

Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2023 - Technical Report

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SSAS 2023 – Technical Report

An analysis of the impact of changing mode from face-to-face interviewing to a push-to-web methodology on the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

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Key Findings

In 2023, a condensed version of the Scottish Social Attitudes Core Module was run to explore potential impacts of a change in methodology from face-to-face to push-to-web. The key findings from this experimental survey are as follows:

- The SSAS 2023 provided largely similar weighted demographic data to the face-to-face surveys, while the unweighted data showed a smaller proportion of respondents aged 65+ and a larger proportion of female respondents.
- There was a marked drop in the proportion of those who identified as having a long-term health condition/disability, compared to when the survey was conducted face-to-face. If SSAS is conducted online in future consideration should be given on how to increase response among this group.
- The weighting efficiency for SSAS 2023 was 64%, which is broadly comparable with the last two years the survey was conducted face-to-face: 66% in 2019 and 70% in 2017.
- The sample is broadly comparable with face-to-face years across questions asked on politics and national identity (unfunded questions which assist with analysis of the funded attitudinal questions), indicating there has not been an adverse political bias introduced as a result of the change in mode.
- Certain questions in the Core Module had to be adapted significantly for the web design – as a consequence the ability to compare these with face-to-face results was negatively impacted.
- Though noting underrepresentation in places such as long-term health condition – overall the web methodology was found to be robust. This report therefore recommends that the web methodology could, where question wording has not been markedly adapted, be used to maintain the long-running SSAS time series into the future

Introduction

The purpose of the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS) is to provide robust, high quality and nationally representative data over time on the Scottish public's attitudes towards a range of social and political issues. SSAS has a modular structure, with a 'Core Module' which has been consistently commissioned by the Scottish Government since 2004ⁱ, and modules on different topics being commissioned by a number of funders each year. The Core Module typically consists of thirty questions on attitudes toward government and public services

SSAS was first fielded in 1999, at the beginning of Scottish devolution, and hitherto has been run as a face-to-face survey with in-home interviewing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviewing was not feasible due to government regulations on social distancing. SSAS, in common with other large-scale surveys in Scotland, the rest of the UK and further afield, had to use alternative methods. However, this raised potential questions about the comparability of the data collected using these alternative methods with those obtained by previous surveys - and thus the integrity of any time series derived from questions asked repeatedly from year to year. A key consideration is therefore whether alternative methods result in samples with significantly different characteristics or change the way in which people answered questions.

SSAS did not run in 2020, while in 2021/22 it was run for the first time as a push-to-telephone survey, with no interviewing being conducted face-to-face in-home. Addresses were drawn at random from the Postcode Address File and up to two people at each address invited by post to undertake an interview by phone. Unfortunately, the change in methodology had adverse effects on the quality of the sample achieved and the final response rate was lower than anticipated. Even after the data were weighted, compared with previous surveys certain demographic groups, most notably graduates and supporters of the SNP, were over- or under-represented in the final sample. As a result, the results of the 2021/22 survey were not comparable with those of previous survey years. Consequently, one of the key advantages of SSAS as a survey, namely its two-decade time series of data on attitudes in Scotland, was negatively impacted by the methodological change. The [2021/22 SSAS technical report](#) sets out the 2021/22 survey design and impact on the time series in further detail.

With the lifting of restrictions on face-to face interviewing following the pandemic, and again in common with other large-scale surveys in Scotland, the rest of the UK and further afield, consideration was given as to whether to return to face-to-face interviewing in people's homes or whether to move SSAS to being administered online. While a number of large-scale surveys have returned to face-to-face interviewing, including those with a requirement for physical health measurement or building inspections such as the [Scottish Health Survey](#) and the [Scottish House Condition Survey](#), a number of other surveys, including the [British Social Attitudes Survey](#) (BSA) and the [European Social Survey](#), have taken the decision to move permanently to being conducted online.

At the beginning of the COVID pandemic, BSA, which has been run since 1983, moved from face-to-face interviewing to a push-to-web survey. Since then, a random selection of addresses have been sent a letter to complete the survey online and offered a monetary incentive for doing so. Up to two adults per household are eligible to take part. The change of mode had some impact on the character of the sample, but analysis of the differences determined that they did not significantly compromise the integrity of the many time series that are collected on BSA. Given these encouraging results, it was decided that a condensed version of the SSAS Core Module would be trialled as a push-to-web survey in 2023 in order to see whether a similar approach would be successful.

There are two main ways that the change of methodology may impact on or undermine the SSAS time series. Firstly, the nature of the achieved sample might be markedly different than in previous years. Secondly, the distribution of responses to attitudinal questions asked as part of the Core Module might be affected by the change of mode. In view of these potential risks, this report seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What impact, if any, has the change in survey mode had on the characteristics and representativeness of the achieved sample?
- 2) What impact, if any, has the change in mode had on the distribution of responses to certain attitudinal questions, especially those that needed to be adapted in order to be asked via the web?
- 3) To what extent is the time-series of long-running questions that have previously been asked on SSAS as part of the Scottish Government's Core Module still robust, despite the change in mode?

Although the scope of the report is limited to the questions asked as part of the Core Module in 2023, the findings are of relevance to all future SSAS content fielded via a push-to-web design.

ⁱ With the exception of 2008, 2012, 2014, 2018, and 2020.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the key methodological differences between the face-to-face and web surveys. Subsequent chapters compare the quality of the samples and examine the possibility of mode effects on how respondents answered the questions.

Survey approach

The SSAS face-to-face surveys aimed to achieve between 1,200 and 1,500 productive interviews (where the respondent has answered all, or almost all, of the survey questions) each year. The target population was adults living in private householdsⁱⁱ in Scotland. The lower age limit for participation was 18 between 1999 and 2015, but from 2016 onwards was lowered to 16 to reflect the lowering of the age limit for voting in Scottish Parliament and local government elections. As with many face-to-face surveys, SSAS has experienced declining response rates. Table X illustrates this trend. Whereas in 2011 the response rate was 55%, by 2019, when the survey was last conducted face-to-face, it had declined to 41%.

Table 1: Achieved Response Rate – Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (2011-2019)ⁱⁱⁱ

Survey Year	2011	2013	2015	2016	2017	2019
Achieved Response Rate	55%	55%	46%	49%	50%	41%

SSAS 2023 was conducted using a push-to-web methodology. It was fielded alongside the larger BSA 2023 survey – which is also conducted via push-to-web. The target population remained the same: adults aged 16 and over living in private households in Scotland. Response rates for online surveys are typically lower than those conducted face-to-face. To reflect this, at the beginning of fieldwork a minimum target of 1,000 productive interviews and a 15% response rate was set. These targets were met and SSAS 2023 achieved 1,574 fully productive interviews and a 15.1% household response rate.

Sample Design and Fieldwork Approach

The SSAS face-to-face surveys all used the [Postcode Address File](#) (PAF) as the sample frame. This is a list of postal delivery points compiled by the Post Office. A selection of postcode clusters was selected from a list of all sectors, with proportionality of being selected dependent on the number of addresses in each sector. Prior to selection the clusters were stratified by Scottish Government urban-rural classification, region, and percentage of heads of household recorded as being in non-manual occupations. Addresses were then selected at random within each selected cluster and assigned to interviewers. Before being called on by an interviewer, all addresses in the sample were sent a letter that provided information

about the survey. In the last three years SSAS was run face-to-face (2019, 2017, and 2016) potential respondents received a £10 Post Office incentive irrespective of whether or not they participated in the survey. If an address was comprised of more than one dwelling unit, all dwelling units would be listed systematically and one selected at random. If the selected dwelling unit had more than one adult living at the household, interviewers would carry out a random selection to determine the adult to interview.

For the online survey, the PAF was also used as the sample frame. The sample that is drawn from the PAF for the online BSA survey typically results in around 500 completed interviews from Scottish respondents. This would not be enough to reach the required minimum target of 1,000. As a result, a separate 'Scottish boost' sample was drawn for SSAS. The sample was drawn in a similar way to that for the previous face-to-face surveys – PAF addresses within Scotland were drawn and stratified by region, population density (measured at local authority level) and tenure profile (% owner occupier, measured at output area level). However, one of the advantages of a push-to-web survey design over face-to-face is that the sample does not need to be geographically clustered in order to reduce the burden of interviewer fieldwork, while an unclustered sample typically results in a lower design effect^{iv} (and thus, other things being equal, smaller confidence intervals). Thus the sample was not clustered, though, because of the risk of lower response rates in such areas, those living in the two most deprived SIMD quintiles were oversampled.

A letter was sent to the selected addresses inviting up to two adults aged 16 and over to take part. Unlike a face-to-face survey, with a web approach it is not possible to select at random at each address one adult to be invited to participate, or at least not without creating an unacceptable respondent burden. However, this creates the risk that those within a household who complete the survey are systematically distinctive in their demography and/or attitudes - some groups (e.g. women) are more likely to engage with social surveys than others. To try and reduce that risk, up to two adults were invited at each address to complete the survey. This number reflects the fact that two is the average household size^v - if more than two household members were allowed to take part there would therefore be diminishing returns in terms of the level of response. Each letter inviting potential respondents to take part included a link to the survey and two access codes for each household. The access codes were individually unique and needed to be entered before the survey could be completed – thus ensuring it was those who were sampled for the survey who completed it. After the initial invitation letter was sent out, up to three reminder letters were sent to each address that had not yet taken part in the survey. Respondents received a £10 Love2Shop voucher incentive if they completed the web survey.

There are differences and certain limitations to a web survey in contrast to face-to-face interviewing. Without interviewer engagement, it can be both more difficult to persuade participants to take part in the survey and it is difficult or impossible to do a within-household selection of a potential respondent. Although all surveys find it challenging to secure the participation of younger respondents, there may be a

concern with a web survey that older people would be less likely to take part. Internet access is increasing in Scotland – it reached 91% in 2022^{vi} - but access is still not equally spread across society. Those in higher income households and those living in areas of low deprivation are more likely to have internet access, while older people and those with disabilities are less likely to do so.^{vii} These digital barriers may have an impact on the representativeness of a survey conducted primarily online. SSAS tried to mitigate this risk by offering to all respondents a telephone survey as an alternative. However, in practice only 14 respondents took up this offer.

Weighting

Irrespective of mode, it is known that certain subgroups in the population are less likely than others to respond to surveys. This is referred to as differential non-response. These subgroups can end up being under-represented in the sample, which can bias the survey estimates. Weights are applied to SSAS to correct for these biases as much as possible.

First, however, because those living in the most deprived SIMD quintiles were oversampled, the selection probabilities among strata were not equal. This oversampling meant that a corrective selection weight was required. A selection weight essentially accounts for the fact that a respondent may have been more likely to be selected for the survey as a result of the oversampling and weights their responses accordingly.

Meanwhile, to adjust for differential non-response, two sets of weights were produced, one for individuals within households and one at the level of the selected postal address in order to address differential household non-response. Separate non-response models were constructed to account for each of these facets of non-response.

Between household non-response was modelled using logistic regression, with responding addresses coded 1 and non-responding 0. A number of area-based geographical variables in which a selected address was located were considered for possible inclusion in the response model.

These variables were:

- population density at Output Area level (quintiles);
- area deprivation quintiles (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD));
- socio-economic classification (NS-SEC quintiles);
- percentage of residents with a degree in the postcode sector (quintiles);
- percentage of owner-occupied properties in the Census Output Area (quintiles);

- percentage of residents in employment in the postcode sector (quintiles);
- the percentage of ethnic minority residents in the postcode sector (quintiles);
- the percentage of residents aged 65+ in the postcode sector (quintiles);
- the percentage of residents aged 55+ in the postcode sector (quintiles);
- the percentage of households with cars in postcode sectors (quintiles);
- urban-rural classification and output area classification.

The variables found to be related to household response were:

- Percentage of residents with a degree in the postcode sector (quintiles)
- Percentage of owner-occupied properties in the Output Area (quintiles)
- Output area classification.

The between-household non-response weight was calculated based on this model.

Within household non-response was also modelled using logistic regression, with the dependent variable indicating whether each responding address had one response or two to the survey. Only addresses which included two or more adults and had at least one response were included in the model. In addition to the area level variables specified above, variables of interest that could be measured at the household level were also tested for significance, including: household size; tenure; number of adults in the household; number of children in the household; whether anyone in the household had a degree, and income.

The variables found to be related to within household response were:

- Income
- Whether anyone in the household had a degree
- Deprivation quintiles (SIMD)
- The percentage of households with cars in postcode sectors (quintiles)
- Urban-rural classification
- Output area classification.

Based on this model, the within household non-response weight was calculated as the ratio of the number of adults in the household (capped at 4) divided by the expected number of responses for each household (as identified by the regression model). The number of adults in the household figure was capped at 4 as very few

respondents said they lived in households where the number of adults living there was greater than this number. If the non-response weight was not capped in this way, the weights for the outlier cases would be extreme and, as a result, these cases would have an oversized impact on any attitudinal results once the weights were applied. Similar capping was applied when SSAS was conducted face-to-face.

The final step in the process was calibration weighting. This was used to adjust the composite non-response weight, that is the product of the three weights from the previous stages, so that the weighted composition of the responding sample matches the best available population estimates in terms of age, sex, education, tenure, ethnicity, and deprivation (SIMD).

Questionnaire and Mode of Interview

SSAS has always had a modular structure. Between 1999 and 2019, modules on different topics would be commissioned by a range of funders, and SSAS respondents would be asked the questions in each module as part of the survey. A 'Core Module' of questions on attitudes to government and public services has consistently been commissioned by the Scottish Government since 2004, though several questions within it were designed at the outset of the survey and thus have run since the establishment of the devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999. In a typical face-to-face year, thirty questions that comprised the Core Module would be asked alongside others commissioned as part of the survey. Given that these questions have been asked consistently as part of SSAS, and there is therefore a long time series of face-to-face data that there is a wish to extend, it was decided that, as a trial, a version of this module would be run as part of the online survey in 2023. This module was asked as part of the online survey to all respondents, alongside a standard set of background variables and an International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) module on national identity and citizenship funded by the ESRC.

When conducted face-to-face by interviewers in respondents' homes, interviews were carried out using computer assisted interviewing. In this approach a laptop computer is used by the interviewer, with questions appearing on screen and interviewers directly entering respondents' answers into the computer. From 2011, more sensitive questions were asked via computer aided self-interview (CASI), where the interviewer would hand over their laptop to the respondent to key in responses themselves. CASI interviewing replaced a previous practice of asking more sensitive questions via a paper and pencil self-completion supplement. On the main part of the survey, showcards were used to ease interviewee burden for questions where there were a large number of response options, or where there were the same set of response options for multiple questions.

The potential for respondent fatigue is greater for online surveys where there is no face-to-face engagement with an interviewer, so the length of the survey was kept to a minimum. The median interview length was 33 minutes in total.

Note on Tables

Weighted figures are presented in tables without brackets, while unweighted figures are bracketed. An asterisk (*) symbol within a table represents a figure lower than 0.5 but higher than 0, whereas a dash (-) figure represents an absolute zero.

ii Social housing is included within this definition. Addresses that are out of scope include: empty/derelict addresses, buildings under construction, holiday homes, businesses, other non-residential (such as schools, offices and institutions) buildings and demolished addresses.

iii Data available here: [Scottish Social Attitudes Survey - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

iv The design effect is defined as how far a sampling plan varies from a simple random sample, where every address would have an equal chance of selection – clustering increases the design effect as there is an increased variance from a simple random sample.

v [Households and Dwellings in Scotland, 2022, Report \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](http://nrscotland.gov.uk)

vi [Scottish Household Survey 2022: Key Findings - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

vii Ibid

Mode Change: Effect on Demographics of Sample

To analyse the potential effect of the change of mode on the achieved sample in 2023, we compare the nature of the online sample across several key demographics with that achieved when the survey was conducted face-to-face. In general, the results are encouraging, and did not show a marked discontinuity.

Table 2 provides the weighted and unweighted figures for respondent age on the 2023 web survey and the last three years that SSAS was conducted face-to-face.^{viii} The unweighted figures are presented in brackets.

Table 2: Age of respondent (grouped) – 2016-2023

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
16-24 ^x	11 (6)	14 (7)	10 (5)	12 (6)
25-34	16 (12)	16 (13)	19 (13)	16 (15)
35-44	15 (15)	15 (14)	15 (13)	15 (17)
45-54	19 (20)	18 (18)	17 (18)	16 (16)
55-64	16 (17)	15 (18)	16 (18)	17 (20)
65+	23 (30)	22 (31)	23 (33)	23 (26)
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1237	1234	1022	1574

The most noticeable difference between the online survey and previous SSAS in the unweighted data is the lower proportion of those aged 65 and over. The proportion in this age group was three in ten (30%) in 2016, 31% in 2017, and a third (33%) in 2019. However, it was only around a quarter (26%) in 2023. As might have been expected, a web mode appears to have led to a reduction in the proportion of older respondents. That said, this simply meant that the proportion of older respondents was closer to the population figure. As a result, the weights were smaller for the 65+ group in 2023 than they have been in the face-to-face surveys.

Meanwhile, the age composition of the 2023 survey was similar to the 2016, 2017, and 2019 figures after weighting was applied. The final weighted sample had nearly double (23%) the proportion of over 65s than it did those in the 16-24 bracket (12%). This is similar to when the survey was conducted face-to-face: 23% of respondents were aged 65 and over in 2019 and 10% were aged between 16 and 24, while the equivalent figures for 2017 were 22% and 14% respectively and for 2016, 23% and 11%.

Table 3 shows the weighted and unweighted results for sex of respondent, with the unweighted figures shown in brackets. At 58%, the proportion of women in the sample before weighting was applied is higher than in 2019 (54%), 2017 (53%) and slightly higher than in 2016 (56%). However, after weighting the figures for each of the years are the same. 52% of the respondents were women and 48% were men. This means that here the weights are having to do slightly more work in 2023 than in the face-to-face years.

Table 3: Sex of Respondent – 2016-2023

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
Male	48 (44)	48 (47)	48 (46)	48 (42)
Female	52 (56)	52 (53)	52 (54)	52 (58)
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1237	1234	1022	1574

The characteristics of the online and face-to-face samples can also be compared according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation score of the area in which the participant lived. Household surveys tend to underrepresent those individuals living in areas of high socio-economic deprivation, and overrepresent those from more affluent areas. Before weighting was applied, the proportion of those living in the least deprived quintile in 2023 (26%) was higher than in each of the previous face-to-face years, indicating an overrepresentation of those living in wealthier areas. That being said, the proportion living in the most deprived quintile (22%) was also higher than in the face-to-face samples. The web survey appears in fact to have been responded to least readily by those in the middle of the SIMD quintiles.

However, Table 4 shows that, after weighting, SSAS 2023 achieved a fairly representative sample with respect to SIMD score, as was the case when the survey was conducted face-to-face. As the score is divided into quintiles – a completely representative sample would have a 20% score in each row.

Table 4: SIMD Score (Quintiles) – 2016-2023

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
1 – Most deprived	18 (17)	19 (16)	22 (18)	19 (22)
2	20 (23)	21 (22)	21 (20)	19 (18)
3	19 (21)	22 (26)	16 (19)	20 (16)
4	18 (17)	19 (19)	19 (24)	21 (18)
5 – Least deprived	25 (22)	18 (17)	21 (19)	21 (26)
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1237	1234	1022	1574

There is, however, one area where the distribution of the data was notably different in the web survey from that in previous SSAS. The unweighted figure for the proportion with a long-term health condition or disability in 2023 is 30%, whereas in 2016, 2017 and 2019 the figure was between 44% and 46%. This suggests that the online survey is potentially underrepresenting those with a long-term health condition or disability. The most recent data from the Scottish Health Survey, which is conducted using face-to-face interviewing, indicates that the prevalence of disabilities/long-term health conditions in the Scottish population was 48% in 2022.^x

Weighting the data does not change this picture. After weighting was applied, the proportion with a long-term physical or mental health condition drops to around a quarter (26%). This is significantly lower than in the equivalent figure in previous years. In 2016, the figure was 41%, while the weighted figures for 2017 and 2019 were 43% and 40% respectively. Both before and after weighting SSAS, therefore, came closer to the Scottish Health Survey figure when it was conducted face-to-face than when it was conducted online.

Several factors may have caused this discrepancy, including not least the change in mode from face-to-face interviewing to a web survey. Those living with a disability or long-term health condition are more likely to face barriers to accessing digital and online services than non-disabled people. They are also more likely not to have the skills required to access the devices needed to get online.^{xi} When the interview was conducted face-to-face the respondent did not need to have any digital skills or access to the internet to take part, and the interviewer could guide them through both the questions and any areas of the interview that may not have been clear. The existence of a potential digital barrier and the absence of an interviewer there to help the respondent may have potentially caused a drop in those with a long-term health condition/disability taking part in the online survey.

However, it should be noted that there is no consistent support for this expectation from BSA. Prior to weighting 37% of respondents to that survey in 2018 said that they had a long-term health condition or disability, as did 34% in 2019. In contrast,

the figure was 29% in 2020. However, since then it has continued to be between 33% and 34%, in line with the figure in 2019. Meanwhile, after weighting, the figures were 33% in 2018 and 29% in both 2019 and after the move to web in 2020, and between 33% and 34% thereafter.

Another possible explanation for the sharper drop on SSAS is questionnaire order. In the previous face-to-face SSAS in 2016, 2017 and 2019 the question was preceded by one on the respondent's general health. The same is also true of the Scottish Health Survey. This may have primed the respondent to be thinking more readily about long-term health conditions and disabilities than would otherwise have been the case. In contrast, on SSAS 2023 the question was preceded by one completely unrelated to health, as, incidentally, has always been the case on BSA.

We should also note that the question that was asked to ascertain whether someone had a long-term health condition was somewhat different from that which has previously been used on SSAS. In line with the wording that has been used on BSA surveys since 2021, the question asked in 2023 read, 'Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?'. However, until now the question asked on SSAS has read, 'Do you have any long-term illness, health problems or disability?. By long-term we mean that it can be expected to last for a year or more?' However, it can only be a matter of supposition as to whether this seemingly modest change of wording might have made a difference to the pattern of response.

Further discussion on the apparent underrepresentation of those with a disability or long-term health condition and how it may be addressed is included in the chapter 'Relationship between Disability/Long-term health condition and National Identity variables with Core Module Questions' and in the conclusion to this report.

Weighting Efficiency

The demographic composition of the achieved sample feeds into a 'weighting efficiency' score. Weighting efficiency effectively provides an indication of how much adjustment is required to align the characteristics of the unweighted figures in a sample with the characteristics of the population it is aiming to represent. A weighting efficiency score of 100% would indicate that no adjustment was needed by the weights to make the sample align with the wider population. A lower weighting efficiency score indicates the weights are having to do more work to get the achieved sample to reflect the population – in other words, the unweighted sample is more biased. The weighting efficiency score for SSAS 2023 was 64%, which is broadly comparable with the score achieved in 2019 (66%) and 2017 (70%). This slight downward trend in weighting efficiency is comparable with other attitudinal surveys, such as BSA, which had a weighting efficiency score of 76% in 2018 and 77% in 2019, compared with a score of 74% in 2020 followed by scores of between 64% and 67% in 2021-2023. It is also a marked improvement on when the survey was conducted using a push-to-phone methodology in 2021/22, when the weighting efficiency score was 50%. This score provides encouraging evidence

that a web design can provide a sample that is as broadly representative of the wider population as that achieved through a face-to-face method.

^{viii} Analysis has been restricted to the last 3 years of face-to-face survey so as to reduce the impact that the change over time may have had on the figures, particularly in respect to any changes in social attitudes, in contrast to the change in mode from face-to-face to push-to-web.

^{ix} NB – 2016 figures are for 18-24 year olds, the minimum respondent age was lowered to 16 in 2017.

^x [The Scottish Health Survey 2022 Volume 1: Main Report](#)

^{xi} [Understanding disability in a digital society | TechShare Pro 2020 - Scope for business](#)

Mode Change – Effects on Politics and National Identity Questions

This chapter covers effects of the change in mode on responses to the politics and national identity questions asked as part of SSAS. These questions do not form part of the Core Module and are not funded by the Scottish Government. However, attitudes towards the subject matter of the Core Module, that is, government, public services and democratic engagement, can be influenced by political preferences and identity and are often used in analysis of SSAS data for the Scottish Government and others. In addition, many of them have external measures (e.g. election results), with which they can be compared to evaluate the effectiveness of the face-to-face and push-to-web surveys in providing politically representative samples. This chapter therefore analyses whether the change in mode has had any impact on how representative the SSAS 2023 sample is politically.

The chapter first examines the figures for the questions on turnout at the 2021 Scottish Parliament election and the proportion who voted for each party, the accuracy of both of which can be verified by an external source. Then, the questions on national identity and position on the left-right scale are examined. The pattern of response to these questions on SSAS has hitherto been relatively stable over time.

Voter Turnout and Party Political Affiliation

Table 5 compares the weighted figures for the level of participation in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election reported by respondents to the 2023 survey with the actual outcome – together with the same information (collected via an identically worded question) for previous face-to-face SSAS conducted after the 2011 and 2016 Holyrood ballots.

Table 5: Reported and Actual Turnout, Scottish Parliament Elections – 2011-21

	2011 (F2F)	2016 (F2F)	2023 (2021 Election) (P2W)
	%	%	%
Reported turnout by survey participants	60	70	68
Actual turnout in the election	51	56	63
Error	+9	+14	+5
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1175	1197	1532

It is common for polls and surveys to find that their respondents are more likely to say that they voted in an election than did so according to the official count. In part this is because the official count understates the level of turnout. This happens as a result of redundancy in the electoral register and because it excludes those who voted but whose ballot was deemed invalid. However, it can also arise either because those who participate in elections are more likely to respond to surveys or because respondents are reluctant to admit their failure to vote. While the latter pattern might be thought less likely to occur when respondents are not giving their answers to an interviewer, we might be concerned that the former trend might be more prevalent in a push-to-web sample than in one obtained face-to-face.

In practice, at 68%, the level of turnout in the 2021 election reported by our push-to-web survey is only five points above that recorded by the official count. This compares with figures of nine points in 2011 and 14 in 2016. This suggests, if anything, that the push-to-web sample is a little more representative on this criterion.

Table 6 compares the weighted distribution of the party for which people said they voted on the constituency ballot in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election with the actual outcome of the election, while Table 7 shows the equivalent figures for the list ballot. The same analysis is also shown for the 2011 and 2016 elections. It should be borne in mind that the information on the push-to-web survey was collected some two years after the 2021 election, whereas the 2011 and 2016 SSAs were both conducted relatively soon thereafter. As a result, there is a greater risk on the push-to-web survey that respondents may have misremembered how they voted at the last election.

Table 6: Political Party Voted For – Constituency Vote – Scottish Parliament

	2011 (F2F)	2011 (F2F)	2016 (F2F)	2016 (F2F)	2023 (2021 Election) (P2W)	2023 (2021 Election) (P2W)
	Reported Vote	Actual Vote	Reported Vote	Actual Vote	Reported vote	Actual vote
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Con	9	14	18	22	16	22
Lab	30	32	21	23	20	22
Lib Dem	7	8	6	8	8	7
SNP	52	45	52	47	50	48
Others	1	1	4	2	7	2
Mean Difference		3.0		3.0		3.2
<i>Unweighted base</i>		<i>658</i>		<i>770</i>		<i>965</i>

Table 7: Political Party Voted For – List Vote – Scottish Parliament Elections 2011-2021

	2011 (F2F)	2011 (F2F)	2016 (F2F)	2016 (F2F)	2023 (2021 Election) (P2W)	2023 (2021 Election) (P2W)
	Reported Vote	Actual Vote	Reported Vote	Actual Vote	Reported vote	Actual vote
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Con	9	14	18	23	14	23
Lab	29	26	20	19	22	18
Lib Dem	5	5	5	5	9	5
SNP	50	44	45	42	34	40
Green	4	4	9	7	16	8
Others	3	8	2	4	5	5
Mean Difference		3.2		2.2		5.2
<i>Unweighted base</i>		<i>742</i>		<i>724</i>		<i>933</i>

Across the four parties that contested all of the constituency seats, together with all others combined, on average there is a difference between the actual and reported result of just over three points in the 2023 sample. Much of this difference arises because people were more likely to report voting for an ‘Other’ party – in practice, primarily the Greens - than did so, perhaps because they did not remember the Greens failed stand in all but 16 of the 73 single-member constituencies. Even so, the mean difference across all parties is little different from that recorded in the 2011 and 2016 surveys.

That said, at just over five points, the mean difference on the list vote is noticeably higher than the equivalent statistic for 2011 and 2016. A key reason is that reported support for the Greens is as much as eight points above that in the official result. Most of those who say they voted Green on the list vote reported having voted SNP on the constituency ballot, while the proportion who say they voted SNP on the list vote is six points down on the party’s official tally on that vote. It may be that in the wake of the coalition between the SNP and the Greens, some of those who voted SNP on the list indicated how, in the light of that alliance, they were now inclined to vote Green on the list vote. We might note that a similar pattern was found on two other surveys conducted by ScotCen after the 2021 election, both of which used a

data collection mode other than push-to-web. One was the push-to-phone survey that carried the Scottish Government core module that year, the other a survey undertaken via the NatCen mixed mode random probability panel.^{xii} Given the very different way in which those two surveys and the push to web survey were conducted, it certainly seems unlikely that the discrepancy is evidence of a distinctiveness in the character of the push-to-web sample.

Attitudes towards Scotland’s constitutional status

A key political dividing line in Scotland is people’s attitudes towards the country’s constitutional status, that is, whether it should remain part of the UK or become an independent country. SSAS 2023 contains two measures of people’s attitudes towards the constitutional question, both of which are part of the background questions asked as part of SSAS and are not part of the Scottish Government funded Core Module. The first is how they say they would vote now in response to the question that was posed in the 2014 referendum, ‘Should Scotland be an independent country?’. The second is a question that presents people with five options: independence, either inside or outside the EU; a devolved Scottish Parliament, either with or without taxation powers; and Scotland being ruled from Westminster. This latter question has been asked on every SSAS since 1999. The distribution of responses to both questions on the 2023 survey and information on how they compare with those on the 2016, 2017 and 2019 face-to-face SSAS is shown in Tables 8 and 9. In the case of Table 9, those who chose either independence option have been combined, as have those who chose either devolution option.

Table 8: Reported Vote Intention in Second Independence Referendum - 2016-2023^{xiii}

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
Vote Yes	50	48	60	50
Vote No	50	52	40	50
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1095	1091	901	1527

Table 9: Preference for how Scotland should be governed - 2016-2023

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
Independence	46	45	51	48
Devolution	42	41	36	41
No Parliament	8	8	7	9
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1237</i>	<i>1234</i>	<i>1022</i>	<i>1574</i>

Of course, in this instance it is possible that any difference between the distribution of responses on the 2023 survey and that on previous surveys may have been occasioned by a shift of opinion in the general population. However, we can refer to the evidence provided by other sources to assess whether this might be the case. Table 8 shows that respondents to the push-to-web survey in 2023 were evenly divided between those who said they would vote Yes to independence and those who report that they would vote No. This is in line with the evidence of recent opinion polls^{xiv}. Meanwhile, although lower than in 2019, the level of support for independence is similar to that on the 2016 and 2017 SSAS. This is not inconsistent with the evidence of the opinion polls that there has at most been no more than a marginal shift in the distribution of constitutional preferences since the EU referendum.^{xv} As we might anticipate, this pattern is also reflected in the pattern of responses to our long-running question on how Scotland should be governed.

National Identity

People's attitude towards Scotland's constitutional status is in part influenced by their sense of national identity. The pattern of response to the questions on national identity asked as part of SSAS has remained relatively stable over time. Consequently, if the weighted sample produced by the push-to-web survey is similar to that obtained by previous SSAS, we would expect the distribution of national identity to be much the same as in previous surveys. Table 10 reports the pattern of response to the 'Moreno' question on national identity, in which respondents are invited to identify which of a mixture of being British and Scottish best describes themselves.

Table 10: Moreno National Identity - 2016-2023

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
Scottish not British	24	24	28	32
More Scottish than British	28	30	26	25
Equally Scottish & British	29	28	26	25
More British than Scottish	3	4	4	6
British not Scottish	5	5	5	6
Other	9	9	9	4
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1237	1234	1022	1574

There is little in the way of notable difference between the pattern of response in 2023 and that in earlier years. Indeed, in most instances the figures for 2023 are within a point or two of those obtained in 2019, differences that could well, of course, reflect no more than random sampling variation. That said, at 4%, the proportion who do not select any of the main options is five points down on that recorded in any other recent year. However, this is accompanied by similar increases on previous years both in the proportion who say they are wholly or mostly Scottish and in the proportion who say they are wholly or mostly British. Thus, while the different way of administering the survey may have somewhat depressed the proportion who chose to say 'Other', it appears not to have made any notable difference in the balance between those who chose primarily a Scottish identity and those who select primarily British identity.

SSAS also gathers information about national identity in a second way. In this instance people are presented with a list of the various national identities associated with the islands of Great Britain and Ireland and invited to choose as many as apply to themselves. In the event that they select more than one identity, they are then asked to state which one best describes themselves.

In practice by far the two most commonly chosen responses are 'Scottish' and 'British'. Table 11, therefore, shows the proportion who included these two options among their answers. It will be seen that in both cases the proportion opting to do so is lower than that recorded on recent face-to-face SSAS. As Table 12 further below shows, this reflects the fact that respondents to the push-to-web survey were less likely than those on previous interviewer administered SSAS to take the opportunity to select more than one identity. Indeed, whereas on the 2017 SSA 77% said they were both British and Scottish, and in 2019 67% did so, in the 2023 push-to-web survey, the proportion fell to 52%.

Table 11: Proportions Identifying as Scottish or British - 2016-23

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
Scottish	79	80	76	70
British	55	54	46	43
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1237</i>	<i>1234</i>	<i>1020</i>	<i>1574</i>

Table 12: Number of Nationalities Chosen - 2016-2023

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
0	1	*	*	3
1	47	47	57	66
2	42	40	34	24
3	10	11	7	6
4	1	1	1	1
5+	*	*	*	*

The British Social Attitudes survey also asks this question on national identity. A similar increase in the proportion of respondents who select just one option is also to be observed on that survey, since its transition to a push-to-web methodology. On average, 57% have selected just one option on the three BSA surveys that have asked this question since the change of method, compared with an average of 53% in the three face-to-face surveys conducted between 2017 and 2019. Moreover, this difference is even more notable – and similar to that in Table 12 - if we focus solely on Scottish respondents to BSA in the same period. On average, 65% of Scottish respondents on BSA have selected one option in the last three push-to-web surveys, compared with an average of just 50% who did so in the last three surveys that were conducted face-to-face.

This suggests that the difference in the number of multiple responses reported in Table 12 is a consequence of the change in the way in which the survey is administered. In face-to-face surveys it is standard practice for interviewers, when reading out multiple response questions, to prompt respondents by asking them if there are any further answers they would like to give to the question. In the absence of these prompts it is understandable that fewer respondents selected more than one option when the survey was administered online.

Table 13: Forced Choice National Identity - 2016-23

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
Scottish	67	68	67	62
British	20	20	21	24
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1237	1234	1020	1574

This pattern also appears to have had some impact if we examine the distribution of people’s ‘forced choice’ identity. For those who initially acknowledged more than one identity, their forced choice identity is the identity they chose when subsequently asked to name just one. For the remainder, their forced choice identity is whichever single identity they selected. Table 13 shows that when calculated in this way, the proportion who are classified as Scottish is somewhat lower than on previous SSAS while the proportion who emerge as British is a little higher.

When this question is administered, the option ‘British’ is the first to be shown in the list of responses, while Scottish is the sixth, a reflection of how they were displayed on a show card on previous SSAS/. One possible consequence is that some respondents selected ‘British’ and then did not necessarily pay as much attention to the other items on the list. Indeed, those who on the push-to-web survey said they were British were 14 points less likely than the equivalent group on the 2019 SSA to select more than one identity. Crucially, this figure is higher than the equivalent figure (ten points) among those who said they were Scottish. Consideration may need to be given to the order in which the possible responses to this question are displayed in future surveys.

Position on left-right scale

Finally, a key dividing line in both Scottish and British politics is between those on the ‘left’ and those on the ‘right’. Those on the ‘left’ are those who are concerned about inequality and believe that the government should reduce it, while those on the ‘right’ feel it is more important to provide the incentives to investment that will encourage economic growth from which all can prosper.^{xvi} Since 1999, SSAS has measured where people stand on this divide by administering a series of agree-disagree questions about the extent of inequality and what the government should do about it. As we might anticipate from a measure designed to obtain an underlying value orientation, for the most part, the pattern of responses has varied relatively little from one year to the next.

Table 14 shows that the proportion of people who emerge as being on the ‘left’ and on the ‘right’ is little different on the push-to-web survey than it has been on the last

three SSAs. It would seem that in this respect at least the push-to-web survey has secured a sample whose character is similar to that obtained by previous SSAS.

Table 14: Position on Left Right Scale - 2016-23

	2016 (F2F) (%)	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2023 (P2W) (%)
Left	60	63	66	62
Neither	32	30	27	28
Right	8	6	7	8
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1237	1234	1022	1574

^{xii} Reported Green Party list vote for the phone and panel surveys was 18% and 15% respectively.

^{xiii} Note: those saying *Don't Know/Refused/Not Sure/Definitely will not vote* excluded from the denominator on which these figures are based.

^{xiv} [How would you vote in a Scottish independence referendum if held now? \(asked after the EU referendum\) - What Scotland Thinks](#)

^{xv} Ibid

^{xvi} Further information on the construction of the scale is included in Annex B to this report

Mode Change – Effect on Questionnaire Design

Changing the mode so that the respondent completes the survey online rather than face-to-face with an interviewer can have an impact on how a question is administered, and this possibility had to be considered for each of the Core Module questions before they were fielded on SSAS 2023. The majority of questions were able to be asked exactly as they were previously, without any changes. However, this chapter looks at those questions that did need to be adapted specifically for the push-to-web mode.

The survey asks respondents whether they think that the standard of the health service and the standard of living has increased, fallen, or stayed the same in the last 12 months. Provided they did not refuse to answer the question, or state that they did not know, they were then asked what they thought the change (if any) was mainly the result of. The options were as follows:

“What do you think this has been mainly the result of?”

1. *Mainly the result of the UK government's policies at Westminster*
2. *Mainly the result of the Scottish Government's policies*
3. *For some other reason”*
4. *(Both Westminster and Scottish Government equally)”*

When the survey was conducted face-to-face, the first three options were read out, but the fourth was not; the fourth option (‘Both Westminster and Scottish Government equally’) could only be coded if the respondent said it spontaneously to the interviewer. This aspect of the question presented a challenge for the web survey, because respondents cannot provide the answer spontaneously in the same way.

There were two possible approaches to address this. The first was simply include the fourth option alongside the others. However, presenting option four in this way would more accurately reflect a face-to-face design where this option was read out by the interviewer alongside the others, rather than one where the answer was not read out and could only be given spontaneously. The other approach was to hide this response option, and only have it appear should the respondent try and skip the question. This is similar to the way that ‘Prefer not to answer’ and ‘Don’t know’ were presented as response options throughout the survey, but may still be chosen by fewer people than when the answer could be given spontaneously.

To assess the impact of the two approaches on the pattern of response to the question, both were fielded as part of SSAS 2023. Half the sample were presented

with the fourth option upfront, while for the other half the option was hidden and only presented if the respondent skipped the question.

Tables 15 and 16 show the distribution of responses between 2017 and 2023 for those who thought the standard of the health service had increased and decreased respectively. Note that in this instance we also report the results for the 2021/2 push-to-phone survey, which, as it was administered by an interviewer also enabled respondents to say 'both Westminster and Scottish Government' spontaneously.

Table 15: Standard of Health Service Increased: Assigned Responsibility – 2017-2023

	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2021/22 (P2P) (%)	2023 – 4 th Option hidden (P2W) (%)	2023 – 4 th Option shown (P2W) (%)
Scottish government policies	57	51	60	23	33
UK government policies	16	11	3	56	56
Some other reason	13	26	33	19	7
Both Westminster and SG	9	7	3	-	4
(Don't know)	6	6	1	2	-
(Refusal)	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Unweighted base</i>	106	88	75	48	32

Table 16: Standard of Health Service Decreased: Assigned Responsibility – 2017-2023

	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2021/22 (P2P) (%)	2023 – 4 th Option hidden (P2W) (%)	2023 – 4 th Option shown (P2W) (%)
Scottish government policies	27	19	24	32	19
UK government policies	46	44	28	47	30
Some other reason	13	18	40	19	7
Both Westminster and SG	11	15	7	*	42
(Don't know)	3	4	1	2	1
(Refusal)		-	-	-	1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>602</i>	<i>464</i>	<i>733</i>	<i>533</i>	<i>544</i>

Only a small proportion of respondents in 2023 stated that the standard of the health service had increased in the previous 12 months, so any differences in the pattern of response may be attributable to the low base sizes rather than the different ways the options were presented. This caveat notwithstanding, there was a small difference in the proportions selecting the fourth option: while no-one selected it when it was hidden, 4% did so when it was presented upfront alongside the other options.

If we examine the results for those who thought the standard of the health service had decreased, the difference in the pattern of response is much clearer. When presented with 'both Westminster and Scottish Government' upfront, just over 4 in 10 (42%) people selected it, whereas when it was not presented upfront fewer than 1% did so. Crucially when the fourth option was shown, the proportion selecting it was also notably higher than the results for 2017-2021/22, where the equivalent figures were between 7% and 15%.

A similar pattern is evident in the responses to the questions on who is responsible for changes in the standard of living in Scotland in the previous twelve months. Tables 17 and 18 show the distribution of responses for those who thought the standard of living had increased and decreased respectively.

Table 17: Standard of Living Increased: Assigned Responsibility - 2017-2023

	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2021/22 (P2P) (%)	2023 – 4 th Option hidden (P2W) (%)	2023 – 4 th Option shown (P2W) (%)
Scottish government policies	43	44	28	35	17
UK government policies	28	19	21	47	42
Some other reason	15	28	34	16	28
Both Westminster and SG	9	4	13	-	13
(Don't know)	6	6	3	2	-
(Refusal)	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>177</i>	<i>159</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>39</i>

Table 18: Standard of Living Decreased: Assigned Responsibility - 2017-2023

	2017 (F2F) (%)	2019 (F2F) (%)	2021/22 (P2P) (%)	2023 – 4 th Option hidden (P2W) (%)	2023 – 4 th Option shown (P2W) (%)
Scottish government policies	16	17	17	27	17
UK government policies	50	57	45	55	38
Some other reason	14	12	31	17	8
Both Westminster and SG	17	13	6	1	36
(Don't know)	3	1	1	1	1
(Refusal)	-	-	-	-	0
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>685</i>	<i>503</i>	<i>741</i>	<i>662</i>	<i>673</i>

When the option was presented upfront, 13% stated that 'both Westminster and the Scottish Government' were responsible for an increase in the standard of living in the previous 12 months, whereas when the option was hidden no-one selected it. The 13% figure is more in line with the figures for when the survey was conducted

face-to-face, though as with the health service questions these results need to be caveated with the fact that the unweighted base sizes are low.

In comparison, for those who stated that the standard of living had decreased, 36% said this was the responsibility of both Westminster and the Scottish Government when this option was presented upfront, whereas only 1% did so when the option was hidden. The equivalent results between 2017 and 2021/22 were between 6% and 17%.

Focussing just on the results for those who said the standard of the health service or standard of living had decreased, where there is no need to caveat the results because of low base sizes, the general trend is that where the option is presented upfront the proportion selecting it is markedly higher than when the survey was conducted face-to-face, and respondents could only provide the response spontaneously. In contrast, where the option is hidden the proportion selecting it is markedly lower than when the survey was conducted face-to-face. Therefore the way the question is asked has a significant effect on the pattern of response – and in neither case does the pattern of response reflect that on previous face to face SSAS.

We would recommend that if SSAS is fielded using this design in future a version of the question that does not present the fourth response option upfront should be used. This is because the wording asks respondents what they think ‘this has *mainly* been the result of’. Hiding the ‘both’ option therefore prompts the respondent more strongly to make a decision on where they think responsibility lies, and therefore gets somewhat closer to the intended meaning of the question than the version that presents the fourth option upfront. Although a significant proportion of people selected the ‘both’ option when it was not hidden, many of them may still feel that one government is more responsible than the other. Therefore, hiding the response option more closely aligns the way the question is asked with what it was designed to achieve.

Relationship between Disability/Long-term health condition and National Identity variables with Core Module Questions

Given the differences outlined previously in report with respect to the proportion who (a) report having a disability or long-term health condition and (b) say, when forced to choose, whether they are Scottish or British, it is worth examining the relationship between them and the attitudinal questions in the Core Module. There are two possibilities to consider. First, how strong is the relationship between these variables and people's responses to the questions in the Core Module? If the relationship is weak or non-existent then the different distribution of responses to these background variables will not have had a material impact on the figures obtained by the Core Module questions. Second, is there any notable difference by mode in the strength of any relationship between these variables and questions in the Core Module? If not, it would suggest that despite the differences in the distribution of responses to these background questions, the relationship between them and items in the module is comparable over time.

Disability/Long-term health condition

Tables 19, 20, and 21 show the relationships between disability and long-term health condition with three Core Module questions, where the wording was not amended for the push-to-web survey.

Table 19: Relationship between Disability/Long-term Health Condition and how good respondents rate the Scottish Government to be at listening to people’s views before taking decisions

	2017	2017	2019	2019	2023	2023
	Long-term Health Condition	No Long-term Health Condition	Long-term Health Condition	No Long-term Health Condition	Long-term Health Condition	No Long-term Health Condition
Very good	4	4	7	6	4	4
Quite good	38	48	37	49	37	30
Not very good	37	32	35	28	33	43
Or, not at all good	17	11	16	10	21	22
Total Very/Quite Good	42	51	44	55	42	33
Total Not very/Not at all Good	54	43	50	38	55	64
Don't Know/Refusal	4	6	5	7	4	3
Chi-Squared	17.199 (<.001)	17.199 (<.001)	18.186 (p<.001)	18.186 (p<.001)	12.973 (p<0.01)	12.973 (p<0.01)
Cramer's V	0.121	0.121	0.138	0.138	0.093	0.093

Table 20: Relationship between Disability/Long-term Health Condition and how much respondents trust the UK Government to work in Scotland’s best interests

	2017	2017	2019	2019	2023	2023
	Long-term Health Condition	No Long-term Health Condition	Long-term Health Condition	No Long-term Health Condition	Long-term Health Condition	No Long-term Health Condition
Just about always	2	2	1	3	3	4
Most of the time	17	20	11	14	13	18
Only some of the time	39	46	40	39	32	32
Almost never	41	29	46	41	50	44
Don't Know/Refusal	1	3	3	1	2	2
Total Just about always/most of the time	19	22	12	18	16	23
Total Only some of the time/Almost never	81	76	86	81	82	76
Chi-Squared	18.31 (p<.001)	18.31 (p<.001)	10.80 (p<0.02)	10.80 (p<0.02)	8.74 (p<0.05)	8.74 (p<0.05)
Cramer's V	0.123	0.123	0.104	0.104	.075	.075

Table 21: Relationship between Disability/Long-term Health Condition and who respondents think has the most influence over the way Scotland is run

	2017	2017	2019	2019	2023	2023
	Long-term Health Condition	No Long-term Health Condition	Long-term Health Condition	No Long-term Health Condition	Long-term Health Condition	No Long-term Health Condition
Scottish Government	46	41	39	41	40	45
UK Government	38	43	41	43	51	44
Local Councils	5	5	7	8	6	8
European Union	7	8	7	6	1	1
Don't Know/Refusal	4	4	6	3	3	2
Chi-Squared	3.98 (p>0.05)	3.98 (p>0.05)	2.11 (p>0.05)	2.11 (p>0.05)	6.18 (p>0.05)	6.18 (p>0.05)
Cramer's V	0.058	0.058	0.046	0.046	0.064	0.064

Although Tables 19 and 20 reveal that in each year there is a statistically significant relationship with people's long-term health status, in both cases the Cramer's V score is below 0.2, which indicates a weak relationship.^{xvii} Table 19 does show a change in the direction of this weak relationship, with those with a long-term health condition/disability now somewhat more rather than less likely to say the Scottish Government is very/quite good at listening to people's views before taking decisions, but this is not true of Table 20. Meanwhile, Table 21 shows that there is no significant relationship between the two variables in any of the years tested.

Given the weakness of the relationships and their consistency in general over time, it would appear that the lower reported prevalence of those with a long-term health condition or disability will not have impacted significantly on the pattern of response to the core module questions.

National Identity

Tables 22 to 24 show the equivalent analysis for people's national identity when they are forced to choose just one. Given the low base sizes for the other responses, the analysis is confined to those who choose either 'British' or 'Scottish':

Table 22: Relationship between National Identity and how good respondents say the Scottish Government is at listening to people's views before taking decisions

	2017		2019		2023	
	British	Scottish	British	Scottish	British	Scottish
Very good	3	4	1	9	2	4
Quite good	34	44	34	45	16	38
Not very good	41	34	37	31	41	39
Or, not at all good	20	14	22	10	38	16
Total Very/Quite Good	37	48	35	54	18	42
Total Not very/Not at all Good	61	48	59	41	80	55
Don't Know/Refusal	2	4	5	5	3	2
Chi-Square	14.992	14.992	39.595	39.595	106.622	106.622
Cramer's V	0.118	0.118	0.211	0.211	0.280	0.280
Approximate Significance	0.05	0.05	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001

Table 23: Relationship between National Identity and how much respondents trust the UK Government to work in Scotland's best interests

	2017	2017	2019	2019	2023	2023
	British	Scottish	British	Scottish	British	Scottish
Just about always	7	1	7	1	11	2
Most of the time	32	13	25	8	30	13
Only some of the time	41	43	43	40	37	28
Almost never	18	42	25	50	19	57
Don't Know/Refusal	1	1	1	1	3	*
Total Just about always/most of the time	39	14	32	9	41	14
Total Only some of the time/Almost never	59	85	68	90	56	85
Chi Squared	112.388	112.388	88.536	88.536	209.714	209.714
Cramer's V	0.322	0.322	0.315	0.315	0.393	0.393
Approx significance	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001

Table 24: Relationship between National Identity and who respondents think has the most influence over the way Scotland is run

	2017	2017	2019	2019	2023	2023
	British	Scottish	British	Scottish	British	Scottish
Scottish Government	52	40	44	38	56	39
UK Government	34	44	34	45	32	52
Local Councils	6	4	8	7	7	7
European Union	5	7	9	7	1	1
Don't know/Refusal	3	4	4	4	4	2
Chi Squared	15.486	15.486	8.722	8.722	47.905	47.905
Cramer's V	0.119	0.119	0.099	0.099	0.188	0.188

Approx significance	0.04	0.04	0.121	0.121	<.001	<.001
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Here, the relationship between national identity and our three core module questions is not only significant (with the exception of the 2019 figures in Table 24) but is also relatively strong. However, the strength of the relationship (measured by Cramer’s V) is slightly higher in 2023 than in the two previous years. This though is the opposite of what we would expect if the rise in British identity was solely a result of the order of response options. Such a process should mean that those who are classified as British in 2023 are less distinctive than those who are classified that way in previous years - and thus less likely to express different views from those who call themselves Scottish. Thus while consideration should be given the randomisation of response options to the national identity question if SSAS is fielded online in future, these results suggest that it is reasonable to compare the relationship between items in the core module and national identity with that in previous years.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of fielding SSAS using a push-to-web mode in 2023 was to determine whether the results obtained through an online survey would be comparable with those of previous face-to-face surveys. The results presented in this report provide encouraging evidence that SSAS can be fielded as a push-to-web survey in future and the long-standing time series largely maintained.

Sample

Prior to weighting, there were some differences between the demographic composition of the push-to-web sample and that of previous face-to-face surveys. Most notably there was a smaller proportion of over 65s, a larger proportion of women and a larger proportion of those living in the least deprived SIMD quintile. However, after weighting the demographic data are similar to those obtained in the last three face-to-face surveys conducted in 2016, 2017 and 2019. In respect of area deprivation, age and respondent's sex, the survey provided a final weighted sample that is broadly reflective of the Scottish population – and this has been achieved without significantly stronger weighting than was required for the face-to-face surveys. At 64% the weighting efficiency of the sample was similar to that of recent face-to-face samples.

However, one key apparent disadvantage of the web mode was the noticeable drop in the proportion identifying as having a long-term health condition or disability: the weighted figure was 26% in 2023 compared with 40% when the survey was last conducted face-to-face. It is likely that a significant drop of this kind is at least in part a consequence of the change in mode, though other factors such as a difference in the position of the question in the survey may well have played a role. Unfortunately, it is not possible to tell from the data whether this reduction in the proportion of those who report having a long-term health condition/disability is a result of them being less likely to opt-in to an online survey, or whether those with a long-term health condition/disability were less likely to identify as such after opting-in. However, both issues should be considered in future if SSAS is to be conducted online to ensure the survey is accessible for everyone. For example, the wording of the question and its position in the questionnaire should be reconsidered carefully to reduce any questionnaire design effects to a minimum. Survey materials (invitation letters, leaflets etc.) could also be examined and potentially redesigned to try and improve the participation rate of those with a long-term health condition/disability as much as possible.

Adapted questions

The exercise was instructive with regards to questionnaire design. Questions that, when asked by an interviewer, allowed a response option that was not offered to respondents to be given spontaneously by the respondent present a challenge when asked on an online survey. When the additional response option is shown upfront along with the others, more respondents select it than would typically do so

in a face-to-face survey when it is not read out by the interviewer and can only be offered as a spontaneous response. When the option is not shown upfront but only appears if the respondent skips the question (alongside 'Don't know' and 'Prefer not to say') fewer respondents select it than would typically do so in a face-to-face survey. We would therefore advise that the results from these questions are not directly comparable with those obtained in the face-to-face surveys, given the significant differences in question design and resulting large differences in the spread of responses. We would also advise that, if these questions are to be fielded in future online surveys, the fourth option ('Both Westminster and the Scottish Government') is hidden and presented to the respondent if they skip the question. This version more closely aligns with the purpose of the question, which is concerned with who is *mainly* responsible for changes in the standard of living and of the health service

Response patterns

Administering the survey via the web also had some impact on the pattern of response to questions on national identity. Respondents, when given a free choice to select as many or as few national identities as they wished, were less likely to select more than one than they were when the survey was conducted face-to-face. A similar pattern was noted when BSA moved to an online mode. It also appears to be the case that in selecting just one identity respondents were more likely to select an identity that appeared towards the top of the list that was offered. It might be wise to randomise the order of the response options, should SSAS be fielded online in future. The majority of questions in the Core Module, however, require minimal to no adaptation for an online survey.

As in the case of demographics, the data collected on party political support and independence were generally encouraging in terms of representativeness. The mean error for the constituency vote in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election was similar to that obtained when the same question was asked face-to-face in 2011. It was also not widely dissimilar to the mean error obtained in 2016, when SSAS was fielded in the same year as the election. The mean error for list vote was notably higher, but this is likely more attributable to recall error and to the current participation of the Greens in the SNP-led Scottish Government than it is to the change in survey mode. The figures obtained for turnout at the election were the most accurate SSAS has obtained in recent years, and results for the left-right scale provide no cause for concern.

Recommendations

On balance, the findings outlined in this mode report are a valuable addition to our understanding of the impact of changes in survey mode and we would advise that, a push-to-web method is a viable option for fielding SSAS in future. We would also recommend the following:

- The nature of the achieved sample and the weighting efficiency figure indicates that all questions in the Core Module, with the exception of those

on assigned responsibility for changes in the standard of living/health service, can be compared with existing time series.

- The questions on assigned responsibility for changes in the standard of living and health service cannot be compared with the existing time series, and the version of the question that hides the 'Both Westminster and Scottish Government' should be used if SSAS is fielded online in future.
- Consideration should be given to maximise representation of those with a long-term health condition/disability in future SSAS online surveys, given the apparent reduction in their representation when compared with the face-to-face surveys.

Annex A – Condensed Core Module Questions & Comparability

Core Module Question	Wording/Design Changed for Web Mode	Comparable with existing time series?
<i>Thinking back over the last twelve months, would you say that since then the standard of the health service in Scotland has increased or fallen?</i>	No	Yes
<i>Standard of Health Service: what do you think this [increase/decrease] has mainly been the result of? (with option 4)</i>	Yes	No
<i>Thinking back over the last 12 months, would you say that since then the general standard of living in Scotland has increased or fallen?</i>	No	Yes
<i>Standard of living: what do you think this [increase/decrease] has mainly been the result of? (with option 4)</i>	Yes	No
<i>How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the National Health Service runs</i>	No	Yes

<i>nowadays?</i>		
<i>Here is a list of things the Scottish Government could try and achieve. Which do you think should be its highest priority, that is the most important thing it should try and do?</i>	No	Yes
<i>In general how good would you say the Scottish Government is at listening to people's views before it takes decisions?</i>	No	Yes
<i>And how good would you say the UK government is at listening to people's views before it takes decisions?</i>	No	Yes
<i>How much do you trust the UK Government to work in Scotland's best long-term interest?</i>	No	Yes
<i>How much do you trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's best interests?</i>	No	Yes
<i>Which of the following do you think has most influence over the way Scotland is run?</i>	No	Yes

<p><i>And which do you think ought to have most influence over the way Scotland is run?</i></p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p><i>Think Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people...[more say in how Scotland is governed/less say/or, is it making no difference?]</i></p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Yes</p>

Annex B – Construction of Left-Right Scale

Since 1999, SSAS has included two attitude scales which aim to measure where respondents stand on certain underlying value dimensions – left–right (used in this report) and libertarian–authoritarian.

A useful way of summarising the information from a number of questions of this sort is to construct an additive index^{xviii xix}. This approach rests on the assumption that there is an underlying – ‘latent’ – attitudinal dimension which characterises the answers to all the questions within each scale. If so, scores on the index are likely to be a more reliable indication of the underlying attitude than the answers to any one individual question.

The left-right scale consists of a number of statements to which the respondent is invited to “agree strongly”, “agree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “disagree” or “disagree strongly”. The items are:

- Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off;
- Big business benefits owners at the expense of workers;
- Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation’s wealth;
- There is one law for the rich and one for the poor
- Management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance

The scale is formed by scoring the leftmost position as 1 and the rightmost position as 5. The “neither agree nor disagree” option is scored as 3. 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 (leftmost) to 5 (rightmost).

^{xviii} Spector, P. (1992), *Summated Rating Scale Construction: An Introduction*, Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences, 82, Newbury Park, California: Sage

^{xix} DeVellis, R.F. (2003), *Scale Development: Theory and Applications*, 2nd edition, Applied Social Research Methods Series, 26, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage

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