

# Scottish Social Attitudes: User Guide

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# 1. Scottish Social Attitudes

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The Scottish Social Attitudes was launched by the Scottish Centre for Social Research in 1999, following the advent of devolution. Based on annual rounds of interviews with around 1,200-1,500 people drawn using probability sampling, its aims are to facilitate the study of public opinion and inform the development of public policy in Scotland. In this it has similar objectives to the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, which was launched by ScotCen's parent organisation, the National Centre for Social Research, in 1983. While BSA interviews people in Scotland, there are usually too few in any one year to permit separate analysis of public opinion in Scotland. The Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) surveys inform the development of public policy and are an important barometer of public attitudes used by opinion leaders and social commentators.

SSA did not run in 2020, while in 2021/22 it was run for the first time as a push-to-telephone survey. After the lifting of restrictions on face-to-face interviewing after the coronavirus pandemic, consideration was given as to whether to return to face-to-face interviewing in people's homes or whether to move SSA to being administered online. In line with the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA), which moved from face-to-face interviewing to a push to web survey at the beginning of the pandemic, SSA was fielded as an online survey for the first time in 2023.<sup>1</sup>

SSA is typically conducted on an annual basis and has a modular structure. In any one year it will usually contain a range of modules on different topics (a full module is considered to be 40 questions). Funding for its first two years came from the Economic and Social Research Council, while from 2001 onwards different bodies have funded each year's individual modules. These bodies have included the Economic and Social Research Council, the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and various charitable and grant awarding bodies, such as the Nuffield Foundation and Leverhulme Trust.

The Scottish Government report on SSA 2023 can be found here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-attitudes-survey-2023-attitudes-government-economy-health-service/documents/>

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<sup>1</sup> A Technical Report which analysed the impact of this mode change is accessible here: [Supporting documents - Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2023 - Technical Report - gov.scot](#)

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# 2. Accessing the data

Users from non-commercial organisations can download the data directly from the [UK Data Service](#) (SN 2000049). Access to the data requires Athens registration. You can download the data as SPSS or STATA files, or as a TAB file. Data is archived around a year after the completion of fieldwork (giving time for analysis and reporting).

Commercial organisations must notify the Scottish Centre for Social Research by email ([ssa@scotcen.org.uk](mailto:ssa@scotcen.org.uk)) stating their intended use and seeking permission for download. Permission to download may incur a charge. UKDS will be monitoring usage and providing NatCen with usage reports.

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# 3. What topics do the datasets cover?

Between 1999 and 2019 Scottish Social Attitudes was administered as a face-to-face interview. 2023 was the first year that a push-to-web approach was used, where respondents received a letter inviting them to take part in an online survey or over the phone if they preferred.

In 2023 the survey covered the following topics:

**Table Error! No text of specified style in document..1 SSA 2023 Topics and corresponding funders**

Topic	Funder
Employment	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Tenure	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Politics	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Benefits and income	Scottish Centre for Social Research
National identity and ethnicity	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Religion	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Disability	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Education	Scottish Centre for Social Research
<b>Unfunded module</b>	
Devolution	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Electoral voting reform	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Trust in the political system	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Immigration	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Economic issues	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Equal opportunities for protected groups	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Cost of living/inflation	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Climate change	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Environmental issues	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Monarchy	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Trade Union membership	Scottish Centre for Social Research
<b>Core Module</b>	Scottish Government
<b>International Social Survey Programme</b>	
National Identity	Economic and Social Research Council
Citizenship	Economic and Social Research Council
European Union	Economic and Social Research Council

A wide range of background and classificatory questions, such as on age, sex, ethnicity, religion, social class and household income are also always included.<sup>2</sup> A number of the same questions are asked most years, enabling us to track change over time.

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<sup>2</sup> Further information on analysis variables can be found in the accompanying technical report, and at Table 7.1 in this report.

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# 4. The sample

The Scottish Social Attitudes survey is designed to yield a representative sample of adults aged 16 or over.<sup>3</sup> 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. Since 1999, the sampling frame for the survey has been the **Postcode Address File** (PAF), a list of addresses (or postal delivery points) compiled by the Post Office. For practical reasons, the sample is confined to those living in private households. People living in institutions (though not in private households at such institutions) are excluded, as are households whose addresses are not on the PAF. In addition, the "extended PAF" (known as the 'Multiple Residence file') was used alongside the 'standard' PAF. This extension has separate entries for flats, thus making selection of dwellings more efficient as they can be selected directly at the sampling stage.

In 2023 a stratified sample of 10,333 unclustered addresses was drawn from the PAF. The list of sampled addresses was then split into a main sample (n= 8,611) and a reserve sample (n=1,722). The reserve sample was not issued in 2023.

To improve the efficiency, strata were created for sampling based on SIMD score quintiles within country. The bottom two SIMD quintiles within Scotland were oversampled. Oversampling rates were calculated based on response patterns from the previous two BSAs & SSAs.

## **Selection of individuals**

Up to two individuals aged 16 or over living at the selected addresses were eligible to take part. The invitation and reminder letters contained two unique access codes allowing any two adults aged 16+ living within the household to log in and complete the survey.

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<sup>3</sup> Further detail on how the sample was drawn is also included as part of the accompanying Technical Report

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# 5. Fieldwork

Fieldwork was carried out between 12<sup>th</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023.

Fieldwork used a mixed-mode design, offering the choice of both web and telephone survey completion. The fieldwork period was the same for both modes. The invitation and first reminder letters sent to respondents encouraged participants to take part online, while giving them the option to take part by phone if they wanted to. The letter and first reminder emphasised the option to take part by web. The second reminder letter made the option to take part by phone more explicit.

Telephone fieldwork was conducted by interviewers drawn from the National Centre for Social Research's regular panel. Before fieldwork began, interviewers attended a briefing conference to familiarise themselves with the questionnaire. A total of 14 interviews were conducted via phone and 1560 interviews were completed via web.

Overall, we achieved a household response rate of between 14.7 and 16.4%. Details are shown in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.2 SSA 2023 response rate**

Issued sample	15,498 cases 8,610 addresses
Estimate number of deadwood/ineligible	10%
Eligible addresses	7,749
Number of fully productive cases	1514
Number of partially productive cases	60
Number of addresses with at least one complete (full or partial)	1,267
Number of completes per address	1.24
Unadjusted household response rate	14.7%
Adjusted household response rate <sup>4</sup>	16.4%

## Advance mailings

Sampled addresses were sent an advance letter on the 12th of September, inviting adults aged 16 or over and resident at the household to take part in the survey. Up to two adults could take part in each household. Participants had the option to complete the survey via web or by telephone. Non-responsive households were sent two reminder letters, which included the access codes for the web survey and the SSA telephone contact number.

## Incentives

All participants in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey were offered a £10 conditional incentive for completing the survey.

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<sup>4</sup> The number of households with at least one response as a proportion of all the eligible sample (i.e. adjusted for deadwood)

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# 6. Weighting the data

As with previous waves of the SSA, weights have been constructed to adjust for differential non-response. The “push-to-web” methodology means that non-response could occur both at the address level, as well as within households. This contrasts with pre-pandemic SSA iterations which were conducted face-to-face, and one adult was selected at random at each address, and selection weights were used to account for differential selection probabilities.

As described in section four, addresses were selected with unequal probability within strata, and up to two people in one household at each address were invited to take part. Weighting was therefore required to adjust for unequal selection probabilities, non-response *within* households in addition to accounting for non-response amongst households at selected addresses. Separate non-response models were constructed to deal with each of these elements of non-response. Finally, calibration weighting was used to adjust the profile of the responding sample to match the population in terms of age, sex, education, tenure, ethnicity, economic activity and Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles (IMD).

To minimise non-response bias, data should be weighted in all univariate analyses. Weighting is also recommended for multivariate analysis. The file is not pre-weighted: before running any analysis, please “switch on” the computed weight (**SSA23\_final\_wt**).

## Non-response models

It is known that certain subgroups in the population are more likely to respond to surveys than others. These groups can end up over-represented in the responding sample, which can lead to bias in the survey estimates. Given that up to two people per household could respond this year, non-response can occur at the household level, where no one from the selected address responds, or within households, where only one person responds in households with two or more adults. Where information is available about non-responding addresses, propensity for households (at selected addresses) to respond can be modelled, and the results used to generate a non-response weight. Similarly, where information is available about responding households, the expected number of responses within these households can also be modelled. Hence, this year there are two non-response weights for households – one for between household non-response and one for within household non-response. These are intended to reduce bias in the responding sample resulting from differential response to the survey.

Between household response was modelled using logistic regression, with the dependent variable indicating whether or not someone at each selected address responded to the survey. A number of area-level variables, including aggregated census data and deprivation indices were considered for modeling response. From this model, the between household non-response weight was calculated as the inverse of the predicted response probability for each responding household.

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Within household response was also modelled using logistic regression, with the dependent variable indicating whether each responding address had one or two responses to the survey. Single-adult addresses and non-responding addresses were not included in this stage of non-response modelling. As well as the area-level information used before, additional household-level variables such as household size, tenure, whether anyone in the household has a degree and income were also considered. The predicted probability from the model was used to estimate the expected number of completed surveys in responding households. This was calculated as  $1 \times (1-p) + 2 \times p = 1+p$ , where  $p$  is the probability of two responses. 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 responding household, i.e.  $\text{numad} / (1+p)$ , where  $\text{numad}$  is the number of adults in the household (capped at 4).

The composite (pre-calibration) weight was calculated as the product of the selection weights and the two non-response weights above.

### **Calibration weighting**

In the final stage of weighting, calibration was used to adjust the composite non-response weight (from the previous stages) so that the weighted sample was in line with the best available population estimates of Scottish adults for: sex by age, IMD (quintiles), education by age, ethnicity, housing tenure, and economic activity (employment status).

Population estimates for age, sex, and IMD were derived from the 2021 mid-year population estimates published by the General Register Office for Scotland. The latest Labour Force Survey informed population estimates for education, ethnicity and housing tenure. These are the most recent estimates at the time of weighting.

The final calibrated weight (**SSA23\_final\_wt**) has been scaled to the responding sample size. It should be used for all analyses of SSA 2023.

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# 7. Analysing the data

SSA provides a compelling account of the public's economic, political, moral and social attitudes over the last 25 years. It can be used to provide an annual snapshot of the public's attitudes through an analysis of a single dataset or to create a narrative of the public's attitudes over a period of time by analysing several datasets. Please note that the data must be weighted in all analysis. The file is not pre-weighted.

Before running any analysis, please weight the data using the NatCen computed weight (SSA23\_final\_wt). As long as the weight is included when specifying the sample design, the complex sample procedures will ensure that the data is weighted; however, other procedures may not weight the data automatically.

The sample is geographically unclustered but up to two people in each household are able to take part, so the sample is clustered at the household level. When using complex sample procedures, we would recommend using the SIMD quintile variable (SIMD) as the stratification variable, and household serial (PSU) as the cluster variable. Unlike some other surveys, on Scottish Social Attitudes responses of 'don't know' or 'Prefer not to answer' are considered to be valid responses and should be included in the base for analysis.

**There are a number of identification variables that users may find useful in analyses. These are listed below. In addition, there are a number of potentially useful derived variables that are outlined in the following section. Table 7.3 Demographic variables**

DVSex23	Respondent's sex
RAgeCat	Respondent's age group
RaceOri3_ssa_archive	Respondent's ethnicity
ReligSum	Respondent's religion
ReligFamSum	Religion respondent brought up in
REarn	Total gross individual income
HEdQual2S	Respondent's highest educational qualification
MarStat6_SSA_Archive	Respondent's marital status
TenHhl_SSA_Archive	Respondent's tenure
ReconAct_SSA_Archive	Respondent's economic activity (priority coded)

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HhIAdGpd_SSA_Archive	Number of adults in household (grouped)
HhIChIGpd_SSA_Archive	Number of children in household (grouped)
BestNatu2_SSA_Archive	Nationality that best describes the respondent

### Derived variables

The following derived variables are included in the datasets as standard:

#### Age

RAgeCat (dv) splits respondent's age into eight age categories, pulling information from RespAge (asked from all respondents) and Ragebnd (which collects banded age from respondents who refused to give an answer at RespAge). As per 2022, an additional category (70+) has also been included. RageCat2 groups respondents' age into three categories (18-34, 35-54, 55+).

#### Gender

This variable categorises respondent's gender into male, female and 'other gender identity' based on their responses at the question asking whether their gender is the same as their sex as registered on their birth certificate.

#### Disability and effect on daily life

This variable splits respondents into three categories: i) they have a disability which affects their daily life ii) they have a disability but it doesn't affect their daily life and iii) they don't have a disability. The DV is computed using variables Disact2 and Disnew3.

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## Standard Occupational Classification and National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification

Respondents are classified according to their own occupation, not that of the 'head of household'. Each respondent was asked about their current or last job, so that all respondents except those who had never worked were coded. For the 2023 survey respondents were asked to self-code their current or last job into an 8 category variable (EmpOCC). An employment status that captures information on employment status and supervisory status has also been derived (EmployB\_SSA\_Archive) based on REconAct and REconFW.

An employment status variable that captures information on employment status and size of organisation was also derived (EmplStatDV\_SSA\_Archive) based on questions collecting information on:

- whether an individual is an employer, self-employed or an employee (EMPSTAT\_SSA\_Archive);
- size of organisation (employ); and
- supervisory status (Superv).

The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) was derived from a combination of information on occupation and employment status. In the dataset this variable is called 'RClassGP'. It is important to note this difference how the NS-SEC variable was derived this year, and to take this into account when comparing findings from previous survey years.

For some analyses, it may be more appropriate to classify respondents according to their current socio-economic status, which takes into account only their present economic position. Respondents can be allocated to one of the following categories: "in full time education/training", "in work, waiting to take up work", "on maternity or paternity leave", "unemployed", "retired" or "other" using the data recorded at REconsum.

## Income

The SSA dataset includes a standard measure of household income [HHIncome]. This year, respondents were asked to place themselves into banded income quartiles. The bandings used are designed to be representative of those that exist in Britain and are taken from the Family Resources Survey (see <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/frs>). REarn asked respondents currently in work to place themselves within estimated earnings quartiles.

## Attitude scales

Since 1999, SSA surveys have included two attitude scales which aim to measure where respondents stand on certain underlying value dimensions: left–right and libertarian–authoritarian.

Each of these scales 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:

### Left–right scale (5 items) [leftrigh]

*Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off.* [Redistrib]

*Big business benefits owners at the expense of workers.* [BigBusnN]

*Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth.* [Wealth]

*There is one law for the rich and one for the poor.* [RichLaw]

*Management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance.* [Indust4]

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### **Libertarian–authoritarian scale (6 items) [libauth]**

*Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values.* [TradVals]

*People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences.* [StifSent]

*For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence.* [DeathApp]

*Schools should teach children to obey authority.* [Obey]

*The law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong.* [WrongLaw]

*Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards.* [Censor]

The indices for the two scales are formed by scoring the leftmost, most libertarian or most pro-welfare position, as 1 and the rightmost, most authoritarian or most anti-welfarist position, as 5. The “neither agree nor disagree” option is scored as 3. All the items in the libauth scale have been reversed coded as well as items Unemjob to Welfhelp on the welfare scale.

The scores to all the questions in each scale are added and then divided by the number of items in the scale, giving indices ranging from 1 (leftmost, most libertarian, most pro-welfare) to 5 (rightmost, most authoritarian, most anti-welfare).

Items that were coded as “don't know” or “refusals” in the individual scale items were recoded as 3 (mid-point value of the scale) if the number of valid items was three or more in the left-right (total = 5 items) and libertarian-authoritarian scale (total = 6 items). If the number of valid items was lower than those specified (and therefore there was a greater number of “don't know”/ “refusals” (thus preventing us to derive a scale score), the scale value for those individuals was set to “missing” and given a code of 9. If a user wishes to look at average scores they will need to declare these values as ‘missing’.

The scores on the two indices have been placed on the dataset.

### **Multi-code variables**

Where a respondent was given the opportunity to give more than one response at a question, we have created binary variables for each response option available. These binary variables record the number of respondents who chose that response option. If a respondent answered “don't know” or refused to answer a multi-code question, the “don't know” or “prefer not to answer” response has been included at each of the binary variables.

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### Open-ended questions

Questions that had an “Other – Please specify” option have been back-coded into the questions’ existing categories. Where the answers in the free-text did not fit into any of the existing categories new categories have been created if a sufficient number of responses could be grouped in that category; otherwise responses have been coded as “Other specific answer not in code-frame”, “Vague or irrelevant answer” or “Editor unable to code”.

The following variables were coded:

List of coded variables	
RspGndr	ReIRFW
LegStat	ReIFFW
ReConFW	NationU
Tenhhl	BNationU
ISSP_UrbRur	RaceOri3
PartyFW	F_BORN
DigBnHow	M_BORN
HIncdif4	Hedqual2
Maininc5	

### Notes on other variables

**BNationU** is a follow-up question to NationU which is a multi-coded question that asks people what nationality they identify as. This question also contains an open-response option “Other” asking people to specify their nationality if not included in any of the response options. This open question has been back-coded. BNationU asks people to select the option that best describes their nationality and this year it pulled in the back-coded response from NationU. This does not appear to have been done in previous years, and the “Other” category was presented in its raw form rather than taking into account that NationU has been back-coded. We believe this will provide a more precise presentation of the data, however it does mean that the question may be slightly different from previous years and not directly comparable.

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# 8. Further information

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For further information on anything contained in this booklet please contact: [ssa@scotcen.ac.uk](mailto:ssa@scotcen.ac.uk)



