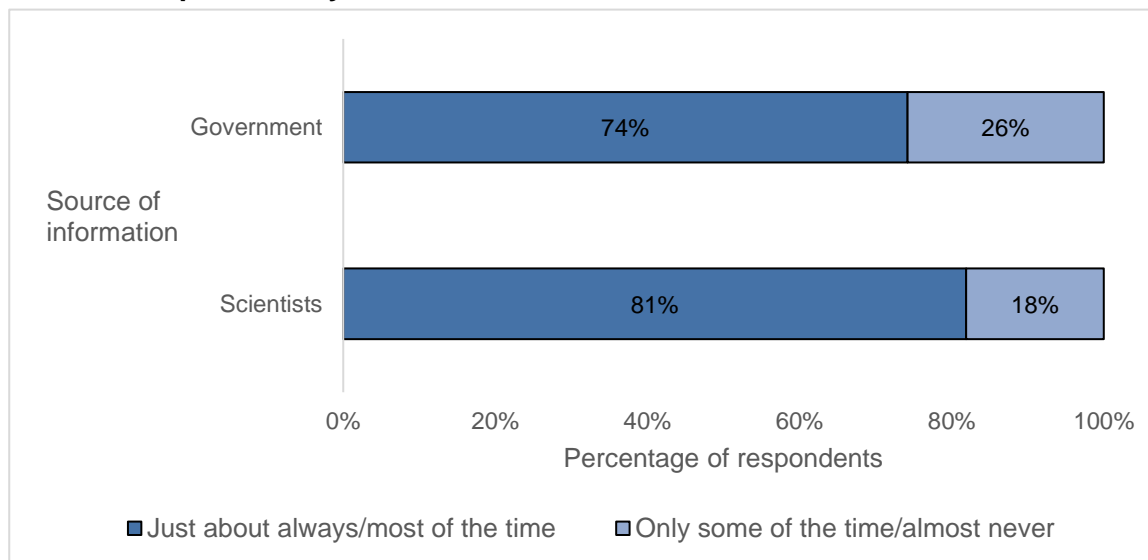
Similarly, trust in the data provided by the Scottish Government during the pandemic varied according to trust in others and experience of social support. The majority (83%) of those who felt most people can be trusted also trusted the information provided by the Scottish Government 'just about always/most of the time' compared with 59% of those who felt they 'can't be too careful in dealing with people'. In addition, 78% of those who said they 'agree/agree strongly' that they had someone to turn to for advice and support trusted the information provided by the Scottish Government 'just about always/most of the time' compared with 52% of those who indicated that they 'disagree/disagree strongly' that they have someone to turn to.

Higher educational attainment was associated with a higher level of trust in the information provided by the government. Among those with a degree or equivalent, 77% trusted the information provided 'just about always/most of the time' compared with 69% of those with Highers or equivalent and 43% of those with Standard Grades or equivalent. However, there was also a comparably fairly high level of trust among those with no qualifications (73%).

How do attitudes vary in levels of trust according to the source of information on the pandemic?

The responses demonstrated that the majority of the public trusted the information provided by the Scottish Government during the pandemic. Albeit, a lower proportion trusted such information compared with information given by scientists.

Figure 2.4: Comparison of the percentage of those who felt they mostly trusted (or not) the information provided by the Scottish Government and scientists



Base: All respondents

Three quarters of people (74%) said they trusted the information provided by the Scottish Government 'just about always/most of the time', a lower proportion than the 81% who reported this same level of trust in the information provided by scientists. A quarter (26%) felt they trusted the information given by the Scottish Government 'only some of the time/almost never' compared with 18% who felt this way in relation to the information given by scientists.

Views on the route of the decisions made

The use of science in decisions made

To gauge attitudes towards the use of science in Scotland's handling of the pandemic, respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether the decisions made relied enough on evidence provided by scientists, as summarised in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Thinking about the decisions that were made in Scotland about how to handle the COVID-19 pandemic, how much would you say that they relied on the evidence provided by scientists?

	(%)
Far too much	3
Somewhat too much	6
About right	72
Somewhat too little	13
Far too little	4
Don't know/Refusal	3
Weighted base	1130
Unweighted base	1130

Base: All respondents

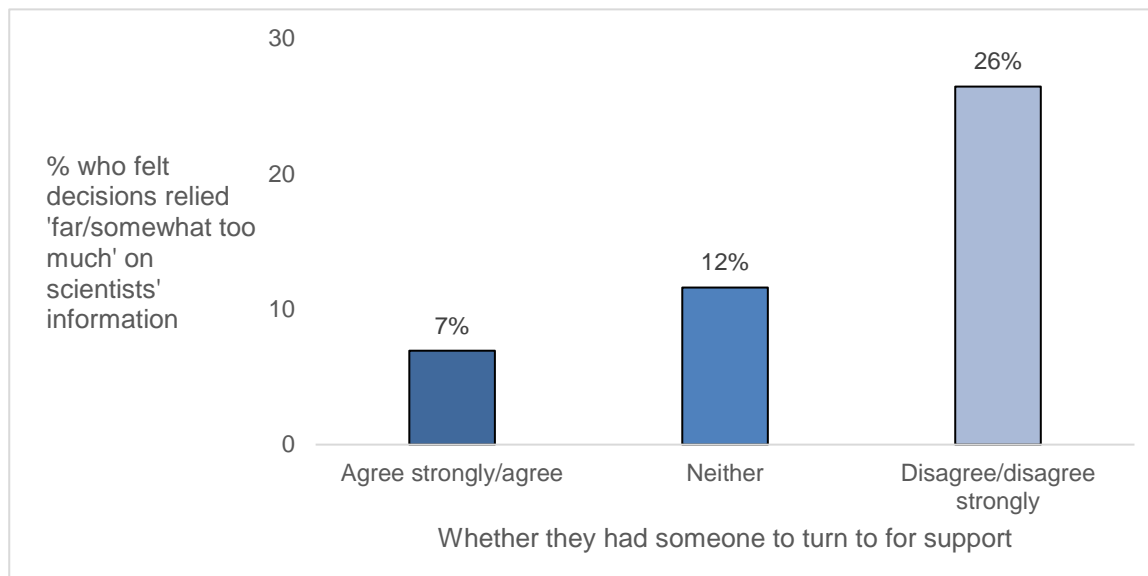
Just under three quarters (72%) felt that the level of reliance on evidence provided by scientists in influencing decisions was 'about right'. A greater proportion (17%) felt that there was 'somewhat too little/far too little' reliance on scientific evidence than felt that this was 'far too much/somewhat too much' (9%).

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

As before, attitudes towards the reliance on evidence provided by scientists to make decisions varied significantly by people's levels of trust and social support. Those who felt most people can be trusted were less likely to feel the decisions made relied 'far/somewhat too much' on the information provided by scientists than those who felt they 'can't be too careful in dealing with people' (6% and 14% respectively). This was in line with the finding that the majority of those who felt that most people can be trusted said they trusted the information provided by scientists (89%) and the Scottish Government (83%) 'just about always/most of the time' compared with 68% (in relation to information from scientists) and 59% (in relation to information from the Scottish Government) of those who felt they can't be too careful in dealing with people.

As shown in Figure 2.5, just 7% of those who 'agree/agree strongly' that they had someone to turn to for advice and support felt the decisions made relied 'far/somewhat too much' on the information provided by scientists, compared with 26% of those who 'disagree/disagree strongly' that they had someone to turn to. This is similar to the finding that those who 'agree/agree strongly' that they had people to turn to for advice and support were more likely to trust the information provided by scientists (84%) and the Scottish Government (78%) compared with 65% of those who 'disagree/disagree strongly' that they have someone to turn to (65% in relation to information from scientists) and 52% (in relation to information from the Scottish Government).

Figure 2.5: Percentage of those who felt the decisions made relied ‘far/somewhat too much’ on evidence provided by scientists by level of support



Base: All respondents

The influence of public views on decisions made

To determine attitudes towards the role of public opinion on Scotland’s handling of the pandemic, respondents were asked how much they think the decisions made were influenced by the views of the public. These responses are summarised in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 Thinking about the decisions that were made in Scotland about how to handle the COVID-19 pandemic, how much would you say that they were influenced by the views of the public?

	(%)
Far too much	4
Somewhat too much	12
About right	61
Somewhat too little	13
Far too little	5
Don't know/Refusal	4
Weighted base	1130
Unweighted base	1130

Base: All respondents

Six out of ten (61%) felt that the amount of influence the views of the public had on decisions made was ‘about right’. A similar proportion felt that the reliance on the public’s views to make decisions was ‘somewhat/far too little’ (18%) as felt this was ‘far/somewhat too much’ (16%).

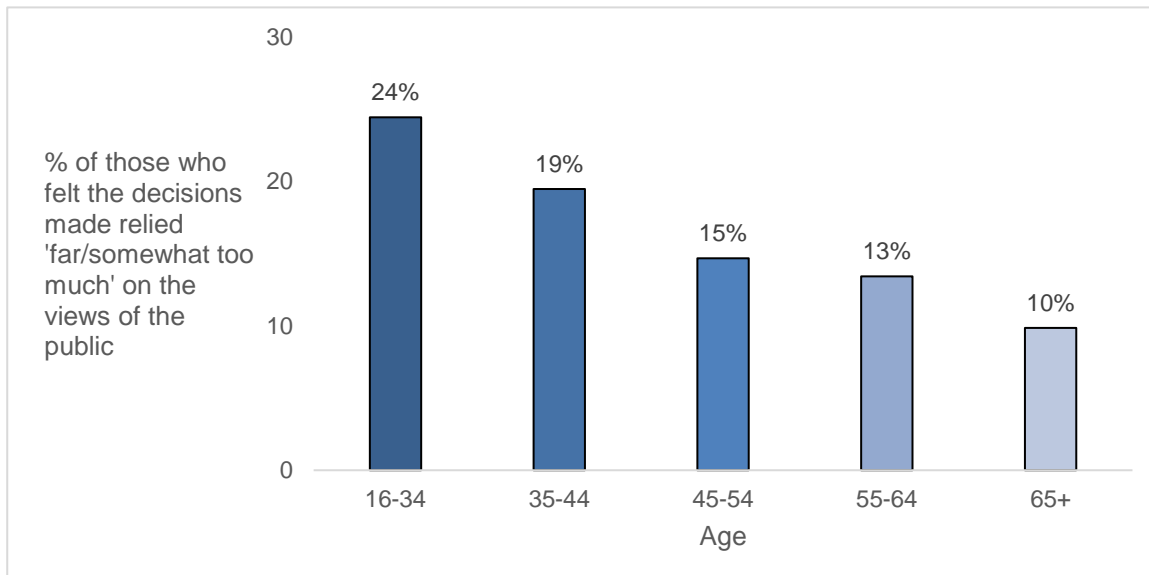
How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

Perceptions of the influence of the public's views on the decisions made during the pandemic varied by demographic information and life circumstances, such as household composition, age and coronavirus status, which showed less or no association with the previous attitudinal questions.

Those who lived with at least one other person over the age of 16 were more likely to feel the decisions made were influenced 'far too much' by the public than those who lived alone (6% and 1% respectively), albeit this perception was low overall (4%).

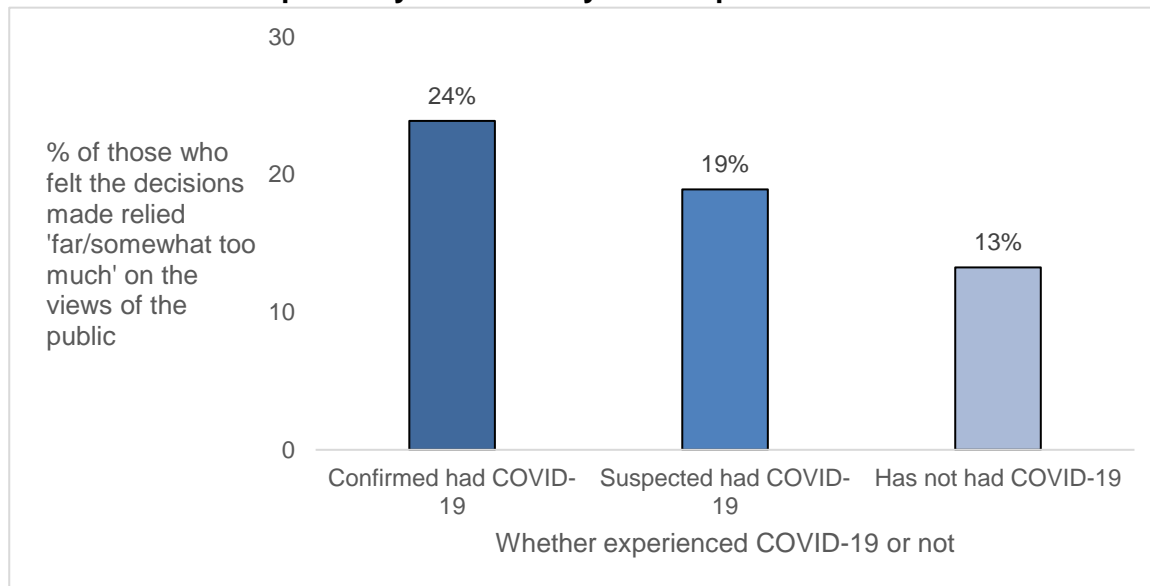
As shown in Figure 2.6 below, there is a linear relationship between this perception and age, with those aged 16-34 over twice as likely (24%) to have felt that the decisions made were influenced 'far/somewhat too much' by the public than those aged 65 and over (10%).

Figure 2.6: Percentage of those who felt the decisions made relied 'far/somewhat too much' on the views of the public by age



Base: All respondents

Figure 2.7: Percentage of those who felt the decisions made relied 'far/somewhat too much' on the views of the public by whether they have experienced COVID-19



Base: All respondents

As shown in Figure 2.7, differences in attitudes towards perceived levels of public influence on decision making were also associated with whether or not people had tested positive for coronavirus. Just under a quarter (24%) of those who tested positive felt that the decisions made were influenced 'far/somewhat too much' by the public compared with 13% of those who did not think they had experienced having coronavirus.

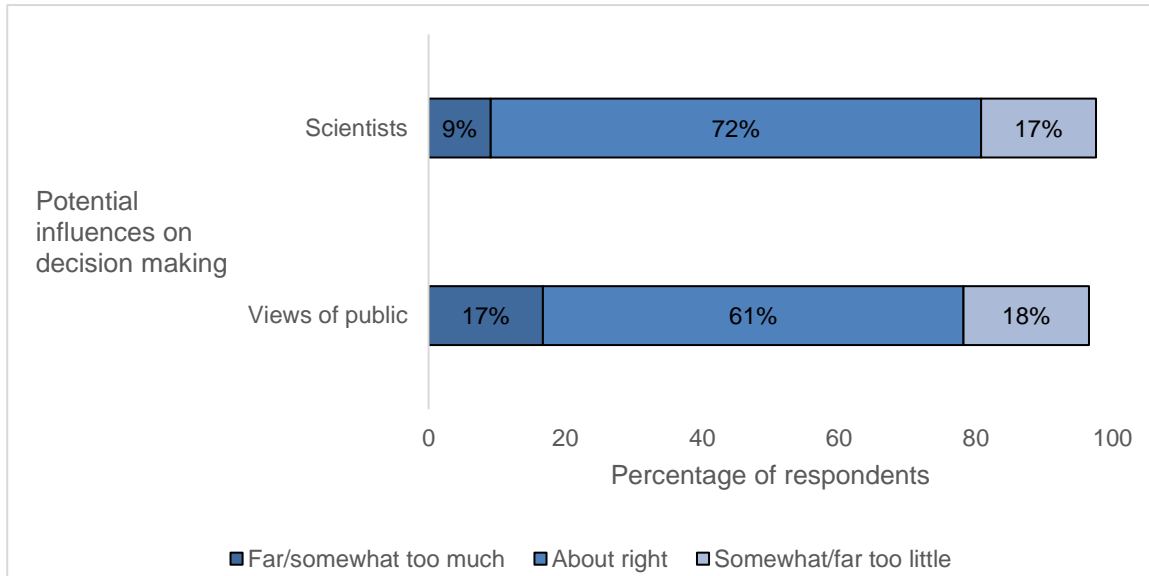
These demographic associations were in addition to those according to social trust and support. Around a fifth of those who felt you 'can't be too careful in dealing with people' indicated that public opinion was relied on too much (22%) compared with 14% of those who felt that 'most people can be trusted'.

Just over a quarter of those who indicated that they 'disagree/disagree strongly' that they have people to turn to (27%) felt that public opinion was relied on too much compared with 15% of those who 'agree/agree strongly' that they have others to turn to.

How do attitudes compare between whether decision making during the pandemic sufficiently relied on science or public views?

Attitudes towards the level of reliance on views of the public to influence decisions made in Scotland during the pandemic differed from perceptions towards the level of reliance on evidence from scientists.

Figure 2.8: Comparison of the percentage of those who felt the decisions made relied sufficiently or not on the evidence provided by scientists and the views of the public



Base: All respondents

Most felt the decisions made were based on about the right amount of reliance on both science and public opinion, although a higher proportion thought this was the case for reliance on scientific evidence (72%) compared with views of the public (61%).

Looked at side by side, a higher proportion felt there was too much reliance on the views of the public (17%) compared with evidence provided by scientists (9%). Similar proportions felt there was 'somewhat/far too little' reliance on the views of the public and evidence provided by scientists (17% and 18% respectively).

Chapter 3 – Government procedural justice (relationship between authority and the people)

This chapter outlines attitudes towards the relationship between governmental authority and the people during the pandemic. Procedural justice refers to whether people feel that they were given a voice in the policy decisions made, that is, whether their views or feelings were taken into account. Specifically, the following research questions are addressed:

- How well do people in Scotland think that the Scottish Government understood the impact of coronavirus restrictions on their lives?
- How well do people think the Scottish Government listened to the views of the population in making decisions about how best to handle the coronavirus pandemic?
- Do people in Scotland think that the Scottish Government had their interests at heart when making decisions about how best to handle the coronavirus pandemic?
- Do people think that the Scottish Government made its decisions regardless of what people wanted during the pandemic?

This chapter also provides an analysis of how perceptions of government procedural justice during the coronavirus pandemic differed between various subgroups.

Empathy

People across Scotland were asked how well or badly they thought the Scottish Government had understood the impact of coronavirus restrictions on the lives of people like them.

Overall, just under two-thirds (65%) felt that the Scottish Government understood the impact of the restrictions 'very/fairly well' while just over a fifth (23%) felt that the government understood this 'very/fairly badly' and 13% 'neither well nor badly'. Table 3.1 summarises these responses.

Table 3.1: In general, how well or badly do you think the Scottish Government understood the impact of the coronavirus restrictions on the lives of people like yourself?

	(%)
Very well	27
Fairly well	37
Neither well nor badly	13
Fairly badly	12
Very badly	11
Don't know/Refusal	0
Weighted base	1130
Unweighted base	1130

Base: All respondents

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

The proportion of those who felt that the Scottish Government understood the impact of restrictions on the lives of people like themselves was associated with gender. Seventy per cent of women said that the government understood the impact of restrictions 'very/fairly well' compared with 59% of men.

There was also an association between the level of trust in others and how well or badly it was felt that the Scottish Government understood the impact of restrictions. Seventy-one per cent of those who felt that 'most people can be trusted' felt that the government understood the impact 'very/fairly well', while 55% who felt that they 'can't be too careful in dealing with people' felt the same way. Around two-thirds (67%) of those who felt that the Scottish Government understood the impact of restrictions 'very/fairly well' agreed or strongly agreed that they had someone in the area to turn to for advice and support. This compared with 51% among those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had someone to turn to in their area.

Taking the views and feelings of the public into account in policy making

How well did the Scottish Government listen to people's views?

People were also asked how well they felt the Scottish Government have been at listening to people's views about how to best handle the coronavirus pandemic. Over two-fifths (44%) felt that the government had been 'very/fairly good' at this, a third (33%) felt they had been 'neither good nor bad' and a fifth (20%) felt they had been 'fairly/very bad'. Table 3.2 breaks down these results.

Table 3.2: In general, how good or bad do you think the Scottish Government have been at listening to the views of people like yourself about how best to handle the coronavirus pandemic?

	(%)
Very good	14
Fairly good	31
Neither good nor bad	33
Fairly bad	11
Very bad	10
Don't know/Refusal	2
Weighted base	1130
Unweighted base	1130

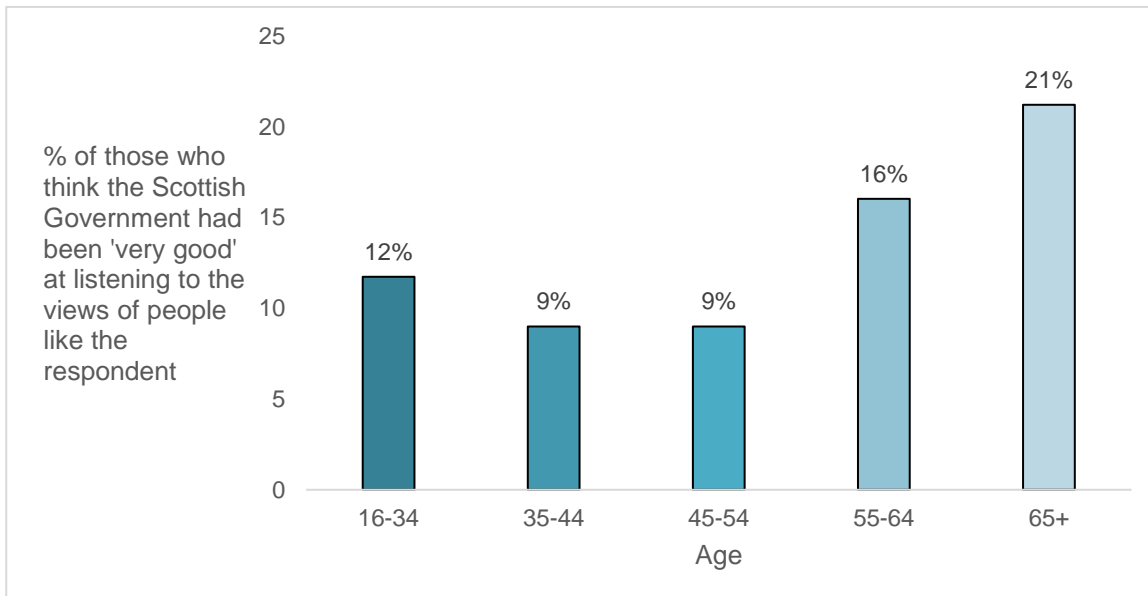
Base: All respondents

This highlights that 86% of the public thought that there was at least some room for improvement in terms of how well the Scottish Government listened to the views of people like themselves about how to handle the pandemic. For example, by either stating that they were 'fairly good,' 'neither good/nor bad,' 'fairly bad,' or 'very bad' at this. This was compared with the 61% that felt that the amount of influence the views of the public had on decisions made was 'about right.' Nevertheless, taking the responses to these questions together suggests that a large proportion of the public of Scotland felt that their views were taken into account in some way during the pandemic.

How do these attitudes vary between sub-groups?

There was some variation by age with regards to how good or bad people felt the Scottish Government had been at listening to people's views about how best to handle the pandemic. As shown in Figure 3.1, those aged 65 and over were most likely to think that the Scottish Government had been 'very good' at listening to their views (21%), with those aged 35-54 being least likely (9%).

Figure 3.1: Percentage who think the Scottish Government had been 'very good' at listening to the views of people like them by age

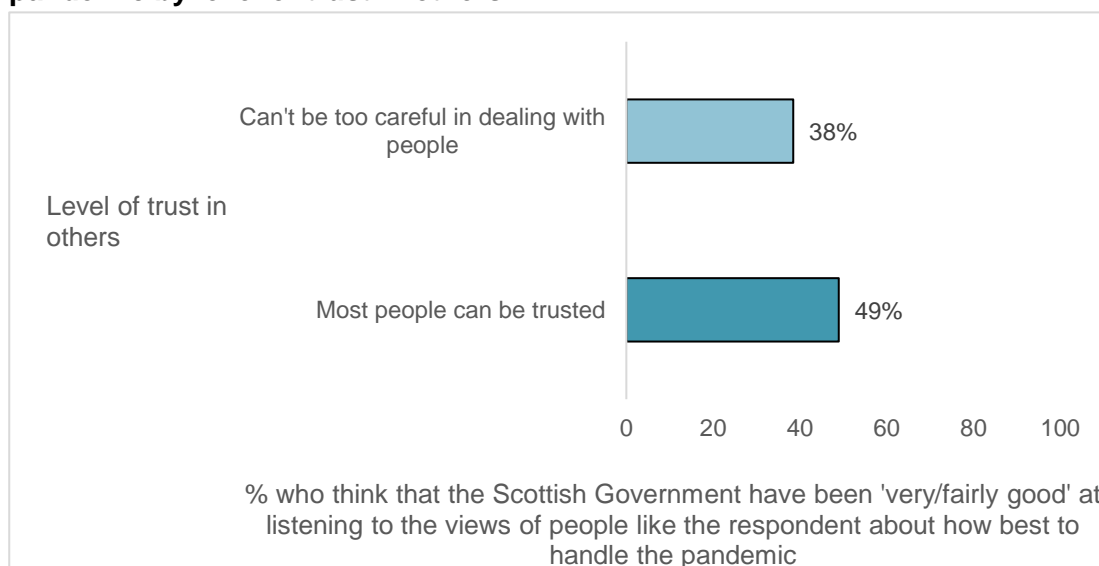


Base: All respondents

The level of social trust or support that individuals had was also associated with how they felt about the Scottish Government listening to their views on how to best handle the pandemic. Around half (47%) of those who agreed or strongly agreed that 'there are people in the area I can turn to for advice and support' felt that the Scottish Government had been 'very/fairly good' at listening to the views of people like them. In comparison, 33% of people who disagreed or strongly disagreed that 'there are people in the area I can turn to for advice and support' felt the same way.

As reported in Figure 3.2, around five in ten (49%) of those who felt that 'most people can be trusted' also felt that the Scottish Government had been 'very/fairly good' at listening to people's views, while just under four in ten (38%) of those who felt that they 'can't be too careful in dealing with people' felt the same way.

Figure 3.2: Percentage of those who think that the Scottish Government have been 'very/fairly good' at listening to the views of people like them about how best to handle the pandemic by level of trust in others



Base: All respondents

To what extent did the Scottish Government have the interests of people like themselves at heart?

Respondents were asked whether they felt that the Scottish Government had the interests of people like themselves at heart during the pandemic. Six in ten (60%) felt that the Scottish Government had the interests of people like them at heart 'a great deal/quite a lot', 23% said 'somewhat' and 17% said 'not very much/not at all'. A breakdown of responses to this question is outlined in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: During the coronavirus pandemic to what extent, if at all, would you say the Scottish Government had the interest of people like yourself at heart?

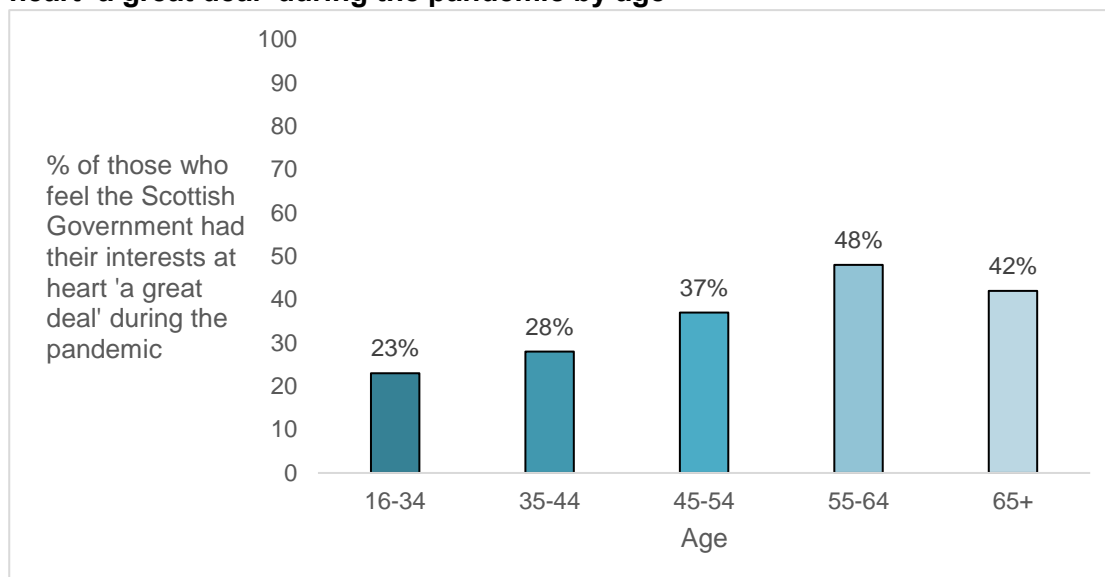
	(%)
A great deal	35
Quite a lot	25
Somewhat	23
Not very much	12
Not at all	5
Don't know	0
Prefer not to answer	1
Weighted base	1130
Unweighted base	1130

Base: All respondents

How do attitudes vary between sub-groups?

There was some variation by age evident in whether people felt the Scottish Government had their interests at heart during the pandemic. As shown in Figure 3.3, 48% of those aged 55-64 and 42% of people aged 65 and over felt that the government had their interests at heart 'a great deal', compared with 23% of 16-34-year-olds.

Figure 3.3: Percentage of those who feel that the Scottish Government had their interests at heart 'a great deal' during the pandemic by age

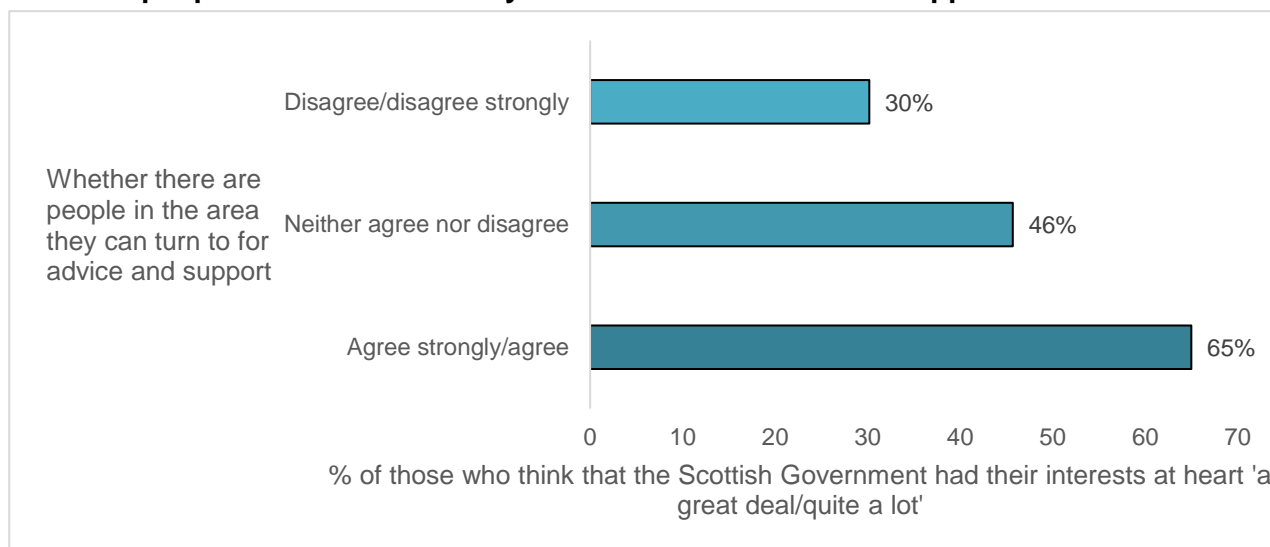


Base: All respondents

Where people lived was also associated with how they responded to this question. Fifty-seven per cent (57%) of people living in urban areas thought that the Scottish Government had their interests at heart 'a great deal/quite a lot'. This proportion was higher (65%) for those living in rural areas.

Again, the level of social trust that individuals had was associated with these issues. Around two-thirds (65%) of those who agreed or strongly agreed that there were people they could turn to for advice and support in the area felt that the government had their interests at heart either 'a great deal/quite a lot' during the pandemic. In comparison, around one third (30%) of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed there were people they could turn to for advice and support felt the same way (as shown in Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Percentage of those who think that the Scottish Government had their interests at heart ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ during the pandemic and to what extent they agree that there are people in the area that they can turn to for advice and support



Base: All respondents

Sixty-nine per cent who said ‘most people can be trusted’ felt the government had their interests at heart during the pandemic ‘a great deal/quite a lot’ (69%), compared with 45% of those stating they ‘can’t be too careful in dealing with people’.

During the coronavirus pandemic did the Scottish Government make its decisions regardless of what people like themselves wanted?

Respondents were asked whether or not they thought that the Scottish Government made decisions regardless of what people like themselves wanted during the coronavirus pandemic. As shown in Table 3.4, 15% thought that the Scottish Government made its decisions regardless of what people wanted ‘just about always,’ 37% said ‘most of the time,’ 33% felt that this was the case ‘only some of the time’ and 12% said ‘almost never.’

Table 3.4: During the coronavirus pandemic would you say the Scottish Government made its decisions regardless of what people like yourself wanted?

	(%)
Just about always	15
Most of the time	37
Only some of the time	33
Almost never	12
Don’t know	2
Prefer not to answer	1
Weighted base	1130

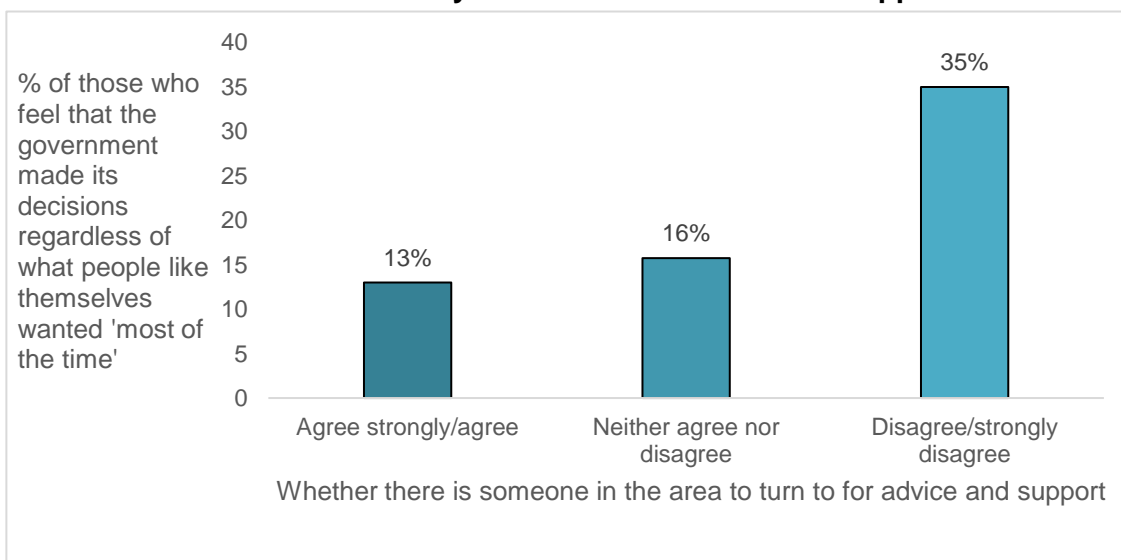
Base: All respondents

This finding that over half (52%) felt that the Scottish Government made its decisions regardless of what people wanted 'just about always/most of the time' shows what appears to be a more negative view of the handling of the pandemic, compared with responses to whether the Scottish Government had the 'interest of people like yourself at heart' and whether they understood the impact of restrictions on people's lives. A potential explanation could be that most of the public feel that the Scottish Government were taking their interests into consideration but that does not mean that they necessarily wanted such decisions to be made. For example, the public may believe that restrictions on their movements and how many people they could socialise with were put in place 'with their interests at heart' but they might not have wanted to experience such restrictions.

How do these attitudes vary by sub-group?

There was variation in attitudes towards whether the government made its decisions regardless of what people like themselves wanted and whether they had someone they could turn to in the area for advice and support. As shown in Figure 3.5, 13% of those who agreed or strongly agreed that they had someone to turn to for advice and support in the area felt that the Scottish Government made its decisions in this way 'just about always'. This figure increased to 35% for those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had someone to turn to for advice and support in the area.

Figure 3.5: Percentage of those who feel that the government made its decisions regardless of what people like the participant wanted 'most of the time' by extent of agreement that there is someone in the area they can turn to for advice and support



Base: All respondents

Eighteen per cent (18%) of those aged 65 and over thought that the Scottish Government made its decisions regardless of what people wanted 'just about

always'. For those aged 16-34, the proportion of those who thought the Scottish Government made its decisions in this way 'just about always' decreased to 12%.

Chapter 4 – Views on how prepared Scotland is for another pandemic

This chapter assesses the relative influence of several potential key drivers of confidence in how prepared Scotland is to deal with another pandemic, specifically addressing the following research question:

- Say that in five years' time there was another pandemic like COVID-19. How confident are you, if at all, that Scotland will be properly prepared to deal with it? (Not at all confident, not very confident, fairly confident, very confident)

To do this, regression analysis was undertaken to find out which variables were key drivers of opinion regarding how prepared Scotland would be to deal with another pandemic. The potential drivers explored as part of this analysis included the following variables:

- Age, gender, household composition, highest educational qualification, whether anyone in the household has had COVID-19
- Level of deprivation (from the least deprived to the most deprived areas) according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), whether individuals are living in urban/rural areas
- National identity, trust in the Scottish Government to act in Scotland's best interests, how good the Scottish Government is at listening before taking decisions, political party affiliation

Levels of confidence in Scotland's preparedness to deal with another pandemic if there was one in five years' time

People were asked how well they felt Scotland was properly prepared to deal with another pandemic like COVID-19 in the future. Nearly a third (31%) felt 'not at all/not very confident' that Scotland was properly prepared while over two thirds (68%) felt 'fairly/very confident' about this. Table 4.1 shows these results.

Table 4.1: Say that in five years' time there was another pandemic like COVID-19. How confident are you, if at all, that Scotland would be properly prepared to deal with it?

	(%)
Not at all confident	10
Not very confident	21
Fairly confident	54
Very confident	14
Don't know/Prefer not to answer	1
Weighted base	1130
Unweighted base	1130

Base: All respondents

When controlling for other variables, party political affiliation was found to be a key driver of confidence in Scotland's preparedness for another pandemic. The odds of someone whose political party affiliation was Conservative saying that they felt 'not very/not at all confident' in Scotland's preparedness for another pandemic was almost four times greater (OR²⁷=3.6) than those whose affiliation was with the Scottish National Party (SNP), while the odds of a Labour supporter saying the same were almost three times greater (OR=2.7).

What other key drivers are associated with views on how prepared Scotland is to deal with another pandemic?

Table 4.2 below outlines several key drivers that were associated with attitudes towards how prepared Scotland is for a future pandemic once other known differences were taken into account.

The column on the right shows the associated odds ratios. This analysis compares the odds of people saying that they were 'not very/at all confident' that Scotland would be properly prepared to deal with another pandemic for each sub-group category compared with the reference category (indicated by 'ref.' in the left-hand column). The higher the odds ratio, the greater the likelihood of such individuals to feel 'not very/not at all confident' in Scotland's preparedness for another pandemic compared with the reference category.

²⁷ The Odds Ratio (OR) is the likelihood of an individual having a score of '1' on the outcome variable (as opposed to '0') from their responses to the predictor variables. In this case the odds of a Conservative supporter being 'not very/not at all confident' in Scotland's preparedness for another pandemic (compared with a SNP supporter which is the base category).

Table 4.2: Key drivers associated with being ‘not very/not at all confident’ in Scotland’s preparedness for a future pandemic

	Odds ratio
Conservative party affiliation (ref: Scottish National Party)	3.6
Scottish Government ‘not very good/not at all good/don’t know/prefer not to answer’ at listening to people’s views before it takes decisions (ref: ‘very good/quite good’)	3.1
Disagree/disagree strongly that ‘there are many people in this area I could turn to for advice and support’ (ref: agree strongly/agree)	2.3
‘Only some of the time/never’ trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests (ref: ‘just about always/most of the time’)	2.2
Had/suspected had Covid (ref: don’t think had Covid/don’t know/prefer not to answer)	1.8
Male (ref: female/other/prefer not to say)	1.7

Base: All respondents

There was an association between perceptions of how good the Scottish Government was at listening to peoples’ views before taking decisions and confidence in future pandemic preparedness. The odds of those who felt that the Scottish Government was ‘not at all/not very good’ at listening to the views of the public before taking decisions saying that they were ‘not very/not at all confident’ in Scotland’s preparedness for another pandemic were three times greater (3.1) than those who felt that the Scottish Government was ‘very/quite good’ at listening to the views of the public when making decisions.

In addition, the odds of those who trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘only some of the time/almost never’ feeling ‘not very/not at all confident’ in Scotland’s preparedness for another pandemic were two times greater (2.2) than those who trusted the Scottish Government to work in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always/most of the time’.

The odds of those who had contracted (confirmed by a test) or believed they had contracted Covid (not confirmed by a test) feeling ‘not very/not at all confident’ about Scotland’s preparedness for another pandemic were two times (1.8) greater than among those who did not think they had ever had Covid.

The odds of men saying that they were ‘not very/not at all confident’ in Scotland’s preparedness for another pandemic were two times higher (1.7) than among women, while the odds of those who said they ‘disagree/disagree strongly’ that they had people they could turn to for advice or support were two times greater (2.3) than among those who said they ‘agree strongly/agree’ that they had people to turn to.

The variables that were not found to be significantly associated with confidence in Scotland’s preparedness to deal with a future pandemic included age, household

composition, highest educational qualification, SIMD quintile, urban/rural residence, levels of social trust and national identity.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

The aims of this module of questions on the Scottish Social Attitudes 2021/22 survey were to explore public views on how key policy decisions were communicated during the pandemic, the relationship between data and trust and how prepared Scotland would be for another pandemic. In particular, it was also of value to explore how these views may have differed among different groups of people in society. This information was collected and analysed with a view to informing the Scottish Government's on-going planning around future pandemic response.

The public reported high levels of trust in the data made available during the pandemic (67%), particularly in relation to the information provided by scientists which around four-fifths of people (81%) trusted 'just about always/most of time'. While trust was higher for information provided by scientists, just under three-quarters (74%) of people trusted information from the Scottish Government 'just about always/most of time'.

People were more likely to feel that decisions made in Scotland during the pandemic were driven by an appropriate amount by scientific evidence than by the views of the public. Whilst 61% felt that the influence of the public on decision making was 'about right,' a higher proportion (72%) felt the same about the level of reliance on evidence provided by scientists. Just under a fifth felt that there was too little (18%) or too much (16%) reliance on the views of the public. There were associations here with demographic variables and life circumstances, rather than trust in others/social support. Nearly a quarter (24%) of those aged 16-24 felt the decisions made were influenced 'far/somewhat too much' by the public (compared with 10% aged 65+), as did the same proportion of those who had tested positive for coronavirus (24% compared with 13% who did not think they had ever had it).

A common thread throughout this report is the association between attitudes towards the handling of the pandemic and personal feelings of trust in others and experience of social support. One or both of these factors were related to almost all of the attitudes measured - from trust in the data provided, to how well people's views were taken into account and how prepared Scotland would be for another pandemic.

There were some associations between sub-groups and how well people feel that the Scottish Government took their views into account and appreciated the impact of the restrictions on them during the pandemic. However, very few demographic sub-group differences were seen in relation to trust in the data provided during the pandemic, views on the extent to which decisions were informed by scientific evidence and perceptions of Scotland's preparedness for another pandemic.

It appears that views on how well Scotland handled the pandemic (including feelings of trust in the information provided and that people's needs were taken into account) and confidence in its preparedness for another pandemic, are inextricably

linked to overall trust in other people and levels of social support. Those who felt that most people could be trusted and that they had others in their area to turn to for support, were more likely to trust the information provided during the pandemic, by scientists and the Scottish Government. They were also more likely to feel that the Scottish Government understood the impact of restrictions and that they had their best interests at heart.

Whether someone had previously tested positive for coronavirus was related to their views on trust in the information provided and how well the pandemic was handled. They were more likely to trust the information provided by scientists just about 'always/most of the time' (87%) than those who had not had coronavirus (71%). They were also more likely to feel that decisions made during the pandemic were influenced 'far/somewhat too much' by the views of the public (24% compared with 13% among those who had not had coronavirus).

Perceptions among the public of how well the Scottish Government had considered and understood the impact of the pandemic on their lives was generally high. The majority felt that the Scottish Government understood the impact of the restrictions on people like them 'very/fairly well' (65%) while six in ten (60%) were of the opinion that the Scottish Government had their interests at heart 'a great deal/quite a lot'. The proportion who believed that the Scottish Government had been 'very/fairly good' at listening to the views of the people about how best to handle the pandemic was lower at 44%. While it is not completely clear why this may be the case, it may be related to the difference between 'listening' and having 'someone's interests at heart'. For instance, listening may be viewed as an active process, requiring more effort and investment than simply considering someone's best interests. It could be that the majority believed that the Scottish Government was taking actions according to what they considered to be right for the people of Scotland but they did not necessarily agree with all the actions being taken. For example, the public might not have wanted to have their movements restricted but may have understood the reasoning behind such measures. This may explain why the percentage of people who felt the Scottish Government considered their interests was higher than the percentage of people who felt they were good at listening. Qualitative research to explore these attitudes in-depth may be beneficial in informing Scottish Government policy and planning for future pandemics.

Similarly, views on whether the Scottish Government made its decisions regardless of 'what people like yourself wanted' shows a more negative view (with 52% saying 'just about always/most of the time') compared with responses to whether the Scottish Government had 'the interest of people like yourself at heart' and whether they understood the impact of restrictions on people's lives. Again this might be because the public felt that the Scottish Government was making decisions with their best interests at heart but that they did not necessarily want those decisions to be made, with the example above relating to views on restrictions being once again applicable.

As well as those with higher levels of trust in others and social support there were other sub-groups that tended to feel more positive about how effectively the Scottish Government understood the impact of restrictions on them and listened to their views during the pandemic. Those aged 65 and over were most likely to think that the Scottish Government had been 'very good' at listening to their views (21%) compared with 9% among those aged 35-54. Similarly, those in the older age groups were more likely to feel that the Scottish Government had their interests at heart when making decisions (42-28% compared with 23% of those in the youngest age group). This may seem a little at odds with the finding that those in the youngest age group were more likely, than older counterparts, to feel decisions made were influenced too much by the public. This possibly suggests that younger adults were more likely to feel that the views of the public in general were taken into account too much but that the personal experiences of their age group were overlooked.

Women were more likely (70%) than men (59%) to believe that the Scottish Government understood the impact of the restrictions on people like them. This may be related to gender differences in experiences of the pandemic, adherence to public health guidelines and belief in the importance of such guidelines. Those living in rural areas (65%) were more likely than those living in urban areas (57%) to think that the Scottish Government had the interest of people like them at heart when making decisions. It may be that age differences were the driver of this association given the demographic of people living in rural areas and that those in older age groups were also more likely to feel that the Scottish Government had their interests at heart.²⁸ The difference in views may also relate to those in urban areas experiencing more severe/prolonged restrictions due to a higher volume of positive cases of coronavirus in such areas and due to factors impacting on housing and healthcare, and the impacts of crime and violence.²⁹ However, there is also evidence that those living in rural areas may have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic in certain ways such as loneliness and disruption in access to healthcare; which would be expected to have affected their perceptions of the pandemic.³⁰

The majority (68%) felt either 'very or fairly confident' that Scotland would be properly prepared to deal with another pandemic, whilst 31% felt 'not very or not at all confident' in this. Several key drivers were found to be influential with regards to confidence in relation to Scotland's preparedness to handle another pandemic, most notably party political affiliation. The odds of people saying that they are 'not very/at all confident' in Scotland's readiness for another pandemic were higher among Conservative and Labour supporters than SNP supporters. In line with this, odds of having lower confidence were also higher among those with less favourable views on how well the Scottish Government listen to people and whether they have

²⁸ [Rural Scotland Key Facts 2021](#)

²⁹ [COVID-19 in an urban world: policy brief; Rural, remote and at risk: why rural health services face a steep climb to recovery from COVID-19](#)

³⁰ [Rural voices heard as first RuralCovidLife results published](#)

their best interests at heart, as well as among men and those who disagreed to any extent that they had others in their area to turn to for support.

The findings overall suggest that whilst the majority of the public felt that they trust the information provided in Scotland during the pandemic, felt their views were taken into account and felt fairly positive about Scotland's preparedness for future pandemics, there were significant differences in perceptions across sub-groups. Those who felt less trusting of others in general, and those who were experiencing lower levels of social support, were less likely to feel their views were taken into account and less trusting in the information provided. Younger adults and men were less likely to feel that their views were taken into account as were those living in urban areas. Further research may be valuable to explore the intersection between these sub-group differences.

These differential views of how effectively the pandemic was handled in Scotland have important implications for planning for future pandemics. In particular, the need to engage with and take into account a diverse range of needs and experiences.

Appendix A – Questions

The following are the questions asked on SSA 2021/22 in relation to attitudes towards the handling of the pandemic.

“We would now like to ask you a series of questions about the handling of the Coronavirus (also known as COVID-19) pandemic. As with all the questions in the survey, you can choose not to answer any question if you don’t want to.”

“How much, if at all, did you trust the data that was made available during the pandemic about the spread of coronavirus in Scotland?”

- 1 A great deal
- 2 Quite a lot
- 3 Somewhat
- 4 Not very much
- 5 Not at all

“How much have you trusted the information provided by scientists during the pandemic?”

- 1 Just about always
- 2 Most of the time
- 3 Only some of the time
- 4 Almost never

“And how much have you trusted the information provided by the Scottish Government during the pandemic?”

- 1 Just about always
- 2 Most of the time
- 3 Only some of the time
- 4 Almost never

“Thinking about the decisions that were made in Scotland about how to handle the COVID-19 pandemic, how much would you say that they were influenced too much by the views of the public, too little, or by about the right amount?”

- 1 Far too much
- 2 Somewhat too much
- 3 About right
- 4 Somewhat too little
- 5 Far too little

“Thinking about the decisions that were made in Scotland about how to handle the COVID-19 pandemic, would you say that there was too much reliance on the evidence provided by scientists, too little, or about the right amount?”

- 1 Far too much
- 2 Somewhat too much
- 3 About right
- 4 Somewhat too little

5 Far too little

“In general, how well or badly do you think the Scottish Government understood the impact of the coronavirus restrictions on the lives of people like yourself?”

- 1 Very well
- 2 Fairly well
- 3 Neither well nor badly
- 4 Fairly badly
- 5 Very badly

“In general, how good or bad do you think the Scottish Government have been at listening to the views of people like yourself about how best to handle the coronavirus pandemic?”

- 1 Very good
- 2 Fairly good
- 3 Neither good nor bad
- 4 Fairly bad
- 5 Very bad

“During the coronavirus pandemic to what extent, if at all, would you say the Scottish Government had the interest of people like yourself at heart?”

- 1 A great deal
- 2 Quite a lot
- 3 Somewhat
- 4 Not very much
- 5 Not at all

“During the coronavirus pandemic would you say the Scottish Government made its decisions regardless of what people like yourself wanted?”

- 1 Just about always
- 2 Most of the time
- 3 Only some of the time
- 4 Almost never

“Say that in five years’ time there was another pandemic like COVID19. How confident are you, if at all, that Scotland would be properly prepared to deal with it?”

- 1 Not at all confident
- 2 Not very confident
- 3 Fairly confident
- 4 Very confident



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