

Attitudes to same-sex marriage in Scotland

Scottish Social Attitudes

ScotCen Social Research's Scottish Social Attitudes survey has been conducted since 1999. Interviews are conducted each year providing a representative, random sample of adults across Scotland.

This briefing explores a single question from Scottish Social Attitudes. People were asked in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014 whether they agreed or disagreed that¹:

Gay or lesbian couples should have the right to marry one another if they want to

There has been a dramatic shift in the last twelve years towards support for same-sex marriage. Over two thirds (68%) of the Scottish public now agree that same-sex couples should have the right to marry. This compares to 61% in 2010 and just 41% in 2002.

Of note is the strength of support for same-sex marriage in 2014. In 2002 the proportion of those who said they 'strongly agree' with the statement was just 10%. By 2006 this had risen to 17%, by 2010, it was 21% and it now stands at 35%. This represents an increase of 25 percentage points over the last twelve years and 14 points in the last four.

¹ Question preamble: 'Please choose an answer for each of the following statements to show how much you agree or disagree with it.'

Likewise, the proportion of those who disagree or strongly disagree with the right of same-sex couples to marry has decreased. In 2002, 29% of Scots were opposed to same-sex marriage, with 12% strongly disagreeing whereas now, only 17% are opposed with 7% strongly disagreeing.

	2002	2006	2010	2014
	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly	10	17	21	35
Agree	31	36	40	33
Neither agree nor disagree	24	21	18	13
Disagree	17	11	10	10
Disagree strongly	12	10	9	7
Can't choose	5	2	1	2
(Not answered)	1	2	1	1
Sample size	1507	1437	1366	1428

Percentage (%) who 'agree strongly' or 'agree' that gay men and lesbians should have the right to marry

Demographics: Where is this change in attitudes coming from?

Age

In every year that we have asked about same sex marriage, younger people have been generally more in favour than older people. In 2014 83% of 18-24 year olds were in favour while less than half (44%) of 65+ age group were. This is perhaps not surprising given that those in the older age brackets grew up in a time when homosexuality was against the law.

However across all age brackets, support for marriage equality has increased and in fact the attitudes gap between the oldest and youngest has narrowed between 2010 (52 percentage points) and 2014 (39 percentage points).

Age	2002	2006	2010	2014	Change 2002-2014	Sample size 2002	Sample size 2006	Sample size 2010	Sample size 2014
18-24	65	73	81	83	+18	103	93	101	99
25-34	53	72	73	74	+21	228	193	191	187
35-44	50	68	75	82	+32	326	299	216	245
45-54	39	54	66	69	+30	267	246	257	248
55-64	33	37	54	65	+32	238	250	258	258
65+	17	28	29	44	+27	342	353	343	390

Percentage (%) who 'agree strongly' or 'agree' that gay men and lesbians should have the right to marry

Gender

Nearly three-quarters of women (72%) and two-thirds of men (63%) agree with the right of same-sex couples to marry in 2014. Men have consistently been less supportive of same-sex marriage than women.

Gender	2002	2006	2010	2014	Change 2002-2014	Sample size 2002	Sample size 2006	Sample size 2010	Sample size 2014
Male	38	47	57	63	+25	663	623	597	615
Female	43	59	65	72	+29	844	814	769	813

Percentage (%) who 'agree strongly' or 'agree' that gay men and lesbians should have the right to marry

Education

Graduates and those with Highers or equivalent have been consistently more supportive of gay marriage than those with lower or no qualifications. This is in part related to age – those in the oldest age group are more likely to have no qualifications.

However there has been a significant shift in attitudes towards gay marriage from those with no formal qualifications in the years since 2010, with an increase of 14 percentage points over the four year period leading up to 2014. Nearly three in five (57%) now support the idea. So while support among this group is lower the gap between graduates and those with no qualifications has in fact narrowed in recent years.

Education	2002	2006	2010	2014	Change 2002-2014	Sample size 2002	Sample size 2006	Sample size 2010	Sample size 2014
Degree/higher education	49	68	69	72	+23	436	434	463	533
Highers/A-levels	48	58	68	71	+23	236	251	245	269
Standard gds/GCSE	36	47	58	66	+30	420	397	362	345
No formal quals	32	37	43	57	+25	413	351	294	273

Percentage (%) who 'agree strongly' or 'agree' that gay men and lesbians should have the right to marry

Religion²

Same-sex marriage is most widely supported by those with no religious affiliation, 81% of whom agreed in 2014 that couples should be allowed to marry if they want to.

Among those who identify as Christian, support is still high at around 60% (59% Church of Scotland, 60% Catholic and 58% for 'other Christians') showing a clear majority in support with little difference between those affiliated with the major Christian sects and churches.

Religion	2002	2006	2010	2014	Change 2002-2014	Sample size 2002	Sample size 2006	Sample size 2010	Sample size 2014
Church of Scotland	28	44	50	59	+31	499	439	368	348
Catholic	37	56	54	60	+23	185	163	146	174
Other Christian	32	49	43	58	+26	156	183	182	240
No religion	54	62	72	81	+27	644	629	645	620

Percentage (%) who 'agree strongly' or 'agree' that gay men and lesbians should have the right to marry

Religious attendance

Those who attend church or other place of worship at least once a week are the least likely of all demographics to support gay marriage with only 33% agreeing with the statement when we asked the question this year.

Attend religious service	2002	2006	2010	2014	Change 2002-2014	Sample size 2002	Sample size 2006	Sample size 2010	Sample size 2014
At least once a week	22	32	31	33	+11	216	207	165	153
Less than once a week but at least once a month	35	57	56	45	+10	126	110	103	107
Less often	38	54	61	67	+29	223	230	187	255
Never/not religious	46	58	66	76	+30	932	864	893	887

Percentage (%) who 'agree strongly' or 'agree' that gay men and lesbians should have the right to marry

² Other religions have not been included as the sample sizes are too small for analysis