

SCOTTISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES 2019: DATA TRUST

An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

PUBLIC SERVICES AND GOVERNMENT

SCOTTISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES 2019: DATA TRUST

Stephen Hinchliffe and Susan Reid

ScotCen Social Research

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Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	3
Data Trust	4
Trust in public service organisations and private companies to use personal data for acceptable purposes only	4
Variations in attitudes between subgroups	5
Tables	7

Introduction

The Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) Survey was established in 1999 by ScotCen Social Research, an independent research organisation based in Edinburgh, and part of NatCen Social Research, Britain's largest independent research agency. SSA is conducted annually, using face-to-face interviews with people selected using random probability sampling, to ensure findings are representative of adults across Scotland. The survey has provided an important source of data on attitudes to government and to the Scottish Parliament over the last 20 years, as well as attitudes to a wide range of other subjects. For the 2019 survey, 1,022 individuals aged 16 and above were interviewed between 30th August 2019 and 18th March 2020.

This paper presents the findings of the Scottish Government funded questions in SSA 2019 covering level of trust in public service organisations and private companies to use personal data only for acceptable purposes. These questions were also asked in 2017. It examines whether attitudes have changed between 2017 and 2019, and whether attitudes varied by social groups.

Data Trust

The Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) Survey 2019 asked participants questions about their views on how public service organisations and private companies use personal data:

“How much do you trust public service organisations to use your personal data only for acceptable purposes?”

“And how much do you trust private companies to use your personal data only for acceptable purposes?”

In order to avoid findings being unduly affected by the order in which these questions were asked, half the sample were asked these questions in the reverse order.

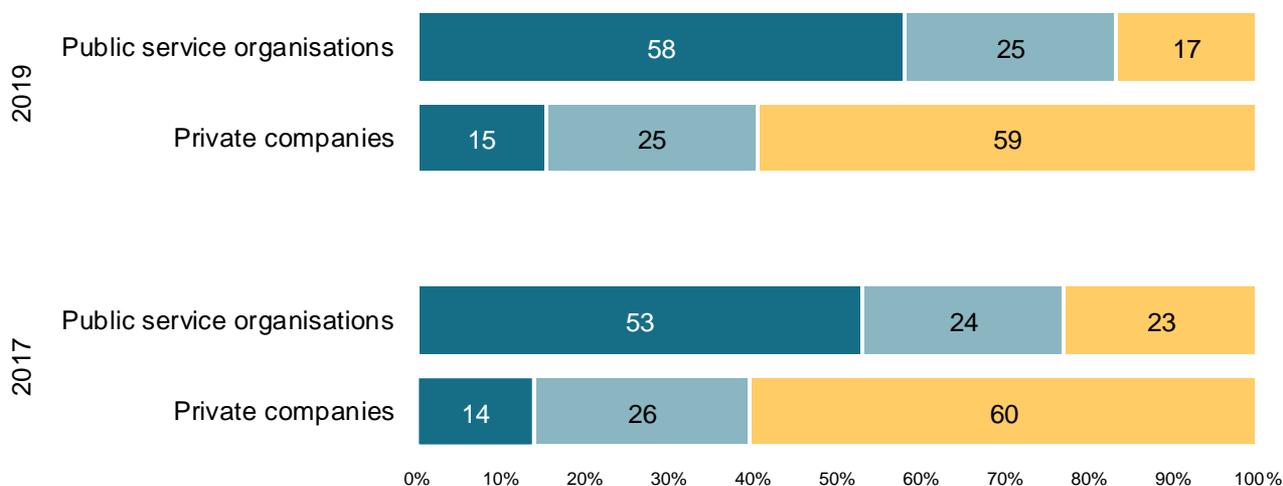
Trust in public service organisations and private companies to use personal data for acceptable purposes only

A greater amount of trust was shown for public service organisations than for private companies regarding the way in which they used personal data.

- 58% of adults trusted public service organisations ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’, compared with 15% for private companies.
- 17% trusted public service organisations ‘not very much’ or ‘not at all’, compared with 59% for private companies.

While figures for private companies have not changed significantly since 2017, the proportion who trusted public service organisations ‘not very much’ or ‘not at all’ has fallen significantly, from 23% in 2017 to 17% in 2019. The corresponding increase in the proportion who trusted public service organisations ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ was not statistically significant.

Figure 1: How much do you trust public service organisations and private companies to use your personal data only for acceptable purposes? (2017 and 2019, %)



Percentages may not sum to exactly 100, due to rounding.
Base: all respondents – 2017 (1,234); 2019 (1,022)

Variations in attitudes between subgroups

Levels of trust in public service organisations and private companies to use personal data only for acceptable purposes varied between subgroups of the population. The main differences between subgroups in the proportion who said they had either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of trust are reported below. These differences are all statistically significant.¹

Trust in public service organisations varied across subgroups as follows:

- **Age** – Trust in public services to use data for acceptable purposes only decreased with increasing age – 72% of 16 to 24 year olds said they had either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of trust, falling to 50% of those aged 65 and over.
- **Education** – Those with higher educational qualifications tended to have more trust than those with lower or no formal qualifications – 61% of those educated to degree-level and 68% with Highers or equivalent said they had ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of trust, compared with 50% of those with Standard Grade or equivalent level and 51% of those with no formal qualifications.
- **Economic activity** – Those in full-time education, employment or looking for work tended to have more trust in public sector organisations than those who were retired or otherwise economically inactive – 71% of those in full-time education or training, 61% of those in employment or waiting to take up

¹ Tables for all subgroups are provided in the supporting documents, whether differences are significant or not.

employment, and 68% of those unemployed and looking for work had 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of trust, compared with 51% of those who were retired and 46% of those who were otherwise economically inactive.

There was less variation between subgroups with respect to trust in private companies. This varied only according to where people's views lay on the political spectrum:²

- **Political spectrum** – Those who were characterised as on the right or in the centre of the political spectrum were more likely than those on the left to report 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of trust in private companies to use data only for acceptable purposes – 31% of those on the right and 25% of those in the centre reported 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of trust, compared with 10% of those on the left.

² 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).

Tables

This section contains the 2017 and 2019 results for questions on data trust.³

Table 1: How much do you trust public service organisations to use your personal data only for acceptable purposes? (2017 and 2019, column %)

	2017	2019
	%	%
A great deal	16	16
Quite a lot	37	42
Somewhat	24	25
Not very much	17	11
Not at all	6	5
(Don't know)	1	0
(Not answered)	-	-
Sample size	1234	1022

Percentages may not sum to exactly 100, due to rounding.

Table 2: How much do you trust private companies to use your personal data only for acceptable purposes? (2017 and 2019, column %)

	2017	2019
	%	%
A great deal	2	3
Quite a lot	12	12
Somewhat	26	25
Not very much	36	38
Not at all	23	21
(Don't know)	1	0
(Not answered)	-	-
Sample size	1234	1022

Percentages may not sum to exactly 100, due to rounding.

³ Tables for all subgroups are provided in the supporting Excel documents on the Scottish Government website.

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Correspondence and enquiries

For enquiries about this publication please contact:

Data Policy and Digital Identity Unit, e-mail: statistics.enquiries@gov.scot

For general enquiries about Scottish Government statistics please contact:

Office of the Chief Statistician, Telephone: 0131 244 0442,

e-mail: statistics.enquiries@gov.scot

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The data collected for this statistical bulletin:

are available in more detail through statistics.gov.scot

are available via supporting Excel files published with this report, and via the UK Data Service

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors.

cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

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