

Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2021/22: Public attitudes to children and young people's decision making

An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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Introduction

This paper presents the findings of the Scottish Government funded questions in the Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) Survey 2021/22 covering how much say young people should have in decisions that affect their lives, according to the Scottish adult population (aged 16 and over). As well as presenting topline findings, this paper also explores whether attitudes varied by demographic groups.

The survey asked respondents two questions, [previously asked in 2017 and 2019](#), about their views on how much say young people should have in decisions that affect their lives:

- “How much say, if any, should 11- to 15-year-olds in Scotland have in decisions that affect their lives?”
- “How much say, if any, should 16- to 18-year-olds in Scotland have in decisions that affect their lives?”

Children's right to participate in decisions

Participation is a key part of recognising, respecting, and promoting children’s rights, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child developed [General Comment 12](#) which gives more information about the right to be heard ([Article 12](#)).

The term ‘participation’ is broadly used to describe a range of practice and methodologies, which enable children and young people to be heard in decision-making. It is an important mechanism to ensure that decision-makers listen, communicate, and consider the views of children and young people on all aspects of their lives. **Children and young people have the right to be involved in any decisions that affect them whether that be national, local or individual, both now and for their future.**

Under [Article 12](#) of the UNCRC, every child and young person who is capable of forming their own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, with those views being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child and young person. In particular, consideration should be given to how views will be obtained where children and young people's views are not known on a matter that is likely to have an impact on them. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

For more information please see [Guidance - Decision-making: children and young people's participation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

Methods

The SSA survey is run by ScotCen Social Research, with the aim of collecting data on public attitudes to issues relevant to Scotland. It has run almost every year in Scotland since the first survey was conducted in 1999.

Fieldwork for the survey was conducted between 21 October 2021 and 27 March 2022 – all figures included in this report are based on data collected in this period. Interviews were undertaken with 1,130 randomly selected people aged 16 and above from 1,043 addresses. The data has been weighted to be representative of Scotland's adult population in terms of age, sex and area deprivation.

Previously the SSA survey has been administered face-to-face but, as a result of coronavirus restrictions in place at the time of fieldwork, the survey was conducted via telephone in 2021/22. This change in methodology impacted the nature of the sample and responses received, and as a result affected comparability with previous SSA survey data. This report, therefore, focusses solely on results from the most recent survey rather than examining trends over time.

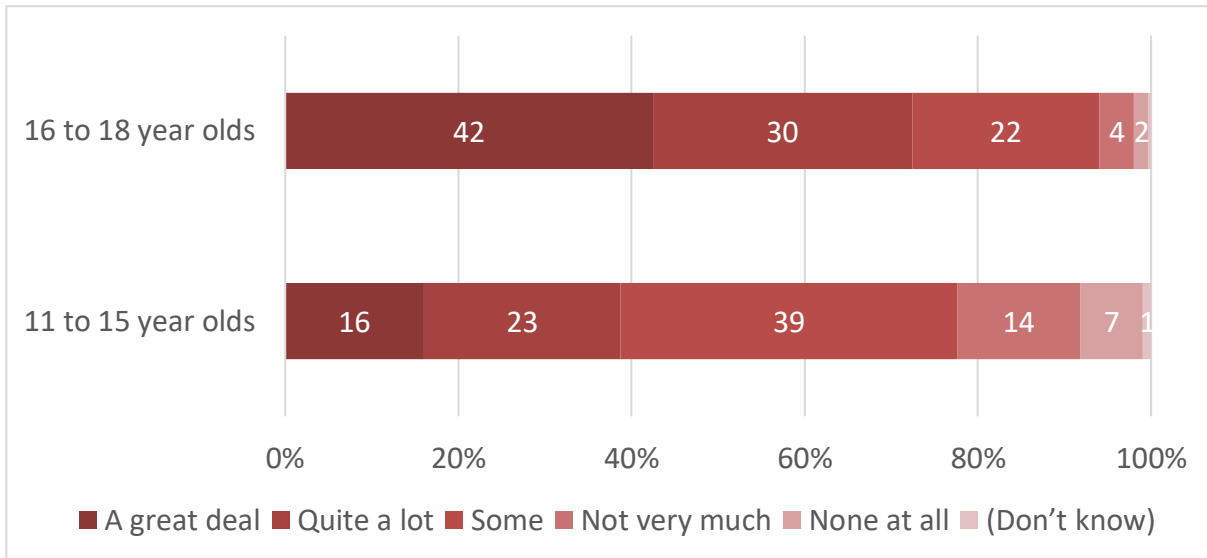
Topline findings

The majority of surveyed adults felt that young people aged 16 to 18 should have 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of say in decisions that affect their lives. The proportion believing this for those aged 11 to 15 was much smaller:

- 72% of adults felt that those aged 16 to 18 should have 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of say, compared with 39% for those aged 11 to 15.
- Only 6% of adults felt that those aged 16 to 18 should have 'not very much' say or 'none at all', compared with 21% for those aged 11 to 15.

Figure 1 presents all answer categories.

Figure 1: How much say 11- to 15-year-olds / 16- to 18-year-olds should have in decisions that affect their lives by age, 2021 (%).



Base: all respondents

Variations in attitudes between subgroups

How much say adults felt young people should have in decisions that affect their lives varied between subgroups of the population. All differences presented are statistically significant.

The amount of say adults felt those aged 11 to 15 should have varied across subgroups as follows:

- **Age** – Over half (51%) of respondents aged 16 to 34 said that those aged 11 to 15 should have either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of say. Those aged 55 to 64 were least likely to hold this view (26%).
- **Children in household** – Those with children aged up to 15 living in the household were more likely to say that young people aged 11 to 15 should have either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of say in decisions that affect them (45%), compared with those not living with children (37%).

There were no statistically significant differences by respondent sex or marital status.

The amount of say adults felt those aged 16 to 18 should have varied across subgroups as follows:

- **Age** – There was less variation between age groups of adults on the view that those aged 16 to 18 should have either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of say in decisions that affect their life than for the question about younger people. The percentage of respondents holding this view was highest in the 35-44 age group (80%) and lowest in the 45-54 and 55-64 age groups (68%).

- **Children in household** – Adults with children aged up to 15 living in the household were more likely to say that young people aged 16 to 18 should have either ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of say in decisions that affect them (79%), compared with those not living with children (71%).
- **Marital status** – The proportion feeling that 16- to 18-year-olds should have ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of say was lowest among those who were married (65%) and highest for those who were living as married or divorced/separated (both 81%).

There were no statistically significant differences by respondent sex.

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How to access background or source data

The data collected for this <statistical bulletin / social research publication>:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available for download alongside the publication
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact socialresearch@gov.scot for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

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If you would like to be consulted about statistical collections or receive notification of publications, please register your interest at [ScotStat Register: guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

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