



*Scottish Social Attitudes
Survey 2006*
Core Module
Report 2: Perceptions of
Government in Scotland

SCOTTISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES SURVEY 2006
CORE MODULE
REPORT 2: PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT IN
SCOTLAND

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Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report, and for all interpretation of the data, lies solely with the authors.

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PREFACE

This report is the latest in a series based on a module of questions in the *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey on public attitudes to government and public services in post-devolution Scotland. The module was funded from 2004 to 2006 by the Scottish Executive's Office of Chief Researcher. The main focus of this report is perceptions of government in Scotland, looking in particular at public trust and other measures of engagement with government, as well as perceptions of the influence of different institutions over how Scotland is run. A separate report in the same series focuses on perceptions of the impact of devolution on public services in Scotland and perceptions of public service standards in the last year (Ormston & Sharp, 2007).

Note on the use of 'Scottish Executive' in this report

On 3 September 2007 the Scottish Executive changed its name to The Scottish Government. This decision was based on clear evidence¹ that the term "Scottish Executive" was confusing or meaningless to many members of the public. The fieldwork on which this report is based was conducted in 2006, before the official name change, and the questions therefore referred to the Scottish Executive. The term Scottish Executive is therefore used throughout the following report.

¹ Including that reported in previous years Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trust in government

- In 2006, more people in Scotland said they trusted the Scottish Executive than the UK government, both to look after Scotland's best interests and to make fair decisions. Around half said they trusted the Scottish Executive 'almost always' or 'most of the time' compared with 1 in 5 who expressed this level of trust in the UK government. Similarly, 31% trusted the Scottish Executive 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' to make fair decisions, compared with 23% who said the same of the UK government.
- Trust varied significantly by education, party political identification, interest in politics, newspaper readership and 'social trust'. In general, trust in government was higher among those with more educational qualifications, those who support the political parties in power (at the time of the survey), those who were more interested in politics, broadsheet readers, and those who expressed more 'social trust' in other people generally.
- In 2006, around half (47%) of people in Scotland trusted the Scottish Executive *more* than they trusted the UK government to act in Scotland's best interests, while almost a quarter (23%) trusted the Scottish Executive *more* than the UK government to make fair decisions.
- The more highly educated, those living in remote rural areas, broadsheet readers, those describing themselves as Scottish, those who identified with the SNP and those who were interested in politics were all particularly likely to trust the Scottish Executive more than the UK government to act in Scotland's best interests. Relatively higher levels of trust in the Scottish Executive than UK government *to make fair decisions* were found among men, younger people and those who identified with the SNP.
- However, it was those who supported having a Scottish Parliament and who held more positive views about the impact of devolution in bringing government closer to the people of Scotland who were most likely to trust the Scottish Executive more than the UK government.

Awareness, engagement and perceptions of influence

- Just over a third (35%) of people in 2006 had heard 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' about the work of the Scottish Executive in the last 12 months (an increase of 5 points from 2005). Although people were still more likely to say they had heard 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' about the UK government (41% in 2006), the gap between awareness of the UK government and the Scottish Executive appears to be narrowing.
- There has been a small but significant increase in the proportion who think the Scottish Executive is good at listening to people's views, from 32% in 2004 to 36% in 2006. While this was higher than the equivalent figure for the UK

government (18%), in 2006 more than half (53%) still thought the Scottish Executive was either 'not very' or 'not at all' good at listening to people's views.

- Just over a third thought that devolution was giving ordinary people more say. A very small proportion of people (5%) thought that devolution had given them less say in how Scotland is governed, whilst the majority (55%) felt their ability to influence government had not changed as a result of devolution.
- Since 2000 there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of people who think the Scottish Parliament/Executive has most influence in running the country, from 13% in 2000 to 24% in 2006. The proportion who think the UK government has most influence has decreased markedly from 66% in 2000 to 38% in 2006.
- Awareness, and perceptions of influence and engagement were found to vary by sex, age, education, affluence, newspaper readership, interest in politics, and party identification.
 - Men were more likely to say they had heard 'a great deal/a lot' about the work of the Scottish Executive, as were older people.
 - Women were more likely to think the Scottish Executive had most influence in running the country.
 - Younger people were generally more likely to hold positive perceptions about the effectiveness of devolution in giving people more say.
 - Those with higher levels of educational qualifications were generally more likely to have positive views across all the measures discussed.
 - People living in more affluent areas were generally more aware of the work of the Scottish Executive compared with those in less affluent areas. They were also more likely to think the Scottish Executive has most influence over how Scotland is run.
 - Broadsheet readers, those with an interest in politics and those supporting parties in power at the time of the survey were generally more likely to be positive about the devolved institutions.
- But as with trust, it was attitudes to other aspects of devolution in principle and in practice which were most strongly related to awareness of devolved government and perceptions of its influence and engagement. Put simply, those who were more positive about devolution and the Scottish Executive on one measure were often more likely to be positive on others.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 The Scottish Parliament was established in 1999 with the key aims of giving Scotland more autonomy over its affairs and implementing public policies that are more responsive to the needs of the people of Scotland. It was also hoped that the devolved institutions would allow for more effective engagement with the people of Scotland, by encouraging them to make their views heard, and involving them in decision-making. The Scottish Parliament was not just physically closer to the people of Scotland than its counterpart in Westminster (the Scottish Parliament's 2007 Annual Report noted that it welcomed its millionth visitor in March 2007); its founding principles also included a commitment to conduct its business in a very different way. The Consultative Steering Group, who drafted the initial standing orders for the new Parliament, stated that it should be 'accessible, open, responsive, and develop procedures which make possible a participative approach to the development, consideration and scrutiny of policy and legislation' (Scottish Office, 1999). Reflecting this aspiration, consultation was made an integral part of the Scottish Executive's policy-making process, while the Scottish Parliament received its 1,000th public petition in October 2006 (Scottish Parliament Corporate Body, 2007). It was hoped that by adopting these more open, participative ways of working, the new Scottish institutions would be able to combat the widely-reported sense of public disillusion and distrust in government and politicians (for example, see Dewar, 1998).

1.2 The Scottish Executive funded a series of questions in the 2004-2006 *Scottish Social Attitudes* surveys (SSA) on attitudes to government. These questions are used in this report to assess the extent to which the Scottish institutions have succeeded in engaging the Scottish public, and how this has changed over time. In particular, the report addresses the following questions:

Key questions

- Do people in Scotland trust the devolved institutions?
- How aware are people of Scottish Executive activities?
- Do people feel they have a chance to influence government in Scotland?
- Who do people think *has* and who do they think *ought to* have the most influence over how Scotland is run?

1.3 'Engagement' is a multi-faceted concept, and 'engagement with government' may have many components. At a basic level, people 'engage' with government by voting in elections. However, the Scottish Executive, like many modern governments, is clearly concerned with encouraging public engagement in a broader sense. This report considers trust in government, awareness of government activities and the extent to which people feel a sense of involvement in public decision making - all of which can be considered aspects of 'engagement'.

1.4 The first part of this report explores public trust in government in Scotland. While it is possible to argue that some degree of scepticism about politicians and political

institutions is healthy for political life (e.g. see Hardin, 1999), Newton (2002) argues that a properly functioning democracy should create a political system that encourages public trust. High or rising levels of political distrust suggest that the political system is performing poorly in the eyes of its citizens. Moreover, low levels of trust in government institutions seem likely to hamper attempts to engage the public with political decision-making and government initiatives. This report explores trust in government to act in Scotland's best interests and to make fair decisions. It examines which groups of the public were, in 2006, most likely to trust the government on each of these measures, and considers whether the Scottish Executive was trusted more or less than the UK government.

1.5 The report then discusses other key measures that can be characterised as indicators of public engagement with government. First, levels of public awareness of government activities are explored. Although simply being aware of government activities does not imply that people are actively engaged with them, awareness is arguably a necessary condition of further engagement. Put simply, if people are not aware of what governments do, they are unlikely to become engaged with them at any more meaningful level. Next, beliefs about whether, as its advocates hoped, devolution has given ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed and views about how good the Scottish Executive (and UK government) are at listening to people's views before taking decisions are considered. These questions can help us understand public perceptions of the 'efficacy' of the political system in Scotland – that is, how well equipped it is to respond to the demands of the Scottish people.

1.6 Finally, the report considers public perceptions of the comparative influence of the Scottish Executive, UK government, Local Councils and the European Union over how Scotland is run. As well as comparing who, in 2006, people thought *ought* to have most influence with who they thought actually *had* most power, the report examines trends in perceptions of influence over the post-devolution period.

1.7 The views of different groups within Scotland are compared across all these measures in order to explore whether some groups were more likely than others to hold positive views about the success of the Scottish institutions both in engaging the public and in influencing how Scotland is run.

The data

1.8 The data come from the *Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA)* survey, conducted by the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen). *SSA* is an independent survey that aims to provide high quality survey data on a wide range of social and political attitudes in order both to inform public policy and to facilitate the academic study of public opinion. This report focuses on data from the 2006 survey and builds on previous *SSA* reports on attitudes to government (particularly Bromley & Given, 2006, Curtice, 2007 and Given & Ormston, 2007). Between August 2006 and early January 2007, a random sample of 1,594 adults aged 18 plus resident in Scotland was interviewed, representing a response rate of between 56% and 58%². Interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's

² The precise figure given for response rates depends on whether dwelling units whose eligibility to participate was unknown are included or excluded from the calculation. Dwelling units are coded as 'unknown eligibility' where the interviewer is unable to establish whether the property is occupied and residential. The higher response rate excludes dwelling units of unknown eligibility from the calculation,

homes, using computer assisted personal interviewing. Ninety per cent of respondents also completed a paper-self completion questionnaire. Further technical details about the survey are included in a separate technical report. (Cleghorn, Ormston & Sharp, 2007)

2. TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

Trust and democracy

2.1 As discussed in the introduction, it is commonly argued that trust in government is an essential component of a properly functioning democracy. At a very basic level if people do not trust government they may not vote in elections, which form the basis of a healthy democracy. For example, Bromley, Curtice and Seyd found that 78% of those who said they trust governments to put interests of nation first voted in 1997 UK general election, compared with just 62% of those who almost never trust governments (Bromley et al, 2001). However, in Scotland as in many modern democracies, the government is increasingly concerned with engaging the public outside the ballot box – they wish to involve them in consultations and actively encourage them to contribute their views to discussions about public policy. Low levels of trust in government are likely to hamper these attempts at public engagement. Moreover, low levels of political trust can affect support for (and, at worst, cooperation with) the programmes and policies of government.

2.2 At the same time as public trust is commonly held to be key to successful democratic government, researchers, politicians and journalists have long been preoccupied with the idea that we face a ‘crisis’ of trust in government in established democracies. Newton (2006) summarises the prevailing view that:

“Political support is declining in many established Western democracies, as citizens become more and more critical of their political leaders, their government institutions and their system of democracy.”

2.3 However, as Bromley et al (2004) note, in Britain at least we have never been particularly trustful of government. They cite 1974 data from the Political Action Study to show that even then, only around 4 in 10 thought that governments of whatever political party can be trusted to put the needs of the nation above those of their own party. That said, there is evidence from Britain and other countries with established democracies (including the USA and some European countries) that public trust and confidence in government has fallen further since then, particularly in the early 1990s - for example, by 1994 just 24% of people in Britain said they trusted governments to put the needs of the nation first.^{3 4} Findings on trust in this report should thus be read in this broad context, whereby the challenges governments face in engaging public trust are both nothing new and far from unique to Scotland.

while the lower rate includes them. As some of the dwelling units whose eligibility was unknown are likely to be eligible and some ineligible, the true response rate probably lies somewhere between the two figures. For further details on response rate calculations, see the technical report.

³ British Social Attitudes survey, cited in Bromley et al, 2001.

⁴ In 2006, this figure stood at 19% (British Social Attitudes survey).

Measuring political trust

2.4 Like ‘engagement’, ‘political trust’ is a complex concept. There are many different respects in which the public could trust or distrust institutions of government – trust to perform well, to accommodate their interests, to protect their civil liberties, to be stable and durable, etc. Moreover, as Curtice notes in the 2005 *SSA* report on trust, it is possible for government institutions to be trusted in some respects but not others. The 2006 *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey included two sets of questions designed to measure levels of public trust in government. First, people were asked whether they trust the UK government and the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland’s best interests. The questions were worded as follows:

How much do you trust the UK government to work in Scotland’s best long-term interest?

and

How much do you trust the Scottish Executive to work in Scotland’s best interests?

The answer options were: ‘Just about always’, ‘Most of the time’, ‘Only some of the time’, and ‘Almost never’.

2.5 The above questions have been asked annually in the *SSA* since 1999 and aim to measure the extent to which devolution is seen as successful in delivering government that is responsive to the distinctive needs of the Scottish people. The 2006 survey introduced two new questions that asked people how much they trust the UK government and the Scottish Executive to make ‘fair decisions’ to explore this somewhat different aspect of political trust. Verba (2006) argues that political ‘fairness’ can be understood in different ways – for example, in terms of impartial law-making, honest and transparent processes, or giving equal consideration of the interests of different citizens. For the purposes of this survey, ‘fair decisions’ were defined as ‘decisions that are fair to different groups of people in the UK/Scotland’, reflecting the idea of fairness as ‘equal consideration’. The answer options were: ‘A great deal’, ‘Quite a lot’, ‘Some’, ‘Not very much’ and ‘Not at all’.

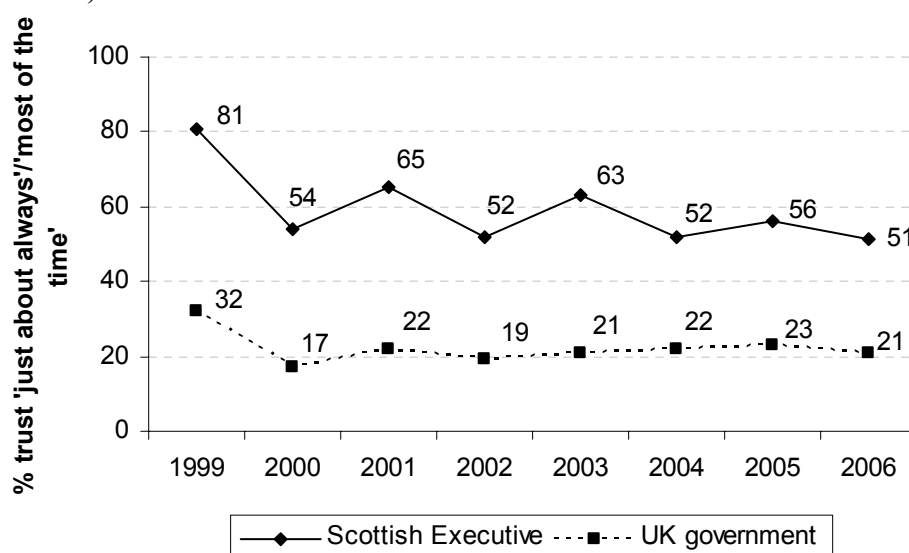
2.6 In this section, overall levels of trust in the Scottish Executive and UK government are compared on each of these measures, including changes over time in levels of trust in government to act in Scotland’s best interests. Findings on who was most and least trusting of government are summarised. Next, the report explores which groups of people were more likely to trust the Scottish Executive than the UK government on each measure (‘best interests’ and ‘fair decisions’). Demographic differences and general political attitudes are explored, and the relationship between relative trust in the Scottish Executive and UK government and respondents’ views about devolution is examined.

Trust in devolved and UK government

2.7 In every year since the survey began in 1999 more people have said they trust the devolved government to look after Scotland's best interests than have said the same of the UK government (Figure 1). Levels of trust in the Scottish Executive fluctuated quite markedly in its early years – with higher levels of trust observed in 2001 and 2003 - but the trend has been more stable since 2004, flattening out at around half (51% in 2006). The proportion who indicate trust in the UK government is much lower, at around 1 in 5 (21% in 2006), and has been stable for a longer period.

2.8 The report on the 2004 *SSA* (Bromley and Given, 2005) noted that the years in which trust peaks included an election (the 2001 UK general election and 2003 Scottish Parliament election). These peaks and troughs now appear to be declining, with trust in the Scottish Executive only slightly higher in 2005, the year of the last UK general election, compared with 2004 and 2006 levels. However, it will be interesting to see whether the results from the 2007 study, which coincides with another Scottish Parliament election, show the same kind of upturn evident in 2003.

Figure 1 Trust in the UK and devolved government⁵ to act in Scotland's interests, 1999-2006



Base: All respondents

Sample size: 1999 = 1,482, 2000 = 1,663, 2001 = 1,605, 2002 = 1,665, 2003 = 1,508, 2004 = 1,637, 2005 = 1,549, 2006 = 1,594

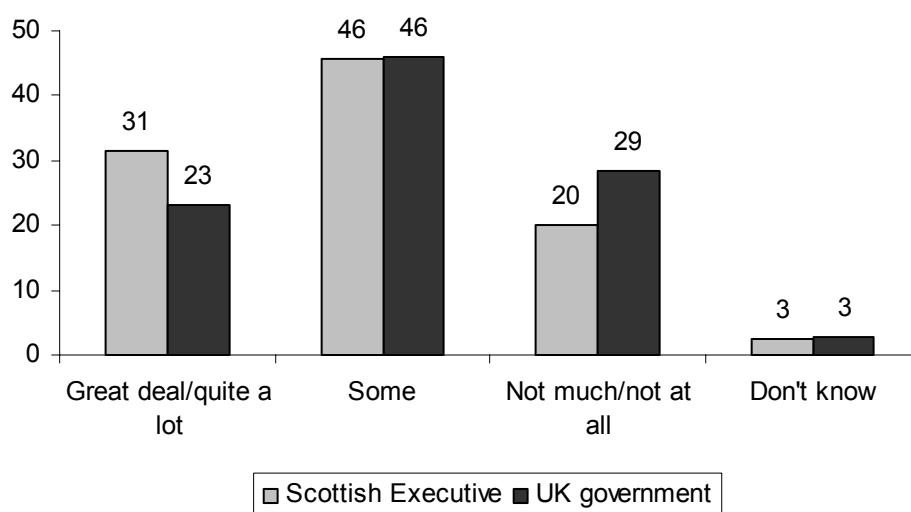
2.9 In 2006, the proportion who said they trusted the Scottish Executive to make 'fair decisions' also outweighed the proportion who trusted the UK government to do the same (Figure 2). Thirty-one per cent expressed 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of trust in the Scottish Executive to make 'fair decisions', compared with just 23% who said the same of the UK government. The proportion expressing very low levels of trust in the Scottish Executive on this measure was also relatively small (just 20% said they trusted them 'not

⁵ Prior to 2004, this question asked about the Scottish Parliament. However, in response to criticisms that the two questions were not comparing alike institutions, a split sample experiment was undertaken in which half the sample were asked about the Scottish Parliament and half about the Scottish Executive. The difference in wording made a negligible difference to the results (see Bromley and Given, 2005, for full results), so from 2005 onwards the question was changed to ask about the Scottish Executive.

much' or 'not at all'). However, the 8 percentage point difference in the proportion who displayed 'high levels' of trust in the two institutions to make fair decisions is clearly much narrower than the 30 percentage point difference found in relation to the question about acting in Scotland's best interests, seen above.

2.10 This is primarily because the proportion who said they trusted the Executive to work in Scotland's best interests 'just about always' or 'most of the time' (51%) was much higher than the proportion who trusted it 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' (31%) to make fair decisions. So while trust in the Executive to work in Scotland's best interests is relatively high, particularly when compared with levels of trust in the UK government, this new question lends support to the view that people's overall level of trust is also dependent on the context being asked about. However, it should be noted that direct comparisons between the two questions are slightly complicated by the fact they have different response scales.⁶ This caveat aside, the fact that views appear to vary considerably depending on the question asked suggests that further exploration of political trust beyond these two measures could be illuminating – perhaps examining confidence in government competence, or trust in government to protect the rights of citizens.

Figure 2 Trust in the UK government and Scottish Executive to make fair decisions, 2006



Base: All respondents (1,594)

Who trusts government?

2.11 Political researchers have put forward various theories to explain why people have high or low levels of trust in government. Some focus on individual-level explanation, whereby trust is thought to be associated with individual personality, status and personal experience. Others focus on broader social and other forces – for example, the influence of the media, and in particular the tabloid press, is often cited as a possible cause of declining political trust in the UK context (see for example discussion in

⁶ The question about trust to act in Scotland's best interests used a four-point 'temporal' scale ranging from 'just about always' to 'almost never', while the 'fair decisions' question used a five-point scale based on 'amount' of trust, with options ranging from 'a great deal' to 'not at all'.

Bromley et al, 2004). Meanwhile Putnam (2000) and other social capital theorists argue that falling political trust is associated with a broader trend towards people being less trusting of each other in general (although as discussed below the association between general social trust and political trust is disputed).

2.12 Data on trust from the 2006 *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey was analysed to explore who was particularly likely to express high levels of trust in the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland’s best interests and to make fair decisions, focusing particularly on demographic factors and general social and political attitudes.⁷ Overall, trust varied significantly by education, party political identification, interest in politics, newspaper readership and social trust.

Education

2.13 It has long been shown that people with higher levels of education are more trusting of government (Bromley and Curtice, 2002). The 2006 *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey confirms this, showing that those educated to degree level were more likely to express high levels of trust in the Scottish Executive both to act in Scotland’s best interests and to make fair decisions (Table 1). For example, 41% of those qualified to degree or higher education level compared with 23% of those with no qualifications expressed ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of trust in the Scottish Executive to make fair decisions. Similar patterns were also apparent for trust in the UK government - for example, 28% of those with degrees compared with just 16% of those with no qualifications trusted the UK government to make fair decisions.

Table 1 Trust in government BY highest educational qualification (cell %)⁸

	Trust to act in Scotland’s best interests ‘Just about always’/‘most of the time’		Trust to make <u>fair decisions</u> ‘A great deal’/‘quite a lot’		Sample size
	SE	UK	SE	UK	
None	37	19	23	16	394
Standard grade/GCSE	44	18	26	19	432
Highers/A-levels	58	22	35	28	280
Degree/Higher Education	64	25	41	28	479

⁷ The main multivariate analysis technique used to inform this report was logistic regression. Logistic regression is a statistical technique used to summarise the relationship between a ‘dependent’ variable (in this case, trust in the Scottish Executive) and one or more ‘independent ‘explanatory’ variables (for example, age, sex, education etc). It is particularly useful when explanatory variables are related to each other (for example, education and area deprivation), since it takes the relationships between these in to account when determining which are statistically significant. Full results of this analysis are reported in a separate technical report (Cleghorn, Ormston & Sharp, 2007).

⁸ Cell percentages imply that the percentages shown in each cell ‘stand alone’. It is not meaningful to total such percentages across a row or down a column. For example, the figure in the first cell on the top row represents the per cent of those with no qualifications who trust the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland’s best interests ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’.

*Party political identification*⁹

2.14 Another common finding about political trust is that those who sympathise with the party in power at the time tend to be more trusting than supporters of opposition political parties. *SSA* findings clearly reflect this, with supporters of Labour and the Liberal Democrats (who formed the Executive at the time of the survey in 2006) more likely to express high levels of trust in the Scottish Executive on both measures than those who identified with other parties or those who had no party-political affiliation (Table 2).¹⁰ Similarly, the highest levels of trust in the UK government on both measures were apparent among Labour supporters. If trust in the Scottish Executive is, as this analysis suggests, strongly associated with political sympathy with the party of power, there may be a quite different pattern of trust in the Scottish Government in the 2007 *SSA* (fieldwork for which started shortly after the SNP took control of the Scottish Executive following the 2007 Scottish Parliament election).

Table 2 Trust in government BY party political identification, interest in politics and newspaper readership (cell %)

	Trust to act in Scotland's best interests 'Just about always'/'most of the time'		Trust to make fair decisions 'A great deal'/'quite a lot'		Sample size
	SE	UK	SE	UK	
Party political identification					
SNP	46	8	28	13	271
Lib Dem	61	16	38	27	142
Labour	58	31	40	32	532
Conservative	50	27	26	23	207
None	39	15	22	17	215
Interest in politics					
A great deal/quite a lot	56	25	39	33	440
Some	59	22	35	23	562
Not very much/none at all	41	17	23	16	592
Newspaper readership					
Tabloid	43	19	29	21	600
Broadsheet	58	23	37	28	317
None	56	22	32	22	670

⁹ NB the question on party political identification is not funded as part of the Office of Chief Researcher core module, but is part of the background classification data collected for *SSA*.

¹⁰ NB although bivariate (cross-tabulation) analysis suggests that Liberal Democrat identifiers are more likely than those who support the SNP to trust the Scottish Executive, multivariate analysis suggests this may not be significant after other factors are controlled for. Labour supporters, on the other hand, are significantly more likely than SNP identifiers to express high levels of trust, even after controlling for other factors. See Cleghorn, Ormston & Sharp, 2007, for details.

Interest in politics

2.15 Those who were more interested in politics in general were more likely than those with little or no interest to be trusting of both the Scottish Executive and the UK government (Table 2) with respect to trust to make fair decisions. For example, 39% of those with ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of interest in politics, compared with just 23% of those with ‘not very much’ or no interest at all, expressed a high level of trust in the Executive to make fair decisions. It is important to note, however, that the *direction* of this relationship between interest in politics and trust in government cannot be established from this analysis. While it seems plausible that mistrust of government could lead some people to feel less interested in politics, a lack of interest in or knowledge about politics may also predispose people to feel less trusting of government.

2.16 With respect to trust to act in Scotland’s best interests, a somewhat different pattern emerges. Interestingly, it is those who express a moderate level of interest in politics, rather than those with a ‘great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of interest who are most likely to be trusting of the Scottish Executive on this measure.¹¹ Perhaps those with some moderate interest in government and politics are slightly more accepting of ‘default’ values (like the idea that government acts in a country’s best interests) than are those with either very high or very low levels of interest.

Newspaper readership

2.17 In common with reports on the 2004 and 2005 *Scottish Social Attitudes* surveys (Bromley and Given, 2005 and Curtice, 2007), the 2006 results show that those who read broadsheet newspapers were more likely than tabloid readers to express high levels of trust in the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland’s best interests (Table 2). However, while a broadly similar pattern emerges in bivariate analysis of trust in the Scottish Executive to make fair decisions (whereby people’s response to the trust question is simply cross-tabulated by their newspaper readership), multivariate analysis¹² suggests that newspaper readership was not associated with this aspect of trust in government after other factors (such as education) are controlled for. Thus the 2006 survey provides at best limited evidence for the view that reading tabloid newspapers is associated with being less trusting. Moreover, as Bromley et al (2004) point out, it is not possible to tell from such analysis whether reading a tabloid newspaper actually makes people more cynical about politics or whether people read tabloid newspapers because they reflect their existing cynicism about politics (indeed, they provide some longitudinal evidence which suggests there may be little basis for the former view).

Social (or inter-personal) trust

2.18 Social capital theorists argue that social trust, or trust of other people in society, is strongly related to political trust. They argue for the existence of a ‘virtuous circle’,

¹¹ Multivariate analysis suggests that differences in the levels of trust in the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland’s best interests expressed by those with the highest and lowest levels of interest in politics are not significant after other factors are controlled for. See Cleghorn, Ormston & Sharp, 2007, for details.

¹² Where the relationship between different explanatory factors is controlled for. See footnote 7 and the *SSA* Core module technical report (Cleghorn, Ormston & Sharp, 2007).

whereby high levels of social trust promote good government and increase political trust, while at the same time political trust and good government help sustain social trust between citizens (see Newton, 2006 for a brief overview). However, some researchers have criticised this theory, arguing that while there is some evidence that countries with high levels of social capital also tend to have high levels of political trust, there is little evidence to suggest individuals who evince more social trust are particularly more likely to express trust in political institutions (*ibid*).

2.19 The 2006 *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey included a long-standing and commonly used question designed to measure general social (or inter-personal) trust:

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

Overall, around 1 in 2 people (51%) thought that 'Most people can be trusted', whilst 44% felt that 'You can't be too careful'.

2.20 Levels of social trust were in fact significantly related to trust in the Scottish Executive on both measures ('best interests' and 'fair decisions'). For example, 57% of those who said 'most people can be trusted' trusted the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland's best interests 'just about always' or 'most of the time', compared with just 45% of those who said you 'can't be too careful dealing with people' (Table 3). However, criticisms of the social capital theory still hold true to the extent that while there was some relationship between social and political trust, it was far from perfect – there were many people who trusted each other, but did not trust the government (and vice-versa).

Table 3 Trust in government BY inter-personal trust (column %)

	Trust to act in Scotland's best interests 'Just about always'/'most of the time'		Trust to make fair decisions 'A great deal'/'quite a lot'		Sample size
	SE	UK	SE	UK	
	%	%	%	%	
Most people can be trusted	57	24	36	27	831
Can't be too careful dealing with people	45	18	27	18	702

Who trusts the Scottish Executive more than the UK government?

2.21 As discussed above, levels of trust in the Scottish Executive in 2006 were found to exceed those in the UK government on both measures included in *Scottish Social Attitudes*. More detailed analysis of individual responses to each question reveals that, overall, 47% of people trusted the Scottish Executive more than the UK government to act in Scotland's best interests, while 23% trusted the Scottish Executive more than Westminster to make fair decisions. In contrast, very few people gave responses which

indicated higher levels of trust in the UK government - just 4% on the ‘best interests’ measure and 8% on the ‘fair decisions’ measure.

2.22 These findings raise the question of whether trust in the Scottish Executive was higher than trust in the UK government across *all* groups in Scotland, or whether some people were particularly likely to express much higher levels of trust in one institution compared with the other. Various possibilities present themselves here:

- First, there may be demographic differences. Perhaps those who are more highly educated are relatively more likely to trust the Scottish Executive, as well as being more likely to trust government in general.
- Second, national and political identity may be relevant. It may be that those who support the SNP are relatively more trusting of the Scottish Executive when compared with the UK government (reflecting a preference for being governed solely from Scotland), while those who identify as Scottish rather than British may be relatively more trusting of Scottish institutions.
- Third, relative trust in the Scottish Executive and UK government may be related to attitudes to devolution, both in *principle* and in *practice*. It may be that those who are more supportive of Scotland having its own parliament are relatively more trusting in the devolved government compared with UK political institutions. Further, political trust may be related to the perceived performance of institutions. If this is the case, one would expect to find that those who believe the Scottish institutions are performing their democratic functions effectively – for example, by listening to people’s views and giving ordinary people more say in how Scotland is run – will be relatively more likely to trust in those institutions.

2.23 Curtice (2007) explored some of these theories with respect to the ‘best interests’ measure of trust in the 2005 *SSA* report on this topic. Here, we build on this analysis and add findings from the new question about trust to make fair decisions. Multivariate analysis¹³ was used to identify those who expressed higher levels of trust in the Scottish Executive than the UK government on each of these measures. The analysis initially looked at demographic factors, before incorporating general political attitudes and factors like newspaper readership and national identity, and finally adding in constitutional preference and factors associated with judgements about the performance of the Scottish Parliament and Executive. By building the analysis in these stages, it is possible to see how much different factors add to the ability to explain higher levels of trust in the Scottish Executive compared with the UK government. The tables below include findings for both measures of trust (‘best interests’ and ‘fair decisions’), while the text identifies those factors found to be significant for each in multivariate analysis.

Demographic factors

2.24 As mentioned above, those educated to a higher level tended to be more trusting of both the Scottish Executive and UK government. Table 4 demonstrates that they were also relatively more likely to express higher levels of trust in the Scottish Executive

¹³ Again, see footnote 7 and the *SSA* Core module technical report (Cleghorn, Ormston & Sharp, 2007).

compared with the UK government. This was particularly the case with respect to trust to act in Scotland's best interests – 55% of those qualified to degree or higher education level compared with 35% of those with no qualifications trusted the Scottish Executive more than the UK government on this measure.¹⁴ Those living in remote rural areas were also more likely than those in large urban areas to express relatively higher levels of trust in the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland's best interests (60% compared with 45%).¹⁵

2.25 With respect to trust to make fair decisions, men were somewhat more likely than women to trust the Scottish Executive more than the UK government¹⁶. As Curtice (2007) notes, previous studies have shown that younger people tend to be more inclined than older people to trust politicians. The findings in this report suggest they are also relatively more likely to trust devolved political institutions – in 2006, 31% of 18-24 year-olds compared with 19% of those aged 65 or older trusted the Scottish Executive more than the UK government to make fair decisions.

Table 4 Percentage who trust the Scottish Executive more than the UK government BY demographic factors (cell %)

	To act in Scotland's best interests	To make fair decisions	Sample size
Highest qualification			
None	35	19	394
Degree/HE	55	26	479
Urban-rural			
Large urban	45	22	508
Remote rural	60	30	192
Age			
18-24	49	31	108
65+	39	19	396
Sex			
Male	48	26	701
Female	46	21	893

Newspaper readership, national identity and political attitudes

2.26 It was found that those who read tabloid newspapers were *less* likely than broadsheet readers to trust the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland's best interests. Table 5 shows that they were also relatively less likely than both broadsheet readers and those who do not read any paper to trust the Scottish Executive compared with the UK government in this respect.

¹⁴ Although a similar pattern can be seen with respect to trust to make fair decisions, the difference is smaller and was not significant in multivariate analysis after other factors were taken into account.

¹⁵ Again, although a similar pattern can be seen with respect to trust to make fair decisions, urbanity/rurality was not significant after other factors were controlled for in multivariate analysis.

¹⁶ NB sex was significantly associated with trust to make fair decisions in the initial multivariate model, which included demographic factors (like sex, age, occupational sector and education) only. However, it was not significant once other factors, like party identification and constitutional preference, were also taken into account. This suggests that differences in trust between men and women may in part reflect gender differences in political attitudes more generally.

2.27 Nationalism with both a small and a capital ‘n’ (that is, identifying as Scottish and support for the Scottish National Party) also seems to be associated with having greater trust in the Scottish Executive compared with the UK government. Table 5 shows that people who described themselves as Scottish were more likely than those who described themselves as British to express relatively higher levels of trust in the Scottish Executive than the UK government to act in Scotland’s best interests (49% and 42% respectively). Those who identified with the SNP were also relatively more likely than Labour and Conservative identifiers and those with no party affiliation to trust the Scottish Executive more than the UK government on both measures. However, this finding primarily reflects very low levels of trust of the UK government among SNP identifiers (see Table 2, above), given that in fact at the time of the 2006 survey it was Labour and Liberal Democrats who were most likely to express high levels of trust in the Scottish Executive.

2.28 Finally, people who said they had a great deal or quite a lot of interest in politics were more likely than those with little or no interest in politics to express relatively higher levels of trust in the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland’s best interests (51% and 39% respectively). However, interest in politics made no difference to relative levels of trust in the Scottish Executive and UK government to make fair decisions.

Table 5 Percentage who trust the Scottish Executive more than the UK government BY national identity, newspaper readership and general political attitudes (cell %)

	To act in Scotland’s best interests	To make fair decisions	Sample size
National identity			
Scottish	49	25	1211
British	42	17	247
Other	40	20	130
Newspaper readership			
Tabloid	41	21	600
Broadsheet	51	23	317
None	51	26	670
Party political identification			
SNP	61	34	271
Lib Dem	58	27	142
Labour	42	20	532
Conservative	45	16	207
None	37	23	215
Interest in politics			
A great deal/quite a lot	51	24	440
Some	52	25	562
Not very much/none at all	39	22	592

Attitudes to devolution in principle and practice

2.29 While relative trust in the Scottish Executive compared with the UK government varied between demographic groups and by factors like newspaper readership and party political identification, analysis suggests that it is even more closely associated with other

attitudes towards devolution. First, those who supported having a Scottish Parliament were more likely than those who would prefer Scotland to be governed solely from Westminster to express relatively higher trust in the Scottish Executive than the UK government (Table 6). With respect to working in Scotland's best interests, it made little difference whether people would prefer that parliament to exist within the UK or to be independent of it – 49% of those in favour of devolution and 55% who favoured independence expressed higher levels of trust in the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland's best interests, compared with just 24% of those who preferred Westminster rule. However, when it comes to making fair decisions, interestingly it was those who supported independence who trusted the Scottish Executive more than the UK government (31%, compared with 22% of those in favour of devolution and 14% in favour of Westminster rule). This appears to be a result of the fact that while those who supported devolution were less likely to trust the UK government than the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland's best interests, they were not much less likely to trust Westminster compared with the Scottish Executive to make fair decisions. Supporters of independence, on the other hand, were much less trusting of the UK government than the Scottish Executive on both measures. Whatever the precise reasons for this, these findings clearly indicate the close relationship between support for having some form of government in Scotland (whether devolved or independent) and trust in Scottish institutions of government.

2.30 Second, judgements about the effectiveness of the Scottish institutions in delivering on promises to bring government closer to the people of Scotland also appear to be strongly related to both measures of trust. For example, 32% of those who believed the Scottish Executive was giving ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed, compared with just 19% of those who thought it was making no difference or giving them less say, expressed greater trust in the Scottish Executive than the UK government to make fair decisions (Table 6). Similar findings were apparent with respect to the belief that the Scottish Executive was good at listening to people's views before it takes decisions. Again, the direction of these relationships is not clear-cut - high levels of trust could either precede, or follow on from positive perceptions of devolution in practice. However, at an intuitive level it seems plausible that the more people believe the Scottish Executive listens to them and gives ordinary people a say, the more likely they are to trust that any decisions it then makes will be fair.

2.31 Finally, those with higher levels of awareness of Scottish Executive activities¹⁷ were more likely than those who had heard little or nothing about what the Scottish Executive had done in the previous 12 months to trust the Scottish Executive more than the UK government on both measures. A similar finding is that those who knew more about devolution (as measured by a knowledge 'quiz'¹⁸) were more likely to trust the Scottish Executive more than the UK government to act in Scotland's best interests. Questions of causal 'direction' are again relevant – are those who are relatively more trusting of the Scottish Executive therefore more likely to want to find out more about it, or are people more trusting as a result of hearing about the Scottish Executive's work?

¹⁷ As measured by a question which asks how much respondents have seen or heard about the work of the Scottish Executive over the last 12 months.

¹⁸ The quiz is presented as a series of statements, covering both responsibilities (who makes decisions about health spending and levels of unemployment benefits in Scotland) and the mechanics of government in Scotland (how many MSPs there are and whether or not the Scottish Executive is just another name for the Scottish Parliament). Respondents are asked to say whether they think each statement is true or false.

However, these results suggest that if levels of knowledge about government in Scotland and awareness of Scottish Executive activities increase, there might also be a corresponding increase in levels of trust.

Table 6 Percentage who trust the Scottish Executive more than the UK government BY constitutional preference and attitudes to devolution in practice (cell %)

	To act in Scotland's best interests	To make fair decisions	Sample size
Constitutional preference			
Westminster rule	24	14	154
Devolution	49	22	852
Independence	55	31	478
Having a Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people ...			
... More say in how Scotland is governed	59	32	574
... Less say or makes no difference	41	19	959
How good Scottish Executive is at listening to people's views			
Very/quite good	56	33	562
Not very/not at all good	43	19	842
Awareness of Scottish Executive activities			
Great deal/quite a lot	53	31	563
Some	52	23	488
Not much/nothing at all	36	17	526
Knowledge of devolution*			
Low	36	19	268
Medium	50	24	844
High	58	28	270

*Based on knowledge quiz scores; high = 3 or 4 items correct, medium = 1 or 2 items, low = 0 items correct.

3. AWARENESS, ENGAGEMENT AND PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCE

3.1 Trust is one key measure of government success in engaging with the public. However, as discussed in the introduction to this report, there are other aspects against which the success of government in engaging with the public can be measured. These include:

- the extent to which people are aware of government activities (which, while a fairly low-level measure of engagement, is arguably important in encouraging any further public participation), and
- perceptions of the extent to which the public can influence policy making, including beliefs about how good government is at listening to the public's views before making decisions and beliefs about whether devolution gives ordinary people a say in how the country is run.

3.2 The next section starts by discussing trends for each of these aspects of engagement comparing views about the UK government and the Scottish Executive. After discussing people’s perceptions of how much influence the *public* has over decision-making in Scotland, it goes on to discuss perceptions of which *institutions* have the most influence over how Scotland is run – the Scottish Executive, the UK government, Local Councils or the European Union. Finally, the attitudes of different groups of people in Scotland are compared to explore whether some are more likely than others to hold positive views about the success of the devolved institutions in engaging with and bringing power closer to the people of Scotland.

How aware are people of Scottish Executive activities?

3.3 Questions about how much people have seen or heard about Scottish Executive and UK government activities over the previous year have been asked annually in the *SSA* since 2004. People are asked to say whether they have heard a great deal, quite a lot, some, not very much, or nothing at all.

3.4 Just over a third (35%) of people in 2006 had heard ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ about the work of the Scottish Executive in the previous 12 months. The corresponding figures for 2004 and 2005 were 29% and 30% so this represents an increase in one year of 5 percentage points. Whilst it is too early to be certain, this could suggest the start of a trend towards increasing awareness of Scottish Executive activities.

3.5 At the same time, awareness of UK government activities has also increased since 2004, but in contrast most of the growth occurred between 2004 and 2005, with only a slight change between 2005 and 2006 (from 39% to 41%). Although people are generally more likely to have heard a lot about UK government activities than they are to have heard a lot about Scottish Executive activities, the gap between these proportions has narrowed from 9 percentage points in 2005 to 6 percentage points in 2006.

3.6 However, there remains a substantial proportion of people in Scotland who have heard very little about the work of either the Scottish Executive or the UK government – in 2006 around a third said they had heard ‘not very much’ or ‘nothing at all’ about either. Evidently, attracting public awareness of the work of government remains a big challenge for both Scottish and UK institutions.

Table 7 How much have people heard about the activities of the Scottish Executive and UK government? (2004 to 2006, column %)

	Scottish Executive			UK government		
	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006
	%	%	%	%	%	%
A great deal/a lot	29	30	35	34	39	41
Some	30	28	31	29	26	26
Not much/nothing at all	40	40	33	36	34	32
Don’t know	1	1	1	-	2	1
<i>Base</i>	<i>1637</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1594</i>	<i>1637</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1594</i>

Bases = all respondents.

Note: not all columns may add to exactly 100% due to rounding.

How good is the Scottish Executive at listening to peoples views?

3.7 Questions on how good the Scottish Executive and – for comparative purposes – the UK government are at listening to people’s views have been asked in the *SSA* since 2004. Just over a third (36%) of people in 2006 thought the Scottish Executive was either ‘very’ or ‘quite good’ at listening to people’s views, an increase from 32% in 2004 (Table 8). Although this figure compares favourably with the 18% who thought the UK government was ‘very’ or ‘quite good’ at listening to people’s views, nevertheless there remained many people who were sceptical that the Scottish Executive took their views on board in decision-making. In 2006, more than half (53%) still thought the Scottish Executive was either ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ good at listening to people’s views, while three quarters (75%) said the same about the UK government.

Table 8 How good is the Scottish Executive and the UK government at listening to peoples views before it takes decisions? (2004 to 2006, column %)

	Scottish Executive			UK government		
	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very or quite good	32	33	36	15	16	18
Not very or not at all good	58	54	53	79	77	75
Don’t know	10	13	11	6	7	7
<i>Base</i>	<i>1637</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1594</i>	<i>1637</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1594</i>

Bases = all respondents.

Note: not all columns may add to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Does devolution give ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed?

3.8 In line with one of the founding principles of devolution of a more open and responsive policy making process, since 2001 the *SSA* has also asked if having a Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed, less say, or making no difference. In 2006, only a small proportion (5%) of people thought that devolution has given them less say in how Scotland is governed (Table 9). However, the majority (55%) still felt that their ability to influence government had not changed as a result of having a Scottish Parliament. Just over a third (37%) felt that devolution was giving people more say, a figure which (although it has fluctuated) has not changed significantly since 2001.

Table 9 Does having a Scottish Parliament give ordinary people more say in how Scotland is governed? (2001 to 2006, column %)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More say	38	31	38	31	37	37
Less say	4	4	4	6	5	5
Making no difference	56	62	54	60	55	55
Don't know	2	3	3	3	4	4
<i>Base</i>	<i>1605</i>	<i>1665</i>	<i>1508</i>	<i>1637</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1594</i>

Bases = all respondents.

Note: not all columns may add to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Who is most influential in running the country?

3.9 Since 1999,¹⁹ SSA has included questions on which institution *has* and which *ought to have* most influence in running Scotland. Prior to 2003, the question asked which of the UK government, the Scottish Parliament, Local Councils or the European Union people thought had and ought to have most power. However, following an experiment in 2004,²⁰ the 'Scottish Parliament' option was revised to 'Scottish Executive', in recognition of the fact that the Executive is the more appropriate comparator for the UK government.²¹

3.10 Since 2000 there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of people who think the Scottish Parliament/Executive *has* most influence in running the country, from 13% in 2000 to 24% in 2006 (Figure 1). By contrast, the proportion who think the UK government is the most influential body has decreased markedly from 66% in 2000 to 38% in 2006. Thus although people were still more likely to think that the UK government rather than the Scottish Executive has most influence over Scotland, figure 3 highlights that, by 2006, the gap between the two had narrowed considerably. The most recent narrowing of this gap is primarily due to a particularly steep drop from 2005 to 2006 in the proportion who think the UK government has most influence. Little change occurred between 2005 and 2006 in the proportion thinking that the Scottish Executive is most influential (up from 23% in 2005 to 24% in 2006). Rather, a new trend is emerging whereby the proportion thinking that local councils or the European Union have most influence appears to be growing (Figure 3 and Annex Table A.1).

3.11 Although people were still relatively less likely to think that either local councils or the EU have most influence, almost a fifth (18%) of people in 2006 thought that local councils were most influential. Analysis was conducted to explore which groups were most likely to hold this view (see Annex table A.3). Interestingly, it was many of the groups often considered hard to engage with politics - younger people, people with lower

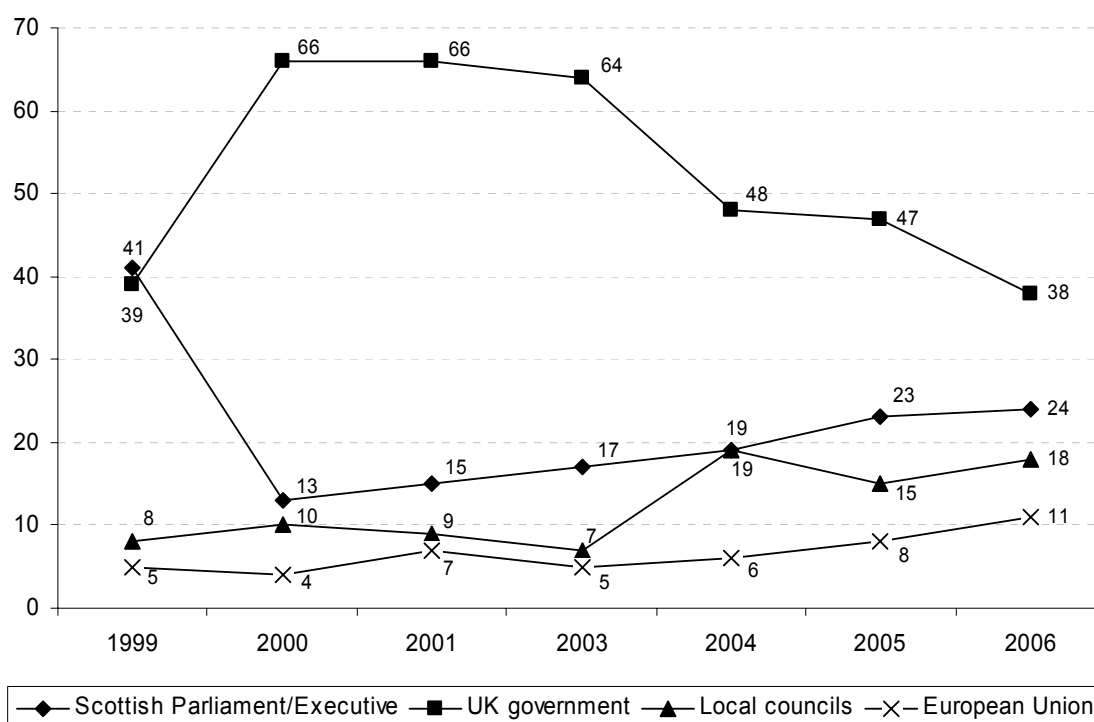
¹⁹ With the exception of 2002.

²⁰ Where half the sample were asked about the Scottish Executive and half about the Scottish Parliament.

²¹ The question wording also changed from asking people to think prospectively about the influence the parliament *would* have in 1999 ('When the new Parliament starts work, which of the following do you think will have most influence over the way Scotland is run?'), to its current wording from 2000 onwards ('Which of the following do you think has most influence over the way Scotland is run?').

levels of educational qualifications, people living in more deprived areas, people who were generally less interested in politics and people who were less aware of the work of the Scottish Executive – who were particularly likely to think that local councils had most influence. There also appears to be a difference by political party identification, with supporters of the Conservative party more likely than SNP supporters to consider local councils most influential. As with any emerging trend, it will be interesting to watch how views change in the coming years. These recent changes may represent a short-term ‘blip’ in the data and hold no long-term significance, or they may herald something more novel - a genuine shift in opinion towards different models of either local or European governance.

Figure 1 Perceptions of who *has* most influence over the way Scotland is run (1999-2006)



Base = all respondents

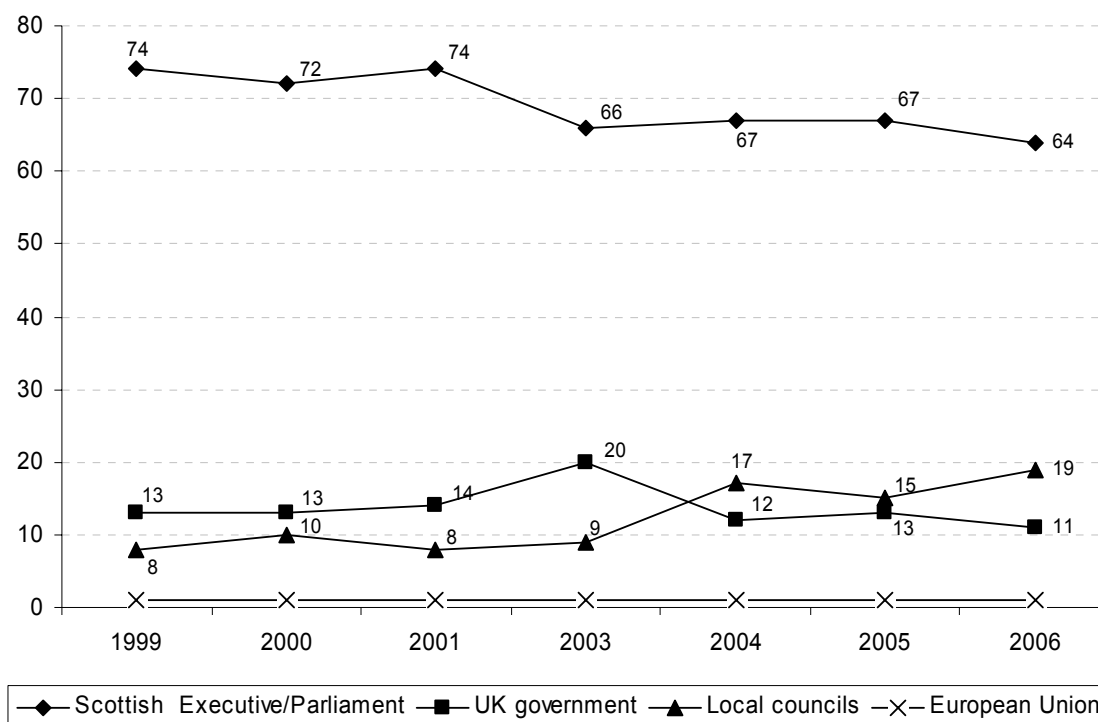
Sample size: 1999 = 1,482, 2000 = 1,663, 2001 = 1,605, 2003 = 1,508, 2004 = 1,637, 2005 = 1,549, 2006 = 1,594

3.12 The proportion who think the Scottish Parliament/Executive *ought to have* most influence over how Scotland is run has remained at around two thirds since 1999 (Figure 2).²² A much lower proportion of people think the UK government ought to have most influence (between 11% and 13% since 2004). In line with recent changes in the perception of local councils’ influence noted above, there also appears to have been a gradual increase in the proportion who think that Councils *ought to have* most influence

²² Questions about trust and influence both now ask about the Scottish Executive rather than the Scottish Parliament. However, prior to 2004, this question asked about the Scottish Parliament. In response to criticisms that the two questions were not comparing alike institutions, a split sample experiment was undertaken in which half the sample were asked about the Scottish Parliament and half about the Scottish Executive. The experiment concluded that in practice it makes little difference which institution is asked about – people’s response were broadly the same.

(from 10% in 2000 to 19% in 2006). While this pattern has been evident to some extent since 2004, the 2006 data suggest that people in Scotland may now be more likely to think that councils rather than the UK government should have most influence over how the country is run (19%, compared with 11% - Figure 4 and Annex table A.2).

Figure 2 Perceptions of who *ought* to have most influence over the way Scotland is run (1999-2006)



Base = all respondents

Sample size: 1999 = 1,482, 2000 = 1,663, 2001 = 1,605, 2003 = 1,508, 2004 = 1,637, 2005 = 1,549, 2006 = 1,594

How do perceptions of influence and engagement vary?

3.13 Are some groups of the population more aware of Scottish Executive activities than others? Do perceptions about the openness of the devolved institutions vary across different groups of the population? And are some people more likely to think the Scottish Executive has most influence over how Scotland is run? Multivariate analysis was used to explore whether particular groups of the population were more likely to report positive perceptions on the various measures of engagement and influence discussed above.²³

3.14 As with trust, demographic factors, like sex, age and education, are considered first. General political attitudes (party political identification and interest in politics) and newspaper readership are then examined, all of which have been associated with differing attitudes to the Scottish Executive in previous waves of *SSA*. Finally, the relationships *between* various attitudes to devolution in principle and practice are explored. Are those who are more aware of Scottish Executive activities more likely to have favourable views

²³ Again, see footnote 7 and the *SSA* Core module technical report (Cleghorn, Ormston & Sharp, 2007). Unless otherwise stated, only those variables found to be significant in this multivariate analysis are discussed in the text.

about its success in engaging the public? Are those who believe the Scottish Executive has most influence over how Scotland is run correspondingly more likely to think it is giving ordinary people more say? And are those who support having a Scottish Parliament in principle more likely than those who would prefer Westminster rule to hold positive views about the influence and performance of devolved government in practice?

Sex and age

3.15 As in previous years of *SSA*, men were more likely than women to say they had heard ‘a great deal/a lot’ about the recent work of the Scottish Executive (38% and 32% respectively). This reflects the long-standing finding that women tend to indicate lower levels of interest than men in politics. However, equivalent figures from the 2005 *SSA* were 38% and 23% (Given & Ormston, 2005), suggesting that the gap in awareness between men and women may be decreasing.

3.16 In spite of indicating lower levels of awareness of devolved government activities, women were *more* likely than men to think the Scottish Executive has most influence in running the country (27% of women compared with 21% of men). However, they were no more or less likely than men to think devolution had given ordinary people more say or that the Scottish Executive was good at listening to people’s views before taking decisions (Table 10).

3.17 Older age groups were generally more likely to have heard ‘a great deal’ or ‘a lot’ about the work of the Scottish Executive (around 40% of those aged over 45 compared with 20% of 18 to 24 year olds). In contrast, when it comes to perceptions of how effective devolution is at giving people more say, younger people were the most positive - 49% of 18 to 24 year olds thought that devolution was giving ordinary people more say, compared with between 32% and 37% of older age groups (Table 10).

Education, occupational sector and measures of affluence

3.18 The first section of this report showed that those who are educated to a higher level tend to be more trusting of government. A similar relationship between education and holding positive views of government is found here: those with higher levels of education were generally more likely to have positive perceptions across all measures. For example, 46% of those with a degree or Higher Education qualification thought the Scottish Executive was good at listening to people’s views, compared with 28% of those with no qualifications (Table 10).

3.19 People working in the public sector were more likely to be aware of the work of the Scottish Executive - for example, 44% of public sector workers had heard ‘a great deal/quite a lot’ about the activities of the Scottish Executive compared with 30% of private sector workers. This is not surprising, since people in public sector jobs might be expected to hear more about government activities through their work (Table 10).

3.20 People living in more affluent areas of Scotland, as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)²⁴, were generally more aware of the work of the Scottish Executive (43% compared with 27% of those living in the most deprived areas - Table 10). They were also more likely than those in more deprived areas to think the Scottish Executive was good at listening to people's views, that having a Scottish Parliament has given ordinary people more say or that the Scottish Executive has most influence over how Scotland is run. However, multivariate analysis suggests that apart from awareness, these differences in perceptions of government between people living in affluent and deprived areas are not significant once other factors (in particular education) are taken into account.

Area

3.21 Once other factors are controlled for, there are few significant differences in perceptions of government between people living in urban and rural areas. The only exception is that those living in 'Accessible small towns' were less likely to say the Scottish Executive was good at listening to people (24%, compared with 40% of those living in 'Large Urban' areas - Table 10).

²⁴ For further details, see <http://www.scottishexecutive.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SIMD/Overview>. The areas SSA respondents lived in were matched to SIMD quintiles, with 1 being the least deprived and 5 being the most deprived.

Table 10 Levels of ‘engagement’ and perceptions of influence, by demographic and social factors (cell %)

	Have heard a great deal/quite a lot about SE ²⁵ activities	Believe the SE has most influence over running Scotland	Believe the SE is (very/quite) good at listening to people’s views	Believe devolution is giving people more say in how Scotland is governed	Sample size
Sex					
Men	38	21	35	36	701
Women	32	27	36	37	893
Age					
18-24	20	17	37	49	108
25-39	29	22	40	35	380
40-64	39	25	34	37	707
65 and over	41	27	34	32	396
Education					
None	26	21	28	24	394
Standard/GCSE	29	20	31	35	432
Highers/A levels	32	25	36	42	280
Degree/HE	48	29	46	44	479
Occupational sector					
Private sector	30	20	32	35	765
Public sector	44	29	41	38	537
SIMD					
Most deprived	27	22	29	32	307
Least deprived	43	31	40	41	319
Area					
Large urban	35	26	40	39	508
Other urban	35	23	32	37	375
Accessible small towns	34	24	24	28	187
Remote small towns	30	20	43	35	113
Accessible rural	34	21	35	36	219
Remote rural	37	23	43	39	192

Newspaper readership, interest in politics, and political party identification

3.22 Just as levels of trust in the Scottish Executive appeared to be lower among tabloid compared with broadsheet readers, broadsheet readers were also more positive than tabloid readers across other measures of engagement and perceptions of influence, as shown in Table 11. However, once other factors are controlled for, it is particularly in relation to the impact of devolution in giving ordinary people more say where broadsheet readers stand out - 41% of broadsheet readers said this, compared with just 31% of tabloid readers.

²⁵ ‘SE’ is used as an abbreviation for ‘Scottish Executive’ in this and the following tables.

3.23 Similarly, it was shown earlier that people with a greater level of interest in politics were more likely to express trust in both the Scottish Executive and UK government. They were also much more likely to report high levels of awareness of the work of the Scottish Executive - 58% of those with a high level of interest in politics had heard a great deal or quite a lot about the Scottish Executive in the previous 12 months, compared with only 20% of those with little or no interest (Table 11).

3.24 Again, it is worth bearing in mind here that the direction of these relationships is not always obvious. Does coverage of devolved government in broadsheet newspapers lead readers to believe the Scottish Executive gives people more say, or is it simply that those who are predisposed to be more sympathetic to the impact of devolution are more likely to read these papers? Are people more interested in politics because they have heard more about Scottish Executive activities or (perhaps more likely) are those who are already more interested in politics more likely to pay attention to what the government is doing?

3.25 Finally, just as supporters of the parties in power at the time of the 2006 survey were more likely to express trust in the Scottish Executive, they were also more likely to say the Scottish Executive has most influence in running the country (about 30% of both Liberal Democrat and Labour supporters, compared with 18% of SNP supporters). Labour supporters were also more likely to think that the Scottish Executive was good at listening to people's views (43% compared with 32% of SNP supporters). Conservative party supporters (who are less likely than supporters of other parties to be supportive of devolution in principle) were less likely to say that devolution gives people more say in how Scotland is governed (24%, compared with between 36% and 48% of other parties' supporters) (Table 11). As noted above, it will be interesting to compare these patterns with responses to the 2007 survey, which will be the first year of *SSA* data collected during an SNP administration.

Table 11 Levels of ‘engagement’ and perceptions of influence, by newspaper readership, interest in politics, and party identification (cell %)

	Have heard a great deal/quite a lot about SE activities	Believe the SE has most influence over running Scotland	Believe the SE is (very/quite) good at listening to people’s views	Believe devolution is giving people more say in how Scotland is governed	Sample size
Newspaper readership					
Tabloid	33	20	30	31	600
Broadsheet	47	27	37	41	317
None	31	26	41	40	670
Interest in politics					
Not very much/none at	20	20	30	30	592
Some	33	26	39	41	562
A great deal/quite a lot	58	28	40	39	440
Party identification					
SNP	32	18	32	36	271
Liberal Democrat	42	30	46	48	142
Labour	40	28	43	44	532
Conservative	38	21	27	24	207
None	18	16	28	30	215

Attitudes to devolution in principle and practice

3.26 We have already observed the close relationship between relative levels of trust in the Scottish Executive and attitudes to devolved government in principle and practice (Table 6, above). Table 12 illustrates similar associations between support for devolution in principle, views about the Scottish Executive’s influence, levels of awareness of their activities and beliefs about their success in giving the Scottish public more say in decision-making. Put simply, those who were more positive about devolution and the Scottish Executive on one of these measures were often (though clearly not always) more likely to be more positive on the others. For example:

- Those who had heard ‘a great deal/quite a lot’ about the work of the Executive were more likely than those who had heard little, to think that the Executive was good at listening to people’s views (47% compared with 21%), and that devolution has given ordinary people greater say (48% compared with 26%). Although it is not always clear what people are referring to when they say they are aware of the government’s work (awareness could, for example, include awareness of negative stories about the government), it would seem likely in this context that ‘awareness’ is related to positive rather than negative aspects of the Scottish Executive’s work.
- Those who thought the Scottish Executive had the *most influence* in running the country were more likely to be aware of the Executive’s work, to think the Executive was good at listening, and to think that devolution has given people more say.

- Constitutional preference was related to perceptions of influence both in terms of running the country and whether the public has much say over policy. Supporters of devolution were more likely than those who favour Westminster rule to think the Scottish Executive had most influence in running the country (28% and 13% respectively). As might be expected, those in favour of Westminster rule were also significantly *less* likely than those supporting either devolution or independence to think that devolution was giving people more say in how Scotland is governed (11%, 43% and 36% respectively).

3.27 Questions about ‘causality’ have been discussed several times in this report. These equally apply to the nature of the relationships between the various attitudes discussed above. For example, it is not possible to say whether believing the Scottish Executive has most influence over how Scotland is run encourages people to pay more attention to its activities, or whether becoming more aware of what the Scottish Executive does leads people to view it as more influential. However, although the direction of these relationships remains open to debate, these findings suggests that improvements in public perceptions of Scottish government and devolution in one area may well be accompanied by improvements in others.

Table 12 Levels of ‘engagement’ and perceptions of influence, by attitudes to devolution (cell %)

	Have heard a great deal/quite a lot about SE activities	Believe the SE has most influence over running Scotland	Believe the SE is (very/quite) good at listening to people’s views	Believe devolution is giving people more say in how Scotland is governed	Sample size
Awareness of Scottish Executive activities					
Not much/nothing at all	n/a	15	21	26	526
Some	n/a	24	39	37	488
Great deal/quite a lot	n/a	32	47	48	563
Who has most influence					
UK government	36	n/a	32	33	592
Scottish Executive	47	n/a	52	53	384
Local Councils	26	n/a	34	36	281
EU	34	n/a	26	24	188
Trust in the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland’s best interest					
Almost never	23	11	4	9	130
Some of the time	29	17	20	19	612
Always/most of the time	42	31	54	55	803
Having a Scottish Parliament is giving ordinary people ...					
....More say in how Scotland is governed	45	35	55	n/a	574
....Less say or makes no difference	29	17	24	n/a	959
Constitutional preference					
Westminster rule	35	13	22	11	154
Devolution	39	28	40	43	852
Independence	33	23	35	36	478

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 This report has discussed public perceptions of government in relation to a number of measures, all of which can be used to help assess the extent to which the devolved institutions have succeeded in their aim of engaging more effectively with the people of Scotland. Trend data over a number of years has also allowed us to explore changes over time in attitudes and perceptions related to this topic.

4.2 A number of trends suggest that devolution is having some success in engaging with the public. In 2006, more people trusted the Scottish Executive to act in Scotland’s best interests than trusted the UK government, a finding that has been consistent since the survey began. There are indications that more people are becoming aware of the

government's work, and that increasing numbers now think the Scottish Executive has most influence in running the country (although in 2006 this was still outweighed by the proportion who thought the UK most influential). There has also been a gradual increase in the proportion who think the Scottish Executive is good at listening to people's views, although in 2006 this remained a minority viewpoint.

4.3 However, some areas have seen little change, indicating that there is still work to do. In 2006 there remained a substantial minority of people who had heard little about the work of the Scottish Executive (though they were almost equally unaware of the UK government's work). Around half of people in Scotland were yet to be convinced that the Scottish Executive is good at listening to people's views. And, although it is encouraging that very few people thought devolution was giving people less say in how the country is governed, in 2006 half still said that it is making little difference in this respect.

4.4 Some of these measures have fluctuated upwards and downwards from year to year. For example, increases in the proportion of people who trust the Scottish Executive were observed in 2001, 2003 and - to a lesser extent - in 2005. These peaks occur in years when either a UK general or Scottish Parliament election is taking place. Although levels of trust in the Scottish Executive have been more stable in recent years it will be interesting to see how the 2007 Holyrood election impacts on these trends.

4.5 As well as looking at trends over time, the report explored whether certain groups of the population were more likely to report positive perceptions on these engagement and influence measures. It was clear that some groups were more likely than others to perceive the devolved institutions as open and engaging.

4.6 Men continued to report higher levels of awareness of government work than women. However, the gap between men and women may be narrowing, as a result of an increasing awareness among women. Older people continued to report higher levels of awareness than younger people, a finding consistent with previous *SSA* reports. However, it was younger people who appeared to be more likely both to trust government and to think that devolution was giving people a greater say.

4.7 Party political affiliation was strongly related to perceptions of government, with those who identified with the parties in power at the time of the 2006 survey more likely to express high levels of trust in the Scottish Executive and to view it as influential and good at listening. The 2007 survey results will be particularly interesting in this respect, since they will provide the first indication of whether differences in attitudes to the Executive along party lines change under the new SNP administration.

4.8 The groups who were generally more likely to hold positive perceptions of the engagement and influence potential devolution offers also tended to have more favourable attitudes to devolution and the devolved institutions more generally. They were more likely to be interested in politics and to read a broadsheet newspaper, as well as being more aware of the work of the Scottish Executive. They were also generally more likely to have achieved higher levels of education.

4.9 In conclusion then, these latest findings from the *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey suggest that while the years since devolution have seen some small but significant steps towards realising the aspirations of the architects of devolution for a system of

government that would win the trust of the Scottish people and engage them more fully in decision-making, much work remains to be done. In particular, that education consistently emerges as an important factor across all of the measures suggests the need to consider ways in which to engage with people who have fewer or no qualifications, and who may be less interested in politics in general.

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ANNEX A – DETAILED TABLES

Table A.1 Who has most influence over the way Scotland is run? (1999 to 2006, column %)

	1999	2000	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Scottish Parliament/ Executive	41	13	15	17	19	23	24
UK government	39	66	66	64	48	47	38
Local councils	8	10	9	7	19	15	18
European Union	5	4	7	5	6	8	11
Don't know	7	7	4	6	7	7	9
<i>Base</i>	<i>1482</i>	<i>1663</i>	<i>1605</i>	<i>1508</i>	<i>1637</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1594</i>

1999: When the new parliament starts work, which of the following do you think *will* have most influence over the way Scotland is run. Note answer codes refer to Scottish Parliament.

2000 to 2003: Which of the following do you think *has* most influence over the way Scotland is run. Note answer codes refer to Scottish Parliament.

2004: Which of the following do you think *has* most influence over the way Scotland is run. Note answer codes refer to Scottish Parliament in half the sample and Scottish Executive in the other half. No difference in results was found.

2005 to 2006: Which of the following do you think *has* most influence over the way Scotland is run. Note answer codes refer to Scottish Executive.

Table A.2 Who ought to have most influence over the way Scotland is run? (1999 to 2006, column %)

	1999	2000	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Scottish Parliament/ Executive	74	72	74	66	67	67	64
UK government	13	13	14	20	12	13	11
Local councils	8	10	8	9	17	15	19
European Union	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Don't know	4	5	2	4	3	4	4
<i>Base</i>	<i>1482</i>	<i>1663</i>	<i>1605</i>	<i>1508</i>	<i>1637</i>	<i>1549</i>	<i>1594</i>

From 1999 to 2003: Answer codes used Scottish Parliament

From 2004 onwards answer codes used Scottish Executive

Table A.3 % who perceive local councils as having most influence over the way Scotland is run, by demographic and attitudinal factors (cell %)

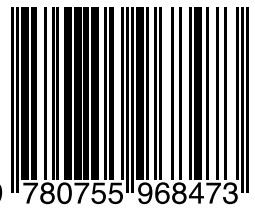
	Local councils have most influence	<i>Sample size</i>
Sex		
Men	16	701
Women	20	893
Age		
18-24	30	108
25-39	16	380
40-64	16	707
65 and over	17	396
Education		
None	20	394
Standard/GCSE	19	432
Highers/A levels	22	280
Degree/HE	13	479
SIMD		
Least deprived	13	319
Most deprived	21	307
Interest in politics		
Not very much/none	19	592
Some	22	562
A great deal/ a lot	12	440
Awareness of SE activities		
Not much/nothing at all	21	526
Some	20	488
A great deal/a lot	13	563
Party identification		
SNP	17	271
Liberal Democrat	14	142
Labour	21	532
Conservative	23	207
None	14	215

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