SMK Campaigner Survey 2021: results

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About the results

Survey conducted between 18 October 2021 and 18 December 2021

118 respondents
(breakdown in final section)
The campaigning environment

NB Percentages may not total 100% where figures have been rounded to one decimal place or where participants were able to select more than one answer
Does your organisation regard campaigning as a vital way to deliver its mission?

- Yes: 90%
- No: 5%
- Don't know: 5%

Do you believe that it’s legitimate for civil society organisations, including charities, to campaign for changes to policy, law, attitudes and behaviours?

- Yes: 98%
- No: 2%
Do you think that there are threats, formal or informal, to the freedom to organise, speak out, or protest (otherwise called ‘civic space’)?

- Yes: 96%
- No: 4%
What factors do you think are threatening our civic space?

- Proposals in the Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill to restrict protest
- Negative statements by politicians on civil society campaigning
- Proposals in the Judicial Review & Courts Bill to restrict access to judicial review
- The Lobbying Act and further proposals in the Elections Bill
- Conditions on funding that prevent lobbying, campaigning or advocacy
- Proposals to criminalise journalists who publish leaked information, and their sources
- Negative media coverage of civil society
- General lack of awareness about the value of civil society campaigning
- Failure by civil society to be confident and proud about its right to campaign
- Negative public view of civil society campaigning
- Guidance, public statements or decisions from charity regulators
- Other
In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning, amongst…?

The public, 2021

- More positive: 31%
- No change: 42%
- More negative: 26%

The public, 2020

- More positive: 54%
- No change: 27%
- More negative: 19%
In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning, amongst…?

Politicians, 2021

- More positive: 3%
- No change: 19%
- More negative: 78%

Politicians, 2020

- More positive: 11%
- No change: 26%
- More negative: 63%
In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning, amongst…?

Media, 2021

- 8% More positive
- 43% No change
- 48% More negative

Media, 2020

- 19% More positive
- 31% No change
- 49% More negative
In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning, amongst…?

**Funders (public), 2021**

- More positive: 79%
- No change: 15%
- More negative: 6%

**Funders (public), 2020**

- More positive: 65%
- No change: 16%
- More negative: 19%
In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning, amongst...?

Funders (independent), 2021

- More positive: 74%
- No change: 6%
- More negative: 20%

Funders (independent), 2020

- More positive: 61%
- No change: 31%
- More negative: 9%
In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning, amongst…?

Board & senior leaders, 2021

More positive: 25%
No change: 66%
More negative: 9%

Board & senior leaders, 2020

More positive: 31%
No change: 55%
More negative: 14%
In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning, amongst…?

Civil society more broadly, 2021

- More positive: 28%
- No change: 53%
- More negative: 19%

Civil society more broadly, 2020

- More positive: 41%
- No change: 44%
- More negative: 14%
In the past year, have you noticed any changes in attitudes to civil society campaigning, amongst…?

Charity regulators (Charity Commissions or Scottish Charity Regulator), 2021

- More positive: 67%
- No change: 29%
- More negative: 4%
A number of legislative proposals have been introduced this year, which may directly affect your campaigning approaches or tactics. How far do you think they will affect the way you campaign?

**Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill (conditions on protest)**

- **8%** We will stop or dramatically reduce activity in this area
- **38%** Activity won’t reduce but will become harder or more expensive
- **35%** No change
- **19%** Don’t know
- **0%** Activity will become easier or cheaper

A number of legislative proposals have been introduced this year, which may directly affect your campaigning approaches or tactics. How far do you think they will affect the way you campaign?
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Elections Bill (reduced spending thresholds for third-party campaigning)

- We will stop or dramatically reduce activity in this area
- Activity won’t reduce but will become harder or more expensive
- No change
- Don’t know
- Activity will become easier or cheaper
A number of legislative proposals have been introduced this year, which may directly affect your campaigning approaches or tactics. How far do you think they will affect the way you campaign?

Judicial Review Bill (changes to which decisions may be judicially reviewed)

- We will stop or dramatically reduce activity in this area: 13%
- Activity won’t reduce but will become harder or more expensive: 36%
- No change: 30%
- Don’t know: 21%
- Activity will become easier or cheaper: 0%
Likely impact of legislation (1)

Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill
• 8% said they expect to stop or dramatically curtail activity
• 38% said activity was likely to become harder or more expensive

Elections Bill
• 10% said they expect to stop or dramatically curtail activity
• 35% said activity was likely to become harder or more expensive

Judicial Review Bill
• 13% said they expect to stop or dramatically curtail activity
• 36% said activity was likely to become harder or more expensive

Not a single respondent said than any of the legislation would make it cheaper or easier to campaign.
How concerned are you that they will ‘chill’ campaigning activity more broadly?

- **Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill**
  - Very concerned: 73%
  - Somewhat concerned: 16%
  - Not at all concerned: 3%
  - Don’t know: 8%

- **Elections Bill**
  - Very concerned: 37%
  - Somewhat concerned: 42%
  - Not at all concerned: 7%
  - Don’t know: 14%

- **Judicial Review Bill**
  - Very concerned: 60%
  - Somewhat concerned: 25%
  - Not at all concerned: 3%
  - Don’t know: 13%
There have been a number of notable attacks by media outlets on charities that have expressed views, published analyses or delivered services that some don’t agree with (these included the National Trust, Barnardo’s, the Runnymede Trust and the RNLI, none of which have been found to have acted outside their mandate).

How have these media stories affected you or your organisation’s willingness to speak out or act in ways that some might disagree with?

- 63%: No change
- 30%: We are more willing than before
- 7%: We are less willing than before
Response to media attacks

When asked to expand on their answer, comments included:

‘Outpouring of positive public support for charities responding to hard-hitting negative headlines has been heart-warming.’

‘They make me feel nervous. I carry these stories in my mind as I'm engaging with decision makers, feel the weight of them.’
Response to media attacks

The top three themes mentioned were:

• **becoming more determined/defiant**
  “Fear followed by determination – we have good, brave leadership, currently”

• **paying greater attention to strategy and risk**
  “The attacks have made us invest a lot of time in getting our engagement right, we felt like we were on a tightrope and some powerful people were willing us to fall. However, the strategic review that resulted probably made us more focussed and stronger.”

• **and the desire for greater solidarity**
  “It has been positive to see sector leaders support each other against attack”
Overall, have things got better or worse in the last year for campaigning?
You answered ‘better' to the above question, tell us a bit about why or how?

Top themes were:

**Increased support from public**
“...people’s awareness of issues and the power of campaigning for positive change has increased (or at least more people are being vocal about this and taking action).”

**Government open to expertise and recommendations**
“...during the pandemic...both Ministers and Civil Servants reached out to charities and valued our expertise and policy recommendations and we saw these impact public policy.”

**More solidarity/mutual support**
“People understood calls for policy change during a pandemic, even if they didn't agree. The temperature has already changed dramatically, however.”

**Sector more determined/mobilised**
“There is wider recognition of campaigning as part of democracy, and diverse groups campaign, including anti-vaxxers, anti-Northern Ireland protocol, anti-woke. And, some campaigns have had a swift result, e.g. over sleaze, climate, racism.”
You answered ‘worse' to the above question, tell us a bit about why or how?

Top themes were:

**Unwarranted or disproportionate attacks by politicians, by the media, and on social media**

‘The government legislation and media coverage has been overwhelmingly negative, which has impacted on campaigning. However, on the other hand, it feels like more public are pro-activism, which bodes well for the future.’

‘More political pressure on our funder means more pressure on us not to not speak out.’

**Legislative or regulatory restrictions**

‘The government has… introduced several policies and pieces of legislation that represent a huge threat to civil society campaigning and wider democracy, human rights and civil liberties.’

**Lack of capacity (increased demands, staff burnout, donor fatigue, unwillingness to fund campaigning)**

‘…the pace of post-Brexit legislation and related consultations is absolutely relentless - we are all exhausted with no respite in sight.’
Thinking about the past three years, how have attitudes to campaigning affected the amount of campaigning your organisation does?

- 62% No difference
- 28% Increased the amount of campaigning we do
- 10% Reduced the amount of campaigning we do

No difference

Increased the amount of campaigning we do

Reduced the amount of campaigning we do
Thinking about the past three years, how have attitudes to campaigning affected the TONE of your campaigns?

- 41% Less robust language or tone
- 32% More robust language or tone
- 27% No difference
Has the Covid-19 pandemic affected how your organisation prioritises campaigning?

- Campaigning has become more important to our work: 53%
- It has stayed about the same: 42%
- Campaigning has become less important to our work: 5%
Do you think that there will be a need for more campaigning by civil society in the next 12 months?

- Yes: 94%
- No: 3%
- Don't know: 3%
Would you like to collaborate more on campaigning with other civil society organisations?

- Yes: 94%
- No: 6%
You answered 'yes' when we asked if you wanted to collaborate more with other organisations on campaigning. What do you think is getting in the way now?

- Not enough time / money: 62%
- Unsure how far we can stray from our ‘core’ issues: 38%
- Clash of cultures with potential partners: 37%
- Unsure how to proceed: 28%
- Other: 23%
- Rules on joint non-party campaigning under the Lobbying Act: 22%
- Internal culture doesn't support it: 15%
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Tell us about any ideas or opportunities you encountered during the past year that you think improved your campaigning.

Top themes:

- **More online working opened up new opportunities** to work with communities, organisations, decision-makers, and other campaigners
- **More collaboration across civil society** and better relationships between organisations
- **Responding to Covid meant doing things differently**, which sometimes turned out to be better
- **COP26 created a focal point** for campaigners to coalesce around all aspects of environmental breakdown
Tell us about any barriers or problems you encountered during the past year that you think made campaigning harder.

Top themes:

- **An environment hostile to campaigning** created by the negative comments of some politicians and media outlets, as well as concern about legislative and regulatory pressures

- **Loss of capacity was a huge issue** – it included time, funding, staff absence, and general fatigue

- **Covid placed huge pressure on people and organisations** – particularly the loss of face-to-face contact
Thinking about the past three years, have the targets or focus of your campaigning changed?

**UK Central Government**
- Less focus on…: 19%
- More focus on…: 37%
- No change in focus on…: 43%

**Devolved national administrations**
- Less focus on…: 11%
- More focus on…: 38%
- No change in focus on…: 51%
Thinking about the past three years, have the targets or focus of your campaigning changed?

Local/regional govt (inc. metro mayors)

- Less focus on: 11%
- More focus on: 55%
- No change in focus on: 34%

Public attitudes or behaviours

- Less focus on: 8%
- More focus on: 51%
- No change in focus on: 42%
Thinking about the past three years, have the targets or focus of your campaigning changed?

- Business practices

- Less focus on...
- More focus on...
- No change in focus on...

17% Less focus on...
32% More focus on...
51% No change in focus on...
Civil society and the 'national conversation'

NB Percentages may not total 100% where figures have been rounded to one decimal place or where participants were able to select more than one answer
Thinking about the specific issues on which you campaign, how far do you feel you are able to participate meaningfully through the following channels?

Debate at public events run by third-parties
- 65% No meaningful participation at all
- 19% Some meaningful participation
- 11% A great deal of meaningful participation
- 5% Don't know

Debate at public events created by you
- 48% No meaningful participation at all
- 37% Some meaningful participation
- 10% A great deal of meaningful participation
- 10% Don't know
Thinking about the specific issues on which you campaign, how far do you feel you are able to participate meaningfully through the following channels?

Debate in UK Parliament

- No meaningful participation at all: 36%
- Some meaningful participation: 41%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 13%
- Don't know: 10%

Debate in elected chambers in the Senedd, Holyrood or Stormont

- No meaningful participation at all: 35%
- Some meaningful participation: 25%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 13%
- Don't know: 28%
Thinking about the specific issues on which you campaign, how far do you feel you are able to participate meaningfully through the following channels?

In direct discussion with national politicians

- No meaningful participation at all: 50%
- Some meaningful participation: 25%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 19%
- Don't know: 7%

In direct discussion with local politicians

- No meaningful participation at all: 45%
- Some meaningful participation: 26%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 16%
- Don't know: 13%
Thinking about the specific issues on which you campaign, how far do you feel you are able to participate meaningfully through the following channels?

In direct discussion with civil servants and/or officials

- 42% No meaningful participation at all
- 29% Some meaningful participation
- 10% A great deal of meaningful participation
- 19% Don't know

UK Government consultations on future policy and legislation

- 46% No meaningful participation at all
- 23% Some meaningful participation
- 21% A great deal of meaningful participation
- 10% Don't know
Thinking about the specific issues on which you campaign, how far do you feel you are able to participate meaningfully through the following channels?

Devolved administration consultations on future policy and legislation

- No meaningful participation at all: 24%
- Some meaningful participation: 26%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 20%
- Don't know: 30%

Local/regional consultations on future policy and decisions

- No meaningful participation at all: 21%
- Some meaningful participation: 40%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 17%
- Don't know: 22%
Thinking about the specific issues on which you campaign, how far do you feel you are able to participate meaningfully through the following channels?

In the national media (print/online)

- No meaningful participation at all: 48%
- Some meaningful participation: 18%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 25%
- Don't know: 9%

In the national media (broadcast)

- No meaningful participation at all: 44%
- Some meaningful participation: 25%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 19%
- Don't know: 12%
Thinking about the specific issues on which you campaign, how far do you feel you are able to participate meaningfully through the following channels?

**In the local media (print/online)**
- No meaningful participation at all: 49%
- Some meaningful participation: 22%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 8%
- Don't know: 21%

**In the local media (broadcast)**
- No meaningful participation at all: 43%
- Some meaningful participation: 24%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 10%
- Don't know: 23%
Thinking about the specific issues on which you campaign, how far do you feel you are able to participate meaningfully through the following channels?

On social media

- No meaningful participation at all: 10%
- Some meaningful participation: 42%
- A great deal of meaningful participation: 44%
- Don't know: 4%
Thinking about the same channels, over the past three years, has it become easier or harder to have your voice heard meaningfully?

Debate at public events run by third-parties

- Easier: 55%
- No change: 25%
- Harder: 19%

Debate at public events created by you

- Easier: 52%
- No change: 31%
- Harder: 17%
Thinking about the same channels, over the past three years, has it become easier or harder to have your voice heard meaningfully?

### Debate in UK Parliament

- **Easier**: 7%
- **No change**: 48%
- **Harder**: 45%

### Debate in elected chambers in the Senedd, Holyrood or Stormont

- **Easier**: 9%
- **No change**: 75%
- **Harder**: 15%
Thinking about the same channels, over the past three years, has it become easier or harder to have your voice heard meaningfully?

In direct discussion with national politicians

- Easier: 13%
- No change: 41%
- Harder: 47%

In direct discussion with local politicians

- Easier: 14%
- No change: 58%
- Harder: 28%
Thinking about the same channels, over the past three years, has it become easier or harder to have your voice heard meaningfully?

**In direct discussion with civil servants and/or officials**
- Easier: 49%
- No change: 38%
- Harder: 13%

**UK Government consultations on future policy and legislation**
- Easier: 58%
- No change: 36%
- Harder: 7%
Thinking about the same channels, over the past three years, has it become easier or harder to have your voice heard meaningfully?

**Devolved administration consultations on future policy and legislation**

- Easier: 8%
- No change: 79%
- Harder: 13%

**Local/regional consultations on future policy and decisions**

- Easier: 8%
- No change: 76%
- Harder: 15%
Thinking about the same channels, over the past three years, has it become easier or harder to have your voice heard meaningfully?

In the national media (print/online)

- Easier: 14%
- No change: 54%
- Harder: 31%

In the national media (broadcast)

- Easier: 13%
- No change: 55%
- Harder: 32%
Thinking about the same channels, over the past three years, has it become easier or harder to have your voice heard meaningfully?

In the local media (print/online)

- Easier: 69%
- No change: 16%
- Harder: 15%

In the local media (broadcast)

- Easier: 67%
- No change: 15%
- Harder: 18%
Thinking about the same channels, over the past three years, has it become easier or harder to have your voice heard meaningfully?

On social media

- Easier: 33%
- No change: 47%
- Harder: 20%
Do you have any views about how civil society organisations take part in our national debate?

Top themes:

- **We need to be confident that it’s part of our core purpose**
  ‘…they should be unafraid to stand up for their values and for what they are established to do.’

- **We need greater solidarity across civil society and to share our platforms, especially with smaller and community or user-led organisations**
  ‘…robustly defend sector players who are aggressively singled out’
  ‘A more balanced playing field which allows for smaller, specialist organisations to take part is urgently needed.’

- **We need to better connect with the experiences we advocate about (e.g. staff profile, how we work with people, how we share platforms)**
  ‘…empower the [people] that we benefit to take part in campaigning and local or national debate - ordinary people understanding how they can make a difference.’
About you

Who responded?

118 respondents

NB Percentages may not total 100% where figures have been rounded to one decimal place or where participants were able to select more than one answer.
Do you think of yourself as a campaigner, a change-maker, an activist, or something else?
Where are you based?

- England: 89%
- Northern Ireland: 3%
- Scotland: 3%
- Wales: 3%
- Other: 2%

Other
Job title

- Trustee/Board Member (or equivalent) - 17%
- Chief Executive (or equivalent) - 6%
- Head or Director (or equivalent) - 14%
- Manager (or equivalent) - 25%
- Officer or Assistant (or equivalent) - 23%
- Other - 16%

Are you paid for this role?

- Yes - 25%
- No - 75%
Organisations’ campaigning activities

- Influencing central or local government policy: 86%
- Influencing legislation: 82%
- Advocating on behalf of or with people with first-hand experience of an issue: 72%
- Attitudinal change: 66%
- Behaviour change: 54%
- Advocating on behalf of or with service users or direct beneficiaries: 52%
- Influencing private sector companies: 40%
- Don't know: 1%