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2017 Edition

BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES 34

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British Social Attitudes 34

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Publication details
Clery E., Curtice, J., and Harding R. (2016), British Social Attitudes: the 34th Report, London: NatCen Social Research, available online at: **www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk**
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First published 2017

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Context

The National Centre for Social Research's BSA 34 comes at a time when Britain seems split in two on many of the biggest questions. A close referendum decision to leave the European Union has been followed by a snap UK election resulting in a hung parliament.

Before that, we had a narrow majority UK government itself preceded by another hung parliament. And in Scotland specifically, the country was split by the question of whether to remain a part of the United Kingdom. Each vote produced an outcome in which the country seemed starkly but often evenly divided.

At each moment there were strident voices on every side and sometimes higher than usual turnout. Fears about political apathy have been displaced by worries about national unity. The results have seen some accuse fellow citizens of 'betrayal' or 'revenge', of voting with their 'gut' not their heads, or of being 'naive', 'stupid' or 'selfish' (Foges, 2017; Perring, 2017; Ridley, 2016; Wilkinson, 2016; Woodward, 2016). One commentator has even asked whether the country is 'ungovernable' (De Quetteville, 2017).

Despite all of this, we have seen great moments of national unity, like One Love Manchester and the Great Get Together, but these have sadly too often been in response to acts of terrorism. After moments of togetherness, too many of us are left wondering whether we really know or understand our neighbours and fellow citizens. Overlapping theories now abound about whether we are seeing a fundamental realignment in previously firm views, trends and dividing lines.

For some, the country is divided into what author David Goodhart calls the 'anywheres' and 'somewheres'; a split evident in the EU vote (Goodhart, 2017). 'Anywheres' are the degree-educated geographically mobile who embrace new people and experiences, and define themselves by their achievements. In contrast, 'somewheres' have an identity rooted in their hometown and find rapid change, such as that brought on by immigration, unsettling.

Others have drawn parallels with the US and suggested we might be beginning our own 'culture wars' (Bagehot, 2017). Here the dividing lines are no longer class or left versus right, but a clash between liberalism and a resurgent conservatism, with the latter angered by issues like same-sex marriage and a sense of runaway multiculturalism.

Before this, there was the suggestion that this is the age of the 'open' versus the 'closed': those embracing an open economy and tolerant society versus those looking to lock out competition and change[1].

For some, however, the splits and trends in society today are still best seen through the lens of economics and class; a lens which contrasts those who are successfully riding the waves of globalisation

1 Tony Blair (then prime minister) speaking to the Trade Union Congress conference, Brighton, 12th September 2006. Full text available here https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/sep/12/tradeunions.speeches

and technological change and those increasingly 'left behind' by the market, austerity and automation (Doane, 2016). On this view the rising inequality of the late 20th century and the consequences of the financial crash underpin much of the changing political currents we see today.

The stark split in voting behaviour by age in the recent general election[2] has also reignited debates about whether we are seeing a clash of generations; contrasting baby-boomers against a 'jilted generation' left without secure jobs, good pensions and affordable housing (Howker & Malik, 2010).

Finally, many have picked up a growing feeling of 'anti-politics' (for example: Clarke et al., 2016) bridging left and right that encompasses all or part rejection of current politics and parties, scandal-hit institutions, 'political correctness', and/or an 'elite' or 'establishment'.

Our conclusion is that none of these theories tells the whole story. Instead, every BSA survey seeks to look beyond the headlines to uncover the deeper attitudes and trends that shape our country. This year is no different, and we have found that the country, while divided on many questions, does have an underlying state of mind - that of a kind-hearted but not soft-hearted community.

'Narratives' and conclusions about events are now formed rapidly, often before basic information is known and verified. The BSA survey unashamedly takes a slower, more considered approach, rooted in some of the most rigourous social research available.

Key findings

In this year's report we explore the trends and divides that lie beneath recent events to see how Britain is changing. We do this by examining attitudes to the EU, immigration, a mix of personal issues, benefits and tax, the role of government and civil liberties.

The result is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a diverse set of trends, some suggesting national unity and others showing important divisions. Together they resist simple dichotomies and conclusions but broadly we find a country that is becoming kinder-hearted but unmistakably not soft-hearted, more socially liberal but very divided on immigration and Brexit.

Kinder: after 7 years of government austerity, public opinion shows signs of moving back in favour of wanting more tax and spend and greater redistribution of income. We also find that attitudes to benefit recipients are starting to soften and people particularly favour prioritising spending on disabled people.

Not soft-hearted: the public in general continues to take a tough line on the response to threats at home and abroad. The majority want the authorities to be given strong powers to respond to terrorism and crime, and record numbers want defence spending increased.

2 Prof. John Curtice, speaking at NatCen 14th June 2017, footage and presentation available here: http://www.natcen.ac.uk/events/upcoming-events/2017/june/breakfast-with-john-curtice/

After pensions being protected from austerity, the public are losing sympathy with the idea that this should be a priority for further spending.

The public takes a dim view of benefit fraud and tax evasion, with many thinking that exploiting "legal loopholes" is also wrong. Further, more people consider benefit fraud wrong than tax evasion. While the proportion who prioritise more spending on increasing the benefits for disabled people has risen, there is little support for more spending on benefits for the unemployed, perhaps because half of people think the unemployed could find a job if they wanted to.

Socially liberal: the onward march of social liberalism continues with record proportions of people being comfortable with same-sex relationships, pre-marital sex and abortion, among other issues. While younger people are still more liberal on these subjects than older people, the difference is narrowing.

Divided: the country is however clearly divided by age and education on views about the EU and immigration; young degree holders are much more positive about both than older people with no formal qualifications.

A backlash against austerity?

After seven years of government austerity programmes by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition and then Conservative majority government, the public is turning against spending less.

For the first time since the financial crash of 2007-8, more people (48%) want taxation increased to allow greater spending, than want tax and spend levels to stay as they are (44%). More people (42%) agree than disagree (28%) that government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well-off. Shortly before the financial crisis fewer people supported redistribution than opposed it (34% and 38% respectively in 2006).

However, while these represent notable changes as compared with recent years, they still only represent a partial move back to an earlier mood. The 48% of people who now want more taxation and spending compares with a joint-record low of 32% in 2010, but highs of 63% in 1998, and 65% in 1991.

People's top priorities for more spending remain as they have always been – health and education. Around 8 in 10 think the government should spend more or much more on health (83%); 7 in 10 on education (71%), and 6 in 10 on the police (57%).

A major focus of the austerity programme was on policies to reduce welfare spending on those of working age via reductions in benefit levels and new assessments of who could receive what support (DWP, 2015). As many of these changes have now been implemented it is interesting to see two notable changes in how favourably people view benefit recipients. First, the proportion who say most dole claimants are "fiddling" has dropped from 35% in 2014 to 22% in

2016 – its lowest level since the question was first asked on the survey in 1986. Secondly, we find the proportion of people (21%) that agree that most social security claimants do not deserve help is at a record low, down from 32% in 2014. We will need to see whether these drops are still in evidence in future years before we can be sure they represent a major change of outlook. In the meantime, depending on your outlook, you can either see this as the response to successful efforts to ensure benefits go to those most in need; or, more negatively, more people feeling that recent changes have shown recipients to be more deserving than previously thought.

In contrast to help for those of working age, retirement age benefits have largely been protected from austerity and the State Pension has in fact had significant growth due to the 'triple lock'[3] (Thurley & Keen, 2017). Whether the 'triple lock' should be kept became one of the key battlegrounds of the recent election. This year, for the first time in more than 30 years, pensions are not the public's top priority for extra spending on benefits. The proportion identifying retirement pensions as being among their top two priorities for extra welfare spending is now just 60%, down from 72% in 2014 and the lowest it has ever been. It seems that the public have recognised the fact that successive governments have been successful in raising the relative incomes of pensioners and this may be an area where people are beginning to feel increased spending is no longer needed.

Tough on threats home and abroad

While attitudes haven't moved in a constant direction, the growing desire for more tax and spend sits alongside continued high support for a strong state on issues of crime and terrorism. This is with fieldwork being completed before the recent terrorist attacks in Manchester and London.

During a time of suspected terrorist attack, half of the public (53%) support the government being able to detain people indefinitely without putting them on trial. The current legal limit is just 14 days. Outside of the two world wars, internment has only briefly been permitted twice during the 20th and 21st centuries. Once was very controversially in Northern Ireland between 1971 and 1975, as an attempt to deal with 'the troubles'. The other occasion was in respect of international - and therefore non-UK - terrorist suspects, between 2001 and 2005 following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US. In addition, the majority of the public (70%) also support authorities having the right to stop and search people at random during times of terrorist attack.

One issue raised by recent terrorist attacks is whether the security services have adequate powers of surveillance in order to stop an attack in the first place. A significant majority (80%) think the government should have the right to monitor people by video in public areas, and 50% think the government should also have the

3 The 'triple lock' is a guarantee that the basic State Pension will rise by the higher of inflation, average earnings or 2.5%.

right to monitor emails and other information exchanged on the internet.

On international threats, 4 in 10 people (39%) back more spending on defence, whereas only 2 in 10 (20%) want to see it cut. Support for more defence spending has never been higher, even though – and perhaps in some instances because – no less than 72% think the government has been successful at dealing with threats to Britain's security. The trend may also be a reaction against the long-term decline in UK defence expenditure, and the uncertainty created by well-publicised conflicts in Ukraine and Syria where the post-Cold War sense of order and international rules have been up-ended (Observer, 2016).

Tough on benefits fraud and tax evasion

While the public is softening its attitudes to benefit recipients, it is nonetheless clear that benefit fraud is wrong, even if the abuse does not involve eye-watering sums. Nearly everyone (91%) thinks that using false information to support a claim is usually wrong, and this falls only slightly if the person is using a "legal-loophole" (to 61% and 48%, respectively). This suggests it is the spirit of the rules that often matters for people, not just whether the strict legal rules have been obeyed.

Overall, people are slightly tougher on benefit fraud than tax evasion. Sixty-eight per cent of people think it is wrong to not declare casual work to the benefit office to gain £500, compared with 56% thinking that it is wrong not to declare casual work for tax purposes to gain £500. This gap suggests that for some, money taken from the public purse is worse than money denied to it. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, we find that those on higher incomes and those who are on the right are more relaxed about tax loopholes. Conversely, those on the left tend to be more relaxed about people using benefit loopholes.

Personal freedom: the continued rise of social liberalism

The EU referendum vote result led some on the left and right to speculate that this was the result of a backlash against greater social liberalism (Eagle & Baird (2017); Lawson (2016)). We find no evidence that there has been a public turn against same-sex relationships, or indeed on many other personal issues. In fact, on some issues such as same-sex relationships, the long-term increase in socially liberal attitudes has actually accelerated.

Two-thirds of people (64%) now say that same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all", up from 59% in 2015, and 47% in 2012. On pre-marital sex, a significant majority of people (75%) say that it is "not at all wrong", an increase of 11 percentage points since 2012. Interestingly, this liberalisation in attitudes to both same-sex relationships and pre-marital sex is occurring in every age cohort.

Record levels of people say an abortion should be allowed if a woman decides on her own she does not want the child (70%) or if a couple cannot afford any more children (65%). Most remarkably, the proportion of Catholics who agree an abortion should be allowed if a woman does not want the child has increased from 33% in 1985 to 61% in 2016, which precedes a recent softening of the Catholic Church's position on abortion during 2015-16 (Povoledo & Stack, 2016).

Prejudice about transgender people is examined for the first time in this year's report. We find that the vast majority of the public (84%) describe themselves as "not prejudiced at all" towards transgender people. However, less than half of people say that a suitably qualified transgender person should definitely be employed as a police officer or primary school teacher (43% and 41% respectively), suggesting that there is a notable gap between the theory and practice of people's attitudes.

So on personal issues, Britain emerges an increasingly socially liberal country. However, it is important to add that we should not assume that this applies to other issues. One important area, for example, not covered here and needing further research is our attitude to race; forthcoming work by NatCen suggests that no such similar liberalisation of attitudes has occurred in that area (Kelley et al, 2017).

Brexit and immigration: a country divided

What the 2016 EU referendum decision actually gave a mandate for in the Brexit negotiations is a matter of near-daily debate in parliament and the media. While our report does not address this issue, it can help settle the hotly contested topic of what issues were at stake when voters went to the polls.

Our analysis suggests that the idea that the referendum was a lightning rod for a rising 'anti-politics' tide is wide of the mark. People's level of trust in government at most played only a minor role in influencing how they voted. Instead, the result reflected the concerns of older, more 'authoritarian' or social conservative voters who were particularly worried about immigration. Any suggestion that immigration was not at the heart of this vote runs counter to what we have found.

The division about immigration that was evident in how people voted in the EU referendum is mirrored in attitudes to immigration itself. In the years leading up to the vote there was a stark and growing divide between young people with a degree education and older people with no formal qualifications in their views about the economic impact of immigration. For example, 62% of those with a degree, and 48% of those aged 18-29 now believe immigration has a positive impact on the economy. In contrast, just 29% of those with GCSEs as their highest level of qualification or no qualifications and just 29% of those aged over 70 hold the same view. Our analysis of the latest

European-wide data on this subject shows that this social divide in attitudes towards immigration is bigger than anywhere else in Europe.

Although views about attitudes towards immigration may have polarised, it is not clear that people have become more concerned about immigration. However, there is widespread agreement that the country should be selective in who it allows to come here. Significant majorities feel the ability to speak English (87%, up from 77% in 2002), a commitment to the British "way of life" (84%, up from 78%) and possessing needed skills (82%, up from 71%) are important criteria for selecting migrants.

Conclusion

We started by highlighting the range of theories that now abound to explain the current state of the nation. Our report shows that none of them quite tells the whole picture.

The differences in EU Referendum vote choice were more marked by education level than class, and early indications from the recent general election suggest the differences were most marked by age. Therefore, the 'anywhere'/'somewhere', 'open'/'closed' and 'culture wars' theories seem worth exploring more. However, they all suggest or imply that the social conservatism of older people will hold out against the liberalism of the young. This thought does not sit easily with the liberalisation of older people's attitudes to pre-marital sex and same-sex relationships, especially as the change seems to be accelerating. Generational divides on these issues remain, but they are closing. If anything, views on personal relationships are now a source of growing cross-generational unity rather than division.

The idea that a rising 'anti-politics' was at the heart of the EU referendum decision is also found wanting. While it is a factor, it is apparently only a small one. The theory that we are split between those doing well economically from globalisation and those 'left behind' is not, in contrast, undermined, but it is not the only or even necessarily the most significant divide on the EU question. Working-class people did lean towards Brexit, but a person's education level was far more important in identifying how they voted than class. Cultural concerns about immigration, identity and sovereignty mattered, not just concerns about the economic consequences of globalisation. We are, it seems, a country split on the intertwined issues of the EU and immigration, and especially between younger graduates and older people without qualifications. Indeed, it seems that the gap on attitudes towards immigration is widening and has become one of the most significant in Europe.

Looking down more traditional left versus conservative political lines, supporters from either side can be buoyed by these findings (they would therefore be wise to not just read the parts of the report they find most appealing). For those on the left, it does seem that the country is tiring of austerity. There are also signs that attitudes

to benefit recipients are softening, and the majority think even low-level tax evasion is unacceptable. However, conservatives can be reassured that people remain committed to wanting a strong response to crime and terror, and the proportion wanting an increase in defence spending is the highest yet. While most people are tough on tax evasion, they are even tougher on benefit fraud. In both cases many of the trends that we see in these areas are important but not revolutionary. Anyone looking to use them to make stark claims about the end of this or that era, ideology or creed will not be someone too troubled by actual evidence.

It is perhaps always the National Centre for Social Research and the BSA survey's job to cut across our desire to explain events with simple narratives. However, on balance, we do seem more socially liberal, keener on more tax and spend and tough on law, order and security, while we are very clearly divided on the EU and immigration. Whatever our views, let us hope there is always unity on the need to explore our differences with civility, and on the importance of robust social research to measure them.

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The data for Figure 1 are shown below.

Table A.3 First and second priorities for extra spending on social benefits, combined, 1983–2014

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994	1995
Benefits for disabled people	58	55	58	58	54	60	59	58	51	57	58
Retirement pensions	64	66	64	65	68	67	65	63	63	64	68
Child benefits	20	22	23	23	24	30	32	35	31	34	33
Benefits for single parents	21	16	18	18	16	17	18	19	18	14	12
Benefits for the unemployed	32	35	31	33	33	25	21	22	32	26	25
None of these	1	1	1	*	1	*	1	*	1	1	1
Unweighted base	*1761*	*1675*	*1804*	*3100*	*2847*	*3029*	*2797*	*2918*	*2945*	*1167*	*1234*

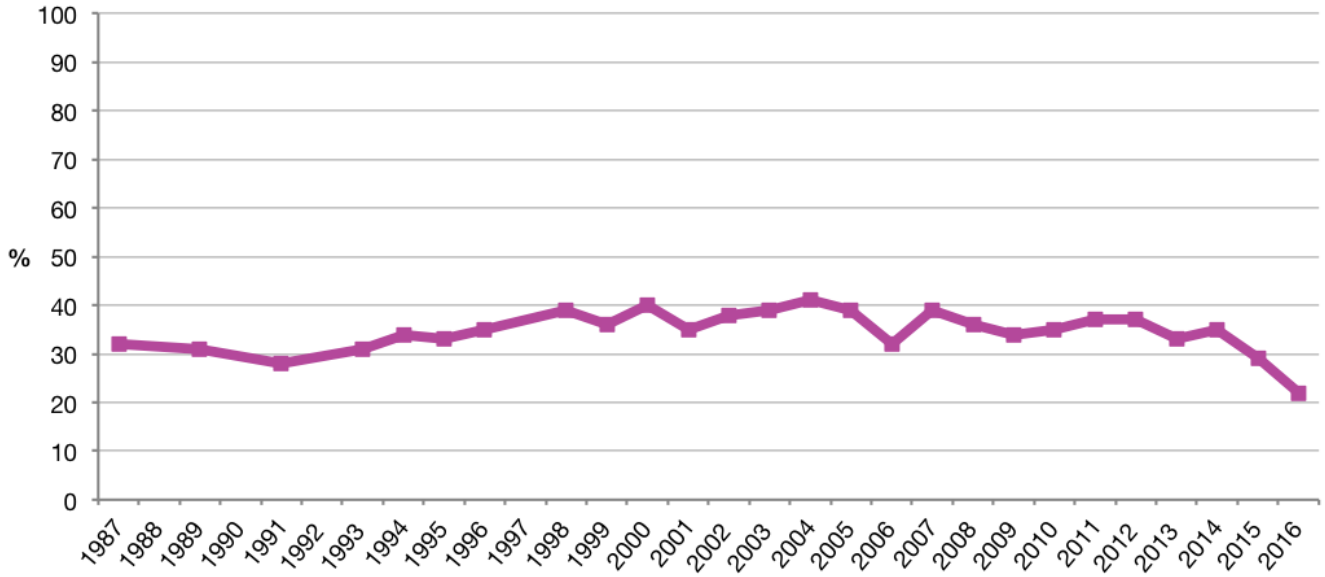
	1996	2000	2001	2003	2005	2007	2010	2012	2014	2016
Benefits for disabled people	54	61	57	54	53	54	53	59	60	67
Retirement pensions	71	74	76	79	80	78	72	72	67	60
Child benefits	30	33	35	38	39	42	42	35	37	36
Benefits for single parents	12	15	14	16	15	15	14	14	17	18
Benefits for the unemployed	26	13	12	10	8	7	11	12	13	13
None of these	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	4	3
Unweighted base	*3620*	*3426*	*3287*	*3272*	*3193*	*3094*	*3297*	*3248*	*2878*	*2942*

Tax avoidance and benefit manipulation

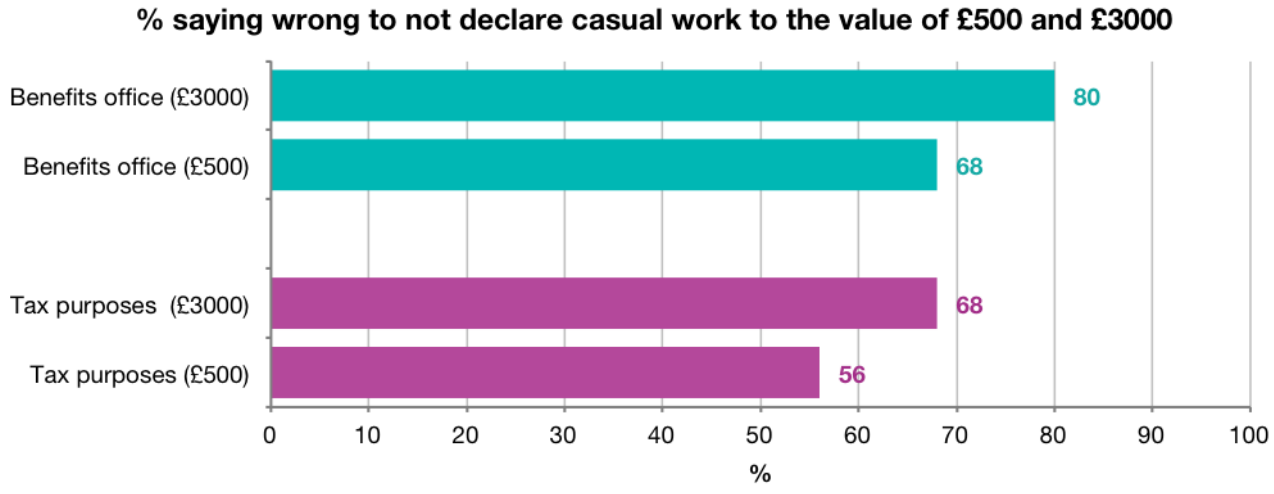
Views on its morality and prevalence

There has been a sharp shift in the perceived prevalence of benefit manipulation but people are more likely to think this is wrong than tax avoidance.

The proportion who say most dole claimants are 'fiddling' is at its lowest level since 1986



The public is more disapproving of benefit manipulation than tax avoidance



Overview

This chapter identifies a double standard in attitudes to tax avoidance and benefit manipulation: while around half or more regard both as wrong, benefit recipients are judged more harshly than tax offenders for what might be considered similar 'offences'. This double-standard varies across different groups: people in the highest income group and who are right-wing are less likely to say that tax avoidance is wrong, while people who hold liberal views are less likely to say that benefit manipulation is wrong. There has been a sudden drop in the perceived prevalence of benefit manipulation, which, if sustained, indicates a major shift in attitudes towards benefit claimants.

A double standard

Around half of the public think tax avoidance is wrong, but people are more likely to think that benefit manipulation is wrong.

- 61% think it is wrong for benefit claimants to use legal loopholes to increase their payments, compared with 48% thinking it is wrong to use legal loopholes to pay less tax.
- 68% think it is wrong to not declare casual work to the benefit office to gain £500, while 56% think it is wrong to gain £500 by not declaring casual work for tax purposes.

More deserving claimants?

There has been a sudden sharp shift in the perceived prevalence of benefit manipulation.

- The proportion agreeing that most dole claimants are 'fiddling' has dropped from 35% in 2014 to 22% in 2016 – the lowest level recorded in 30 years.
- People are less likely to say that they would conceal casual earnings for tax purposes than they used to; 40% said this in 1996, compared with 24% now.

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Introduction

It is unusual to consider the public's perceptions of loopholes around tax and benefits simultaneously (Doig et al., 2001; McGee 2012). Not only are taxation and social security different normative and administrative systems, but the social groups engaged in these practices may also be quite different: the groups most likely to manipulate their benefits claim are not necessarily the same as those trying to avoid tax by using clever accounting (Tunley, 2011). Yet despite these differences, there are important similarities: both tax avoidance and benefit fraud are normatively questionable practices used to increase personal incomes at the expense of the state. Moreover, for both systems, questionable activities can be either illegal ('tax evasion' and 'benefit fraud') or legal ('tax avoidance' and what we here term 'benefit manipulation').

It is unusual to consider the public's perceptions of loopholes around tax and benefits simultaneously

Media coverage

A cursory glance at the print and television media suggests the public is far more interested in and concerned about benefit fraud and manipulation than tax avoidance and evasion (Wiggan, 2012; Scott-Paul, 2013). All of the major terrestrial television channels have, over the last few years, commissioned programs exploring the lives of those who are receiving social security and who are living in poverty (Biressi and Nunn, 2010; Jensen, 2014). Indeed, when we ask respondents to the 2016 survey "How many TV programmes, newspaper or online articles about benefit fraud do you remember seeing in the last 6 months?", 27% report seeing none, 30% recall viewing one or two, 21% remember viewing three to five, while a further 21% have seen six or more such programmes or articles. Moreover, there is a general consensus that the media is critical, rather than sympathetic, in "the way it portrays people who engage in benefit fraud", with 71% of those who remember seeing at least one programme or article describing it as "very critical" or "somewhat critical". Furthermore, shows such as *Benefits Street*, *Skint*, *People Like Us*, *On Benefits* and *Proud*, among others, have become vehicles through which righteous indignation can be legitimately expressed regarding how certain elements of the population live, especially when such lifestyles are supported by taxes paid by 'hard-working families' (Jensen, 2014). The protagonists of these shows are often represented as part of an 'undeserving underclass' that is fraudulently or dishonestly receiving support from the state (Lundstrom, 2013).

As yet, there have not been any television shows dedicated to exploring the lives of tax avoiders or evaders (perhaps partly because they are less willing to receive such publicity). Tax avoidance and evasion have, of course, not been completely absent from public debate in the mass media (Levi, 2006). The Panama papers pushed the tax affairs of David Cameron's father into the spotlight, 'non-doms' dominated the 2015 general election for a few days, and, in

recent years, a number of celebrities have been embroiled in tax avoidance scandals (Robinson, 2015; Usborne, 2016; Morgan and Riley-Smith, 2016) . At the same time, there was also much criticism of the Conservative Treasury Minister David Gauke, who in 2012 said that paying tradesmen in cash to avoid VAT was "morally wrong"[1], suggesting that public attitudes here are not straightforward. Notwithstanding these events, most of the media attention on issues related to tax and benefits has focussed on the bottom of the income distribution rather than the top, suggesting that tax avoidance and evasion and benefit manipulation and fraud may not be considered moral equivalents.

Previous research

There are surprisingly few studies looking at the public's relative perceptions of tax and benefit loopholes

Given this intense media interest, there are surprisingly few studies looking at the public's *relative* perceptions of tax and benefit loopholes. A number of studies have looked at the public's perceptions of benefit fraud – for example, Geiger (2016) identifies five different recent surveys, which consistently show that the average person believes that around one quarter to one third of claims/spending is fraudulent. Typically these figures are compared with the Department for Work and Pension (DWP)'s own exhaustive estimates of benefit fraud based on tens of thousands of case reviews, of which the latest figures show that 0.3%-4.1% of spending is due to fraud (depending on the benefit) (Department for Work and Pensions, 2016). This is a reasonable comparison for those questions that refer to the share of *spending* that is fraudulent, but some questions refer to the share of *claims* that are fraudulent, which tends to be slightly higher for the few benefits for which DWP data are available (1.9%-10.0% depending on the benefit).[2]

Fewer studies have looked at the perceived prevalence of tax avoidance, but over 60% of the public believe it to be 'widespread' (Shah, 2015). The government has published some estimates of the scale of tax avoidance but, like benefit fraud this is by its very nature difficult to track and much less effort has gone into doing so (National Audit Office, 2015). There are therefore no widely accepted comparable figures regarding public perceptions of benefit fraud and tax avoidance against which to compare public perceptions. While 11% of the population admitted in one survey to 'legally' avoiding tax (YouGov, 2015), even studies that have compared tax inspectors' and tax experts' opinions have not reached consistent conclusions over what constitutes tax avoidance (Onu, 2016).

Potentially we can compare the official benefit fraud estimates to people's perceptions. What makes this an especially tricky issue to analyse quantitatively, though, is that there are differences

1 BBC (2012), 'Paying Tradesmen Cash in Hand Morally Wrong, Says Minister', BBC News, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-18964640

2 For example, according to the DWP estimates for 2015/16, 3.1% of JSA cases vs. 2.9% of JSA spending was fraudulent. The equivalent figures for Universal Credit are 2.8% (claims) vs. 1.9% (spending), for ESA are 2.8% (claims) vs. 1.9% (spending), and for working-age Housing Benefit are 10.0% (claims) vs. 5.0% (spending).

between what is *legally* considered fraud/evasion and what actions people *believe* are fraudulent (Geiger, 2016). DWP's estimates refer to legally-defined fraud, such as claiming to live alone in order to receive benefits when actually living with a partner. Yet, the public may interpret the word 'fraud' as including people who are judged to be 'undeserving' regardless of whether they are engaging in any illegal activity. For example, someone may have another child in order to gain additional financial support – support to which this individual would, in fact, be legally entitled. However, in an Ipsos MORI survey in 2013, just over 35% said that their definition of 'fraud' included "having more children so that they are entitled to more benefits" (Geiger, 2016). Moreover, 36% believed "people claiming benefits who haven't paid any taxes/national insurance" constituted fraud; and 46% reported that "people from abroad/immigrants claiming benefits" was also fraudulent. None of these activities constitute fraud in the legal sense.

When it comes to the perceived *morality* of using these legal and illegal loopholes, most of the existing research has focused on the wrongness of tax avoidance rather than benefit manipulation. Over 60% of the public believe tax avoidance is 'unacceptable' because it is unfair to those who pay their taxes (Shah, 2015), and a YouGov poll similarly found that most people believe that 'legally' avoiding tax is 'unacceptable' (YouGov, 2015). It also seems that this varies by income, with more affluent households saying they were slightly more likely to participate in tax avoidance schemes if they were unlikely to get caught (YouGov, 2015). (It is worth adding in brief that the public makes similar moral judgements about tax avoidance by multinational corporations (ComRes, 2013), though this is not our focus in this chapter). In contrast, there may be situations – such as receiving cash-in-hand payments – that are technically illegal but which many believe are normatively acceptable (McGee, 2012). Data collected as part of the 2006 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey suggest that only around 40% of people thought that paying someone cash-in-hand to avoid VAT was wrong, and that over 70% said that they themselves would do it (reported in a blog by Baumberg, 2012)[3].

The only studies that have compared the perceived morality of tax and benefit fraud simultaneously are Edlund (1999) and Halla & Schneider (2014), both of which use one item apiece on tax and benefits. For example, Edlund compared responses to the questions, "Do you feel it is wrong or not if… (i) A taxpayer does not report all of his income in order to pay less income tax?", (ii) A person gives the government incorrect information about himself to get government benefits that he is not entitled to?" Majorities in both the USA and Norway in 1991 agreed that both of these were "wrong" or "seriously wrong", although the wrongness of benefit fraud was felt to be slightly higher. Halla & Schneider similarly compare "claiming state

3 Data on these measures collected as part of the 2016 BSA survey are discussed in the main body of this chapter.

benefits which you are not entitled to" to "cheating on tax", and find that people believe that both are wrong, but that benefit fraud is seen as less justifiable in 21 of 29 countries. However, it is difficult to know if this is due to different moral standards being applied to taxation versus social security, or simply that the question does not ask about equivalent situations.

There is therefore much we do not know about legal and illegal manipulation of the tax and benefits systems and, in particular, people's perceptions of one versus the other. Data collected as part of the BSA 2016 therefore provide a unique lens on these issues by asking similar questions about taxation and benefits, providing some of the most robust empirical evidence available on the perceived morality and prevalence of manipulation of both of these systems.

How wrong are tax avoidance and benefit manipulation?

The use of legal loopholes

We begin by examining perceptions of the extent to which tax avoidance and benefit manipulation are wrong. The 2016 BSA survey included two questions designed to measure people's feelings about the morality of using legal 'loopholes' to reduce the amount of tax one pays (tax avoidance), versus using such loopholes to increase one's benefit payments (benefit manipulation). We asked respondents:

> ***Suppose someone used a loophole in the system to reduce the amount of tax they pay, without breaking the law. What would your view of this be?***
>
> ***Suppose someone used a loophole in the system to increase their benefit payments, without breaking the law. What would your view of this be?***

21% think it is "rarely" or "never" wrong to use loopholes to pay less tax, considerably more than the 14% who think this for increasing benefits

As shown in Table 1, a clear majority (61%) think that it is wrong ("usually" or "always") for benefit claimants to use legal loopholes to increase their payments. A smaller proportion (just under half) think it is always or usually wrong for taxpayers to use loopholes to avoid tax. Conversely, 21% think it is "rarely" or "never" wrong to use loopholes to pay less tax, considerably more than the 14% who think this for increasing benefits. This suggests that fewer people are disapproving of taxpayers 'gaming the system' to withhold tax than of benefit claimants who engage in similar behaviour to increase the payments they receive.

Exploring these questions together on their original five-point answer scales, we find that a majority (56%) provide answers indicating a view that tax avoidance and benefit manipulation are equally wrong. Among those who feel they are not morally equivalent, almost three times as many people (30%) feel that benefit manipulation is more wrong than tax avoidance, as opposed to thinking that tax avoidance is more wrong than benefit manipulation (12%).

Table 1 Attitudes to the morality of exploiting legal loopholes and benefit fraud

	Using loopholes to reduce tax	Using loopholes to increase benefits	False information to support benefit claim
How wrong	%	%	%
Usually or always wrong	48	61	91
Sometimes wrong	30	23	7
Rarely or never wrong	21	14	1
Unweighted base	*2942*	*2942*	*2942*

Interpreting responses to these questions may not be entirely straightforward however. The word 'loophole' may have a normative connotation – suggesting a deliberate action which goes against the intention of the system. This may naturally lead people towards perceiving this activity as 'wrong', inflating the perceived wrongness of the action. However, it is difficult to imagine a general question on this type of activity which does not suffer from this problem.

Beyond the manipulation of legal loopholes, the 2016 survey also asked about the morality of knowingly giving false information to support a benefit claim – in other words, benefit fraud. We asked respondents:

> ***Suppose someone knowingly gave false information to support their benefit claim. What would your view about this be?***

As shown in the final column of Table 1, an overwhelming majority (91%) feel that this is always or usually wrong, with only 1% feeling that it is rarely or never wrong. These proportions are similar to those recorded in both the USA and Norway in 1991, suggesting that most people in most places – even if not quite everyone – think that outright benefit fraud is wrong (Edlund, 1999).

Unfortunately, no questions were asked about the wrongness of tax evasion – but given the responses in this section, we would expect an overwhelming majority of people to also think that this is wrong.

Cash-in-hand work

Alongside general questions on the morality of exploiting loopholes, BSA 2016 also included specific questions on illegally failing to declare cash-in-hand work to the tax and benefits office. We asked if the behaviour described in the following two scenarios is wrong or not wrong (people randomly received different versions of the questionnaire specifying either £500 or £3,000 as the cash amount):

> ***An unemployed person on benefits takes a casual job and is paid in cash. He does not report it to the benefit office and is £500/£3,000 in pocket.***

A person in paid work takes on an extra weekend job and is paid in cash. He does not declare it for tax and so is £500/£3,000 in pocket.

People are more likely to disapprove of a benefit claimant concealing cash-in-hand earnings from the benefit office than they are to disapprove of someone in paid employment failing to declare this for tax

Table 2 presents the breakdown of responses to these questions. In line with the results above, people are more likely to disapprove of a benefit claimant concealing cash-in-hand earnings from the benefit office than they are to disapprove of someone in paid employment failing to declare this for tax. This is equally true for both the smaller and larger cash amounts we ask about, although it is worth noting that, in both cases, people are more likely to think that failing to declare a larger amount is wrong, than failing to declare a smaller amount.

Table 2 Attitudes towards the morality of cash-in-hand work

	Not declaring a £500 gain …		Not declaring a £3000 gain …	
	… to benefits office	… for tax purposes	… to benefits office	… for tax purposes
How wrong to not declare cash-in-hand job …	%	%	%	%
Wrong or seriously wrong	68	56	80	68
A bit wrong	23	31	13	22
Not wrong	4	7	2	5
Unweighted base	*1591*	*1591*	*770*	*770*

Comparing responses to the questions on the morality of cash-in-hand work across benefits and tax on the original four-point answer scales, we find that a majority of people provide responses indicating that it is equally wrong to conceal cash-in-hand work from the benefits office or for tax purposes (59%/63% provide combinations of answers demonstrating this for the £500/£3,000 scenarios respectively). Around a quarter of people in each scenario (26%/24%) provide responses suggesting that a benefit claimant concealing cash-in-hand earnings from the benefits office is worse than a taxpayer concealing such earnings from the HMRC. Less than 10% appear to express the opposite viewpoint (8%/6%).

How would people themselves behave?

While the 2016 survey did not collect any evidence on how people actually behave, we asked respondents, as part of the self-completion element of the survey, how they would anticipate behaving – which enables us to see how this compares with their moral judgement of others. After each of the questions on cash-in-hand work presented above, we asked respondents:

And how likely do you think it is that <u>you</u> would do this, if you found yourself in this situation?

As shown in Table 3, a substantial proportion (20%/24% for £3000/£500) say that they would be likely to conceal cash-in-hand earnings from the tax authorities, while slightly fewer (14%/20%) say they would hide such earnings from the 'benefits office'.

Table 3 Self-reported likelihood of failing to report cash-in-hand earnings

	Not declaring a £500 gain …		Not declaring a £3000 gain …	
	… to benefits office	… for tax purposes	… to benefits office	… for tax purposes
How likely to not declare cash-in-hand job	%	%	%	%
Fairly or very likely	20	24	14	20
Not very or not at all likely	72	69	78	74
Can't choose	8	8	8	6
Unweighted base	*1591*	*1591*	*770*	*770*

Another aspect of behaviour we probed was whether respondents would report someone they knew to have claimed falsely, by asking the following question:

> ***Imagine that you found out that someone falsely claimed benefits amounting to [£500/£3,000]. You know this person but they are not a close friend or family member. How likely or unlikely is it that you would report them?***

Only a minority of people say that they would report someone for falsely claiming benefits

Only a minority of people say that they would report someone for falsely claiming benefits. As found in relation to the questions on cash-in-hand work, people make slightly different judgements when a greater amount of money is involved. Among those asked about the £500 false claim, 23% say that they would be very or fairly likely to report their acquaintance; when the figure specified is £3,000, a somewhat greater proportion (33%) say they would report them.

Given that 91% feel that falsely claiming benefits is wrong, this suggests that a considerable proportion of people who consider benefit fraud to be wrong would nevertheless be unwilling to report an acquaintance they knew to be committing it. Further inspection of the data confirms this. Sixty four per cent of people who think that benefit fraud is always or usually wrong say that they would be *unlikely* to report someone they knew to have claimed falsely. The same question is not asked about tax evasion, but it may well be the case that people are similarly unlikely to report people for illegally failing to pay tax, even though they think this is wrong.

Perceived prevalence of tax avoidance and benefit manipulation

In addition to asking for their moral judgements on tax avoidance and benefit manipulation, we asked respondents how common they perceive these activities to be, using the following two questions:

> ***Thinking about the whole of Britain, out of every 100 people who pay tax, how many do you think have used a loophole in the rules to reduce the amount of tax they pay, without breaking the law?***
>
> ***Thinking about the whole of Britain, out of every 100 people receiving benefits, how many do you think have used a loophole in the rules to increase their benefit payments, without breaking the law?***

Contrary to attitudes to the morality of legal loopholes, as shown in Table 4 there is little difference in perceptions of the prevalence of the use of such loopholes in relation to tax and benefits. On average, people believe the proportion of benefit claimants who have exploited loopholes to increase their benefits is larger than the proportion of taxpayers who have done so to avoid tax, but this difference is quite small (37 out of every 100 claimants vs. 32 out of every 100 taxpayers). Nevertheless, on an individual level, more people provide answers indicating a belief that benefit manipulation is more common than tax avoidance (45%) than provide answers indicating the opposite belief - that tax avoidance is more common than benefit manipulation (23%).

On average, people believe the proportion of benefit claimants who have exploited loopholes to increase their benefits is larger than the proportion of taxpayers who have done so to avoid tax, but this difference is quite small

Table 4 Perceived prevalence of tax avoidance and benefit manipulation

	Out of every 100 taxpayers/claimants, how many have…			
	…exploited loophole to reduce tax	**…exploited loophole to increase benefits**	**…given false information in benefit claim**	**…given false information in benefit claim in local area**
Average perception (out of every 100)	32	37	34	24
% perceiving….	%	%	%	%
0-24 out of every 100	44	35	40	51
25-49 out of every 100	20	19	21	13
50-74 out of every 100	18	26	21	11
75-100 out of every 100	9	11	10	5
Don't know/refused	8	10	8	20
Unweighted base	*2942*	*2942*	*2942*	*2942*

We asked two further questions about the prevalence of illegal benefit fraud (going beyond the exploitation of legal loopholes), which – to our knowledge for the first time in a survey – focused on perceived fraud at both the national and local levels:

> ***Thinking about the whole of Britain, out of every 100 people receiving benefits, how many do you think have broken the law by knowingly giving false information to support their claim?***
>
> ***Now thinking about the local neighbourhood where you live, out of every 100 people receiving benefits, how many do you think have broken the law by knowingly giving false information to support their claim?***

On average, people believe illegal benefit fraud to be almost as common as the legal exploitation of benefits loopholes

No equivalent question was asked about the perceived prevalence of illegal tax evasion (rather than legal tax avoidance).

Responses to these questions are presented in the final two columns of Table 4. It is notable that, on average, people believe illegal benefit fraud to be almost as common as the legal exploitation of benefits loopholes. It is possible that this reflects people's true beliefs about the prevalence of these two different types of activity. However, it is also possible that, despite the question wording, people do not draw a strong conceptual distinction between legal manipulation and illegal fraud: as we noted in the introduction to this chapter, a previous Ipsos MORI survey found that substantial proportions of people described entirely legal scenarios as examples of 'benefit fraud'.

Another notable finding from Table 4 is that, on average, people perceive the national prevalence of benefit fraud to be higher than the prevalence in their local neighbourhood. Almost 20% feel unable to give a figure for the local prevalence of benefit fraud, compared with just 8% who feel unable to give an estimate for the national picture. Taken together, these findings may suggest that people are relying on different sources of information to estimate how common false benefit claims are at the national versus local levels. It seems likely that people's perceptions of the national picture are more strongly influenced by national media coverage; whereas their perceptions of the local situation may draw more strongly on direct experience. This may explain why people are less willing to give a figure for the local prevalence of fraud: they feel that, in the absence of direct knowledge, they should not hazard a guess. This is however speculative, and is something worth exploring in future research.

DWP define a case of benefit fraud as one in which the claimant does not meet the conditions for receiving the benefit (or the rate being paid), and can reasonably be expected to be aware that they have not provided accurate or complete information to support their claim.[4] This definition matches the BSA question wording – which specifically references providing false information – quite closely. In the 2015/2016 financial year, DWP estimated that 1.1% of benefit

4 This is differentiated from 'claimant error', where the "claimant has provided inaccurate or incomplete information…but there is no fraudulent intent on the claimant's part"

spending in Britain meets their definition of fraud. Even accepting that the share of *claims* that are fraudulent is slightly higher than the share of expenditure (see above), the BSA respondents on average seem to vastly overestimate benefit fraud compared to any plausible figure .We must bear in mind that respondents may mean something different by 'fraud' than is specified by the question (as we have already discussed), and that some fraud will be undetected even by DWP's robust fraud-counting exercise. Nevertheless, as one of us has argued in a more extensive review of whether 'benefit myths' exist (Geiger, 2016), "while it is difficult to know the true level of benefit fraud exactly, the public overestimate fraud compared to any reasonable figure."

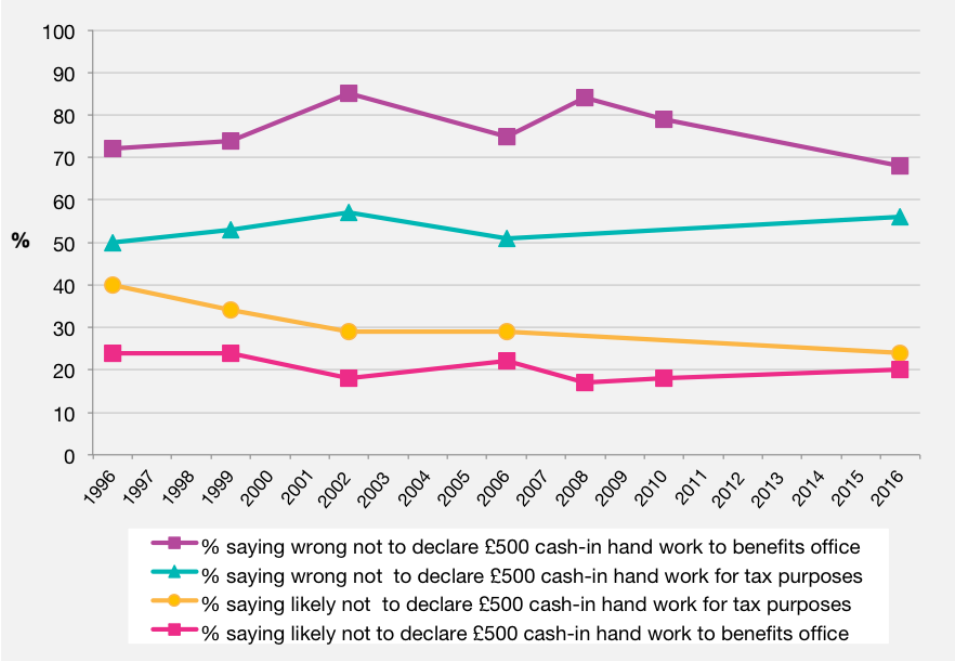
While HMRC do publish estimates on the amount of tax lost to avoidance and evasion, they do not publish statistics on the proportion of taxpayers who are engaged in tax avoidance, or on the proportion of tax returns which include the exploitation of legal loopholes. Without these data it is impossible to determine the accuracy of the public's perceptions of the prevalence of tax avoidance. However, given the large proportion of British taxpayers who pay tax solely through VAT and PAYE, and therefore have a limited ability to exploit 'loopholes', it is plausible that respondents are also overestimating the prevalence of tax avoidance.

Have perceptions changed over time?

While many of these questions were asked for the first time in 2016, the questions about the morality of failing to declare cash-in-hand work of a value of £500 and the respondent's anticipated behaviour in relation to this, have been asked periodically as part of the BSA survey series. Figure 1, which compares responses over time, shows that, there have been noticeable fluctuations over time, but few systematic trends over the past twenty years. The sole exception is in anticipated behaviour regarding declaring cash-in-hand earnings for tax purposes. In 1996, almost 40% said they would not declare such earnings; this figure has now fallen to just 24%. While we can speculate that the more recent dip reflects increasingly negative coverage of tax avoidance in the mainstream media – such as the Panama Papers and celebrity tax avoidance scandals (Morgan and Riley-Smith, 2016) – it remains unclear why the fall was sharpest between 1996-2002.

In 1996, almost 40% said they would not declare such earnings; this figure has now fallen to just 24%

Figure 1 Views on the morality of cash-in-hand work, 1996-2016



The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

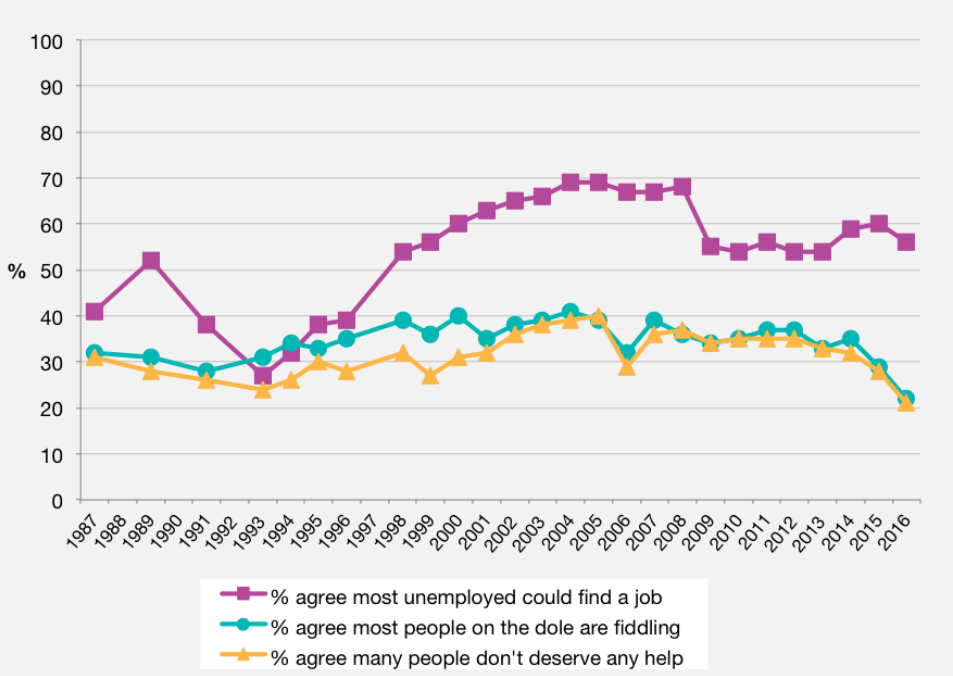
In contrast, attitudes towards the *prevalence* of benefit fraud and manipulation have changed substantially over the years. While the detailed questions on the prevalence of fraud and manipulation were asked for the first time in 2016, to assess how perceptions have changed over time we can examine three broader questions which address this issue. Every year we ask respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following statements:

> ***Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another***
>
> ***Many people who get social security don't really deserve any help***
>
> ***Around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one***

The proportion agreeing that most people on the dole are fiddling has dropped from 35% to 22% in just two years

The proportions agreeing or strongly agreeing with each of these three statements is shown in Figure 2. Previous BSA reports have noted the greater perceived prevalence of fraud/undeservingness in the late 1990s, along with the effect of the 2008-2009 recession (for example, Baumberg, 2014). What is new, however, is the sharp drop in the perceived prevalence of benefit manipulation/undeservingness since 2014. The proportion agreeing that most people on the dole are fiddling has dropped from 35% to 22% in just two years. Similarly, the proportion saying that most social security claimants don't deserve help has dropped from 32% to 21% across the same period.

Figure 2 Views on the prevalence of benefit manipulation, 1987-2016



The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Noticeably these changes have *not* occurred because of any perceived change in the labour market, with similar proportions saying that most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one across the three most recent years. While we will need to examine the results of the 2017 survey to see if these changes are sustained – the smaller drops in 2006 now look like a one-year aberration – this may indicate an important change in the way the public thinks about benefit claimants.

Do attitudes vary across society?

We finally turn to examine whether different sections of society hold distinct views about the morality of manipulating the tax or benefits systems. We might anticipate that some groups are more likely than others to believe that hiding money from the tax office or benefits office is wrong. People with particular levels of income or wealth would have comparatively greater and fewer opportunities to manipulate the tax and benefits systems – and would also be likely to have greater or lesser contact with others in a position to do this. We might anticipate that particular sections of society are more likely to condone behaviour that 'they' themselves undertake – or which is undertaken by others known to or similar to them. On the other hand, views about the morality of tax avoidance and benefit manipulation might be influenced by wider political and moral attitudes and values – particularly the extent to which the individual holds liberal or authoritarian views more generally. In this section, we examine whether our data lend support to these two different theories.

We might anticipate that particular sections of society are more likely to condone behaviour that 'they' themselves undertake – or which is undertaken by others known to or similar to them

Groups defined by income

We divided people by their reported levels of household income to see if richer people apply different standards to tax and benefits manipulation than do poorer people. To identify more accurately the association between income and beliefs about fraud – excluding where possible associations with other factors – we here present the results of statistical models that examine household income differences after removing their associations with age and sex.[5]

Table 5 Income and the morality of exploiting legal loopholes (after controlling for age and sex)+

	Household income quartile [6]				
	Lowest	**2nd lowest**	**2nd highest**	**Highest**	*Significance of income*
Adjusted % agreeing that always/usually wrong to use legal loopholes …					
… to reduce tax	53	49	49	42	0.019
… to increase benefits	58	63	61	59	0.010
Adjusted % providing answers indicating that *more* wrong to use legal loopholes …					
… to increase benefits	26	32	32	32	0.001
… to reduce tax	16	13	11	9	n/a++
Unweighted base	*508*	*596*	*515*	*644*	
Adjusted % likely or very likely to <u>not</u> declare cash-in-hand work …					
… to benefits office, for £500 gain	18	17	16	24	0.101
… for tax purposes, for £500 gain	22	23	24	28	0.002
Unweighted base	*305*	*336*	*284*	*382*	

+ The table is based on a multinomial regression model that controls for sex and age; the percentages in the table are the average marginal effects across income groups after taking these into account.

++ Whether people say that loopholes are more commonly exploited to increase benefits vs. to reduce tax is contained within a single variable, and therefore only one significance estimate applies to both rows.

There is a correlation between income and the likelihood that people will believe that using legal loopholes is wrong

From the analysis presented in Table 5, we can see that there is a correlation between income and the likelihood that people will believe that using legal loopholes is wrong. In particular, people in the highest quartile of household incomes are the least likely to think that

5 Tables 5 and 6 present the results of multinomial logistic regression models, controlling for age (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-74 and 75+) and (binary) sex, using the standard BSA weights. The tables show average predicted probabilities across the sample, after controlling for these variables.

6 The exact pre-tax household income quartiles are: Lowest (less than £1,200 per month), 2nd lowest (£1,200-£2,200/pcm), 2nd highest (£2,201-£3,700/pcm) and Highest (more than £3,700/pcm); the models exclude the 15% of the sample (449 people) who refused to indicate their income.

using legal tax loopholes is wrong (42%, compared with 53% among those in the lowest income quartile). The highest income group are also the least likely to have provided responses indicating that using legal loopholes to reduce tax is more wrong than using loopholes to increase benefits (9%, compared with 16% among the lowest income group). The views of the highest and lowest income groups in relation to using legal loopholes to reduce benefits are not significantly different (although there is significant variation by income across this measure as a whole). However, the lowest income group is the least likely to have provided responses suggesting that it is more wrong to use loopholes to increase benefit payments than to use loopholes to reduce tax (26%, compared with 32% among all other income groups).

These patterns may be explained by straightforward economic interests: those with the highest incomes are the most likely beneficiaries of the exploitation of tax loopholes, whereas the lowest income group are the most likely beneficiaries of benefit manipulation. However, economic interests do not explain why the richest group are also relatively unlikely to say that benefit manipulation is wrong. This may be a consequence of those on the highest incomes perceiving the regular income benefit claimants receive to be very low – potentially justifying the exploitation of legal loopholes to increase it. This is consistent with more detailed analysis of the results shown in Table 4, which shows that the richest group are the most likely to say that they would fail to declare £500 to the tax authorities (and are also slightly – if not quite significantly – more likely to say that they would conceal earnings from the benefits office). Alternatively, it may be the case that individuals with higher incomes are more liberal and therefore less likely to make or act on moral judgements – or this group may simply consider £500 to be too small a sum to be worth declaring.

The highest income group consistently think that using loopholes is much less common than those with lower incomes

Table 6 presents income-related differences in the perceived prevalence of fraud and manipulation. It highlights much greater differences by income than those discussed previously. The highest income group consistently think that using loopholes is much less common than those with lower incomes, perceiving 26 out of 100 taxpayers on average to be using legal loopholes (compared with 39 out of 100 among the lowest income group), and 32 out of 100 benefit claimants to be using legal loopholes (compared with 41 out of 100 among the lowest income group).

Table 6 Income and the perceived prevalence of exploiting legal loopholes (after controlling for age and sex)+

	Household income quartile				
	Lowest income	**Mid-low income**	**Mid-high income**	**Highest income**	*Significance of income*
Out of every 100 taxpayers/ claimants, adjusted average perceived number that have …					
… exploited loophole to reduce tax	39	32	31	26	0.000
…exploited loophole to increase benefits	41	39	38	32	0.000
… given false information in benefit claim	40	38	34	26	0.000
… given false information in benefit claim in local area	29	26	25	18	0.000
Adjusted % providing answer indicating that loopholes are *more* commonly exploited …					
… to increase benefits	38	48	48	47	0.058
… to reduce tax	27	22	23	24	n/a++
Unweighted base (exc. don't knows)	*408-475*	*490-562*	*426-483*	*567-613*	

+ The table is based on a multinomial regression model that controls for sex and age; the percentages in the table are the average marginal effects across income groups after taking these into account.

++ Whether people say that loopholes are more commonly exploited to increase benefits vs. to reduce tax is contained within a single variable, and therefore only one significance estimate applies to both rows.

It is possible that this variation partly reflects variations in the levels of education of the different income groups – both in terms of accuracy (as we noted above, it is likely that most people provide considerable over-estimates of the use of legal loopholes) and numeracy (Ansolabehere et al., 2013). Nevertheless, Table 6 also shows that there are some income-related differences in whether legal loopholes are seen to be more commonly exploited for tax or benefits, with 38% of the lowest income group providing responses indicating that legal benefit loopholes are more commonly used than legal tax loopholes, compared with 47%-48% of the other income groups.

The highest income group think that benefit fraud is lowest both nationally and in their own area

The perceived prevalence of illegal benefit fraud similarly varies by income. The highest income group think that benefit fraud is lowest both nationally and in their own area (26 out of 100 and 18 out of 100 respectively), much lower than the perceived level among those in the lowest income group (40 out of 100 and 29 out of 100 respectively).

Groups defined by political ideology

The BSA 34th Report as a whole examines whether we have witnessed a decline in liberal attitudes in recent years. Contributing

to this assessment, in this section we examine whether people whose views can broadly be classified as liberal or authoritarian think differently about tax and benefit manipulation. To do this, we have split the population into four groups based on the standard BSA scales for left-right and libertarian-authoritarian attitudes (see Technical details): these groups have been labelled as 'left-wing authoritarians', 'left-wing liberals', 'right-wing authoritarians', and 'right-wing liberals'. We have divided the sample in half on each scale, in order to create four roughly equally-sized groups of the population.

The results presented in Table 7 show that political ideology is very important when it comes to the perceived morality of exploiting legal loopholes. For perceptions of tax-related morality, what matters most is whether people are left-wing or right-wing – 39%-42% of those who are right-wing think that it is wrong to use loopholes to reduce tax (irrespective of whether they hold liberal or authoritarian views), compared with 51%-58% of those who are left-wing. In contrast, what matters most for benefits-related morality is whether people hold liberal or authoritarian views – 55% of liberals think that it is wrong to use loopholes to increase benefits, compared with 64%-66% of authoritarians.

While political ideology strongly relates to moral judgements, it appears less important for self-reported behaviour

While political ideology strongly relates to moral judgements, it appears less important for self-reported behaviour. Liberals are slightly more likely than authoritarians to say that they would fail to declare casual earnings to the benefits office, but there are no significant differences around declaring earnings for tax purposes.

Table 7 Ideology and the morality of exploiting legal loopholes (after controlling for age and sex)+

	Political ideology				
	Liberal and left-wing	**Liberal and right-wing**	**Authoritarian and left-wing**	**Authoritarian and right-wing**	*Significance of ideology*
Adjusted % saying that always/usually wrong to use legal loopholes …					
… to reduce tax	51	39	58	42	0.000
… to increase benefits	55	55	64	66	0.000
Adjusted % providing answer indicating that *more* wrong to use legal loopholes …					
… to increase benefits	21	30	30	40	0.000
… to reduce tax	17	8	14	8	n/a++
Unweighted base	*569*	*585*	*649*	*543*	
Adjusted % likely or very likely to not declare cash-in-hand work …					
… to benefits office, for £500 gain	26	21	16	15	0.059
… for tax purposes, for £500 gain	27	25	21	23	0.473
Unweighted base	*386*	*421*	*437*	*362*	

+ The table is based on a multinomial regression model that controls for sex and age; the percentages in the table are the average marginal effects across groups defined by political ideology after taking these into account.

++ Whether people say that loopholes are more commonly exploited to increase benefits vs. to reduce tax is contained within a single variable, and therefore only one significance estimate applies to both rows.

Finally, Table 8 presents data to allow us to ascertain if there are ideological differences underpinning the perceived prevalence of benefit fraud and the use of tax/benefit loopholes. Authoritarians believe the prevalence of *all* these behaviours is greater than liberals do. Those holding liberal views tend to be more highly educated than authoritarians, so this may reflect similar education-related effects to those noted in relation to different income groups in the previous section. However, it is interesting to see that authoritarians are also more likely to provide answers indicating that the exploitation of benefits loopholes is more common than the exploitation of tax loopholes (50-51% of authoritarians express such a view, compared with 38%-43% of liberals).

Table 8 Ideology and the perceived prevalence of exploiting legal loopholes (after controlling for age and sex)+

	Political ideology				
	Liberal left-wing	**Liberal right-wing**	**Authoritarian left-wing**	**Authoritarian right-wing**	*Significance of ideology*
Out of every 100 taxpayers/ claimants, perceived number that have …					
… exploited loophole to reduce tax	26	28	38	34	0.000
… exploited loophole to increase benefits	28	30	47	42	0.000
… given false information in benefit claim	24	25	44	39	0.000
… given false information in benefit claim in local area	18	16	33	26	0.000
% providing answer indicating that loopholes are *more* commonly exploited …					
… to increase benefits	38	43	50	51	0.001
… to reduce tax	30	25	22	19	n/a++
Unweighted base (exc. don't knows)	*466-534*	*465-538*	*530-626*	*444-510*	

+ The table is based on a multinomial regression model that controls for sex and age; the percentages in the table are the average marginal effects across groups defined by political ideology after taking these into account.

++ Whether people say that loopholes are more commonly exploited to increase benefits vs. to reduce tax is contained within a single variable, and therefore only one significance estimate applies to both rows.

Conclusions

Tax avoidance and benefit manipulation do not seem to be morally equivalent in people's minds

Tax avoidance/evasion and benefit manipulation/fraud have been the subject of a great deal of recent political debate and policy reform, yet almost no studies have looked at how the public perceives these practices simultaneously. Using new questions asked on the 2016 BSA survey, we show that tax avoidance and benefit manipulation do not seem to be morally equivalent in people's minds; while both practices are perceived to be wrong by around half or more, benefit recipients appear to be judged more harshly for what might be considered a similar 'offence'. Previous qualitative research has suggested that this may be because tax avoiders are perceived to be retaining money they have earned (Bamfield and Horton, 2009), but it is also plausible that this double standard partly arises because of a

generally more negative attitude towards benefit claimants (and poor people) as a group.

Several other interesting findings emerge from these data. The public almost universally believes that lying to the 'benefits office' is wrong – but only a smaller majority regard concealing cash-in-hand work from the 'benefits office' (which technically constitutes benefit fraud) as wrong, and relatively few would report someone they know to be claiming fraudulently. This nuance is consistent with how people make ethical decisions: people will agree to abstract, normatively acceptable principles, but when such principles are placed in concrete contexts people are more likely to see morally acceptable reasons to deceive (Bartels et al., 2015). We also find that the public believes that fraud is higher nationally than it is in their local area. There appears to be a disconnect between the local, concrete experience of benefit fraud and the national rhetoric, perhaps because the preponderance of media coverage may have served to reinforce the sense that there is a large group of people somewhere in the country (even if they may not be apparent in in one's own neighbourhood) who are fraudulently claiming (Lundstrom, 2013; Tunley, 2011).

There appears to be a disconnect between the local, concrete experience of benefit fraud and the national rhetoric

Our most surprising finding is the sharp change in how common benefit fraud/manipulation is perceived to be. While 35% agreed that most dole claimants are 'fiddling' in one way or another in 2014, this has fallen to 22% in 2016 – the lowest level recorded in 30 years. If this fall is sustained in future surveys, this suggests there has been a major shift in the perception of benefit claimants. There has also been a decline since the mid-1990s in the proportion of people who say they would be likely to conceal casual earnings to avoid tax (from 40% to 24%), although this predates much of the increasingly negative media coverage of tax avoidance schemes. However, despite this decline, more people would still consider concealing earnings from the HMRC than would consider doing so from the benefits office (though this difference is now small).

Our most surprising finding is the sharp change in how common benefit fraud/manipulation is perceived to be

Finally, we found that different social groups perceive tax and benefit manipulation differently. Perhaps reflecting economic interests, richer people are less likely to think that tax avoidance is wrong, and more likely to say that they personally would not declare cash-in-hand earnings for tax. Yet this is not just about economics: the richest share the relative unwillingness of the poorest to say that benefit manipulation is wrong, and are also the group most likely to say that they would conceal casual earnings from the benefits office. The role of ideology is also complex: what matters most for *tax*-related morality is whether people are left-wing or right-wing, but what matters most for *benefits*-related morality is whether people hold liberal or authoritarian views.

Perhaps reflecting economic interests, richer people are less likely to think that tax avoidance is wrong, and more likely to say that they personally would not declare cash-in-hand earnings for tax

Overall, our results show that around half or more of the public is opposed to both illegal and legal manipulation of the tax and benefits system. However, beyond this, their feelings on the issue

are not straightforward. Despite overwhelmingly rejecting benefit fraud, most would not report someone they knew to be engaging in it, and substantial minorities are forgiving of the specific example of concealing casual earnings. Similarly, while economic interests may shape attitudes to tax avoidance and benefit fraud, here too we find that beliefs about fraud are not always entirely consistent with self-interested motives. Once you move beyond the obvious truisms ('fraud is bad'), attitudes toward fraud and using legal loopholes resist easy interpretation.

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Acknowledgements

NatCen Social Research is grateful to the Department for Work and Pensions for their financial support which enabled us to ask the questions reported in this chapter. The questions included on the 2016 survey were designed in collaboration between the Department for Work and Pensions and NatCen Social Research. The views expressed are those of the authors alone.

Appendix

The data for Figure 1 are shown below.

Table A.1 Views on the morality of cash-in-hand work, 1996-2016

	1996	1999	2002	2006	2008	2010	2016
% wrong or seriously wrong not to declare £500 cash-in-hand work …							
… to benefits office	72	74	85	75	84	79	68
… for tax purposes	50	53	57	51	n/a	n/a	56
% fairly or very likely themselves to not declare £500 cash-in-hand work …							
… to benefits office	24	24	18	22	17	18	20
… for tax purposes	40	34	29	29	n/a	n/a	24
Unweighted base	*1038*	*2450*	*2900*	*2822*	*3000*	*2791*	*1618*

n/a = not answered

The data for Figure 2 are shown below.

Table A.2 Views on the prevalence of benefit manipulation, 1987-2016

	1987	1989	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996
% agreeing that ...							
Most people on the dole are fiddling	32	31	28	31	34	33	35
Many people don't deserve any help	31	28	26	24	26	30	28
Most unemployed could find a job	41	52	38	27	32	38	39
Unweighted base	*1281*	*2604*	*2481*	*2567*	*2929*	*3135*	*3085*

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
% agreeing that ...							
Most people on the dole are fiddling	39	36	40	35	38	39	41
Many people don't deserve any help	32	27	31	32	36	38	39
Most unemployed could find a job	54	56	60	63	65	66	69
Unweighted base	*2531*	*2450*	*2980*	*2795*	*2900*	*873*	*2609*

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% agreeing that ...							
Most people on the dole are fiddling	39	32	39	36	34	35	37
Many people don't deserve any help	40	29	36	37	34	35	35
Most unemployed could find a job	69	67	67	68	55	54	56
Unweighted base	*2699*	*2822*	*2672*	*3000*	*967*	*2791*	*2845*

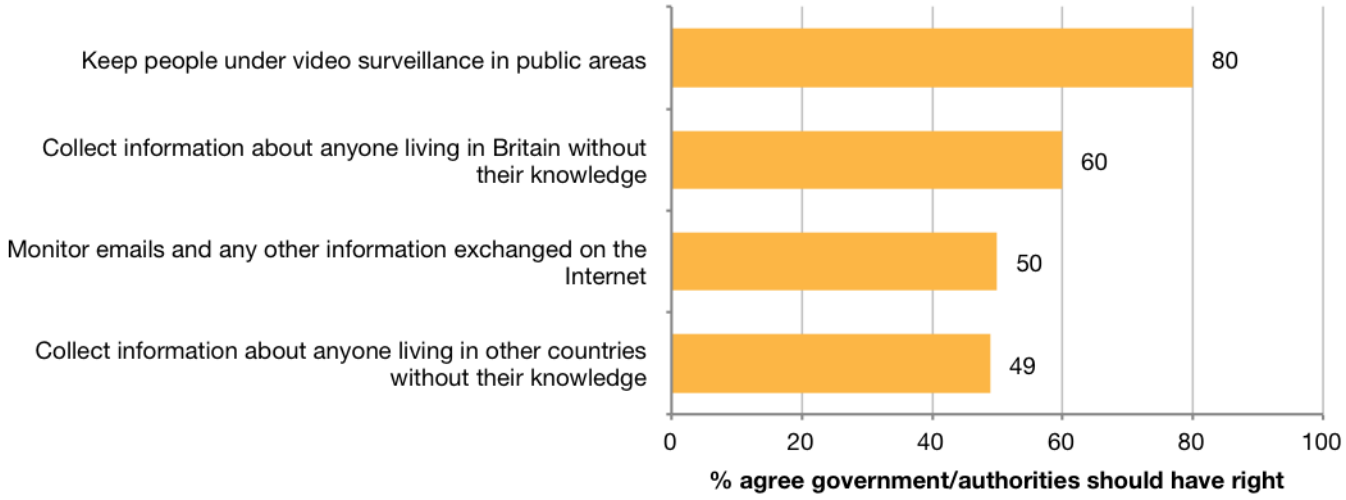
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
% agreeing that ...					
Most people on the dole are fiddling	37	33	35	29	22
Many people don't deserve any help	35	33	32	28	21
Most unemployed could find a job	54	54	59	60	56
Unweighted base	*2855*	*2832*	*2376*	*2781*	*2400*

Civil liberties

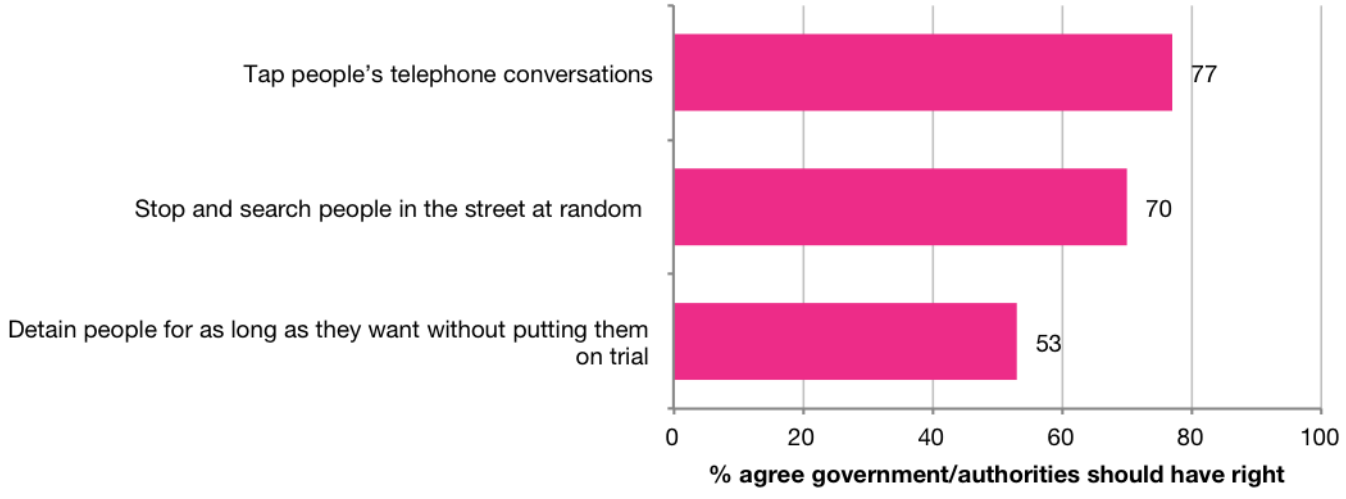
The law, individual rights and the government's role in national security

Public attitudes to the government's role in national security are comparatively iliberal. The public favours stronger state powers to tackle terrorism, with just over half in support of detaining people indefinitely without trial if a terrorist attack is suspected. Currently the law allows detainment without charge for a maximum of 14 days.

What should the government be allowed to do?



What should the government be allowed to do at the time of a suspected terrorist attack?



Overview

Public attitudes to civil rights are comparatively illiberal and generally chime with the current direction of public policy – especially in relation to the government's role in national security. However, the public is relatively divided on a number of issues, especially those relating to freedom of conscience and the rights of extremists, and attitudes have not moved in a consistent direction over the past two decades. And while the public is generally supportive of government activities in the area of national security, levels of support vary across different sections of society.

Public attitudes to civil liberties remain comparatively illiberal

Less than half of the public express a liberal view in relation to almost all of the issues asked about. However, attitudes have not changed in a consistent way over the past two decades.

- Disagreement with the view that the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence for some crimes has doubled since 1986 – from 19% to 37% now. 45% agree with this view.
- 41% think that detaining people for as long as the government wants without putting them on trial in times of terrorist threat should not be allowed, an increase of 10 percentage points since 2006 (31%). Around half (53%) think that this should be allowed.

The public is supportive of government activities in the area of national security

While the balance of public opinion supports government interventions despite the fact that these might limit individual freedoms, different sections of society express diverse views on this matter.

- 80% think the government definitely or probably should have the right to keep people under video surveillance in public areas, while 50% think they should have the right to monitor emails and other information exchanged on the internet.
- People who are older, are less well-educated, are positive about the government's success in dealing with threats to national security and who are concerned about immigration are all more likely to support government activities in relation to national security.

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Introduction

A consideration of the public's attitudes to civil liberties is very timely. This topic was last examined as part of the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey series more than a decade ago, based on data collected in 2005 (Johnson and Gearty, 2007). In the interim, a number of social, legal and political developments have changed the landscape against which attitudes to civil liberties need to be understood. In the main, these developments have resulted in public policy moving in an 'illiberal' direction, with the government tending to acquire greater authority and powers, at the expense of individual freedoms – in order to prevent and counter emerging forms of terrorism and criminality. Moreover, at the time of writing, the terrorist attacks that took place in Manchester and London between March and June 2017 forced campaigning for the 2017 General Election to shift its focus towards issues of national security, prompting discussion and assessment of past and future policy approaches in this area.

A number of social, legal and political developments have changed the landscape against which attitudes to civil liberties need to be understood

For the purpose of this chapter (and accepting that this is itself contentious) we adopt a wide and inclusive definition of civil liberties – encapsulating both positive 'rights to' and negative 'freedoms from' – that correlates broadly with more modern conceptions of human rights, guaranteed to individual citizens by law. Both implicate the state but in different ways. A 'right to' involves a correlative duty to provide – such as the right to a fair trial – and to protect from harms caused by others, including non-state private parties, as would be involved in the full and proper realisation of the right not to be tortured. On the other hand, the freedoms that citizens have to assemble, to protest and to express themselves imposes 'simply' a duty of forbearance: citizens should be entitled to do so without interference or surveillance from the government. Many, indeed most, have both negative and positive limbs – the right to liberty imposes a duty on the state not to detain citizens arbitrarily but also to provide an effective mechanism for those who are arrested to challenge the legality of their detention. Similarly, the right to privacy means not only that the state should not subject citizens to unwarranted surveillance (freedom from) but should also ensure that citizens have the right to take effective enforcement against Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in respect of data they hold on their websites.

In the first part of this chapter, we examine attitudes to civil liberties from three distinct stand-points – from the perspectives of the law, the rights of the individual and the role of government in relation to national security (which arguably has the potential to conflict with individual rights and freedoms). We examine whether the current direction of law and policy-making is reflected in the public's attitudes and preferences and, where time series data is available, we consider whether the public's attitudes have followed the same direction as law and policy-making in recent times (by becoming comparatively illiberal), or are now more at odds with the positions of politicians, policy and law-makers than they were in the past.

Given current debates around the government's role in national security, the second part of the chapter seeks to further our understanding of attitudes in this area. In particular we examine how consistently the public supports government intervention in relation to national security and whether individuals tend to support government intervention per se or whether support depends on the nature of the interventions being considered (and their potential impacts on the individual). We also examine the attitudes and characteristics which are linked with and help to explain preferences for the role of government in this area. In doing so, we seek to ascertain how far the current roles and powers of the government in relation to national security chime with public preferences and the extent to which we are united or divided in our views on this topic – our hypothesis being that what we find out in relation to these two issues may shed light on likely public responses to future policy development and legislation in this area.

The changing social, legal and policy context

To inform our examination of the data, we first consider the changing social, legal and policy context against which attitudes to civil liberties need to be interpreted. This context is best understood against the backdrop of several significant changes that have occurred over the past two decades, most notably:

- the advent of international terrorism, in contrast to (in the UK context) terrorism linked to Irish republicanism, nationalism and Unionism;
- rapid technological expansion – in the form of the internet, social media, smart phones –availing citizens of speedier communications and access to information but allowing governments greater powers to monitor their activities;
- the passing of the Human Rights Act (HRA) in 1998 in the first year of the Labour Government, as part of its package of constitutional reform, bringing into domestic law for the first time the package of human rights contained in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR);
- EU enlargement in 2004 extending rights of free movement to the citizens of several central and eastern European countries opening up borders, including the UK's, to the prospect of immigration on a much larger scale; and
- the global economic crash of 2008, and bank bail-out, leading across the western world to recovery programmes usually typified as 'austerity' – an often drastic cutting of public sector spending.

These developments have often been in tension, yet have sometimes reinforced or complemented each other, in terms of their impacts on individuals, societies and governments. In general, they have

given citizens greater freedom – of movement, expression and communication, while placing countries such as the UK at greater risk of terrorist attack, while arguably reducing their capacity to respond to or prevent it. As a result, they have given rise to measures which might be regarded as limiting or violating civil liberties – in order to protect life and to counter criminality more generally.

The growth of (generally) Islamic terrorism since 2001 has in turn led to calls for increasing the capacity of the police and MI5/MI6 to engage in surveillance – of Facebook accounts and websites visited – as well as fuelling concerns over immigration, irrespective of whether terrorist attacks (actual or thwarted) are committed by home-grown and home-groomed UK citizens. The HRA over its near 20-year lifetime has seen the notion of 'human rights' move to centre-stage in domestic policy debates for the first time yet has been unable to stem the tide of increasingly authoritarian legislation passed by governments of all parties – often in the guise of needing to deal with the terrorist threat. This legislation includes the ban on demonstrations around Westminster – in place between 2005-2011 – as well as a series of Acts designed to enhance the power of the security services and the police to have access to and retain communications data, dating from 2000 with the most recent in 2016. Human rights legislation has also, in general, not prevented a range of counter-terrorism measures being implemented, commencing in 2001 with detention without charge of foreign terrorist suspects and leading to increased policing powers of stop, search, and detention as well as considerable changes to the UK's historic attachment to 'open justice'. While the ready and cheap availability of social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, have enhanced the ability ordinary citizens have to organise and participate politically and indeed to counter what has been termed the mainstream media (MSM), this development has also availed the state with greater capacity to monitor its citizens and their everyday activities. Another key shift of the past decade or so has been in the regulatory opportunities afforded to private companies – such as Google and Facebook – and indeed the commercialisation of private, personal information and data. This shift from public to private has been hastened by the current economic climate – the withdrawal of the state from historic public sector provision, in areas such as criminal justice and welfare, in the name of efficiency and cost-saving. Again, while the HRA has ushered in more secure protection for rights such as freedom of expression, the need (or perceived need) to deal with terrorism, particularly indoctrination, has led to curbs on free speech in the guise of criminalising the encouragement of terrorism, by for example glorifying it, and to restrictions on foreign travel even to the extent of removing individuals' passports.

The three main UK parties have remained fairly consistent in their attitude to the HRA since its inception. Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats fought the 2010 and 2015 General Elections committed to retaining it and to remaining members of the ECHR.

The Conservatives have a longer pedigree, fighting both elections on a pledge to repeal the HRA and replace it with a British Bill of Rights, albeit without a concurrent commitment to leave the ECHR, though this has been floated on several occasions over the past decade. The Conservative approach can be traced back to August 2004 when (then) shadow Home Secretary David Davis announced a review, calling the HRA a "seriously malfunctioning Act" which had "spawned too many spurious rights…fuelled a compensation culture out of all sense and proportion and all too often it seems to give criminals more rights than the victims of crime." (Hall, 2004). In 2011, with David Cameron (when he was leader of the opposition) having listed the HRA third in his 10 pledges (Pascoe-Watson, 2009) and after their 2010 General Election victory, the Conservative-led coalition established a commission on a Bill of Rights to investigate possibilities. Only the presence of the Liberal Democrats in the coalition prevented full-blown repeal. The commission reached deadlock and reported in 2012 without any clear recommendations. It was not just the Conservatives, either in opposition or in government, who voiced concern though generally this was expressed in response to specific judgments rather than suggesting repeal of the whole human rights framework[1].

While it would not be wholly accurate to portray legal developments over the past 10 years or so as being all one-way illiberal traffic, a fair assessment would conclude that this was the general trend

While it would not be wholly accurate to portray legal developments over the past 10 years or so as being all one-way illiberal traffic, a fair assessment would conclude that this was the general trend. In fact, with one or two rare exceptions, where that path has deviated it has generally been informed by the judicial arm. It is rare indeed for parliament, whether with a Labour majority, coalition or Conservative majority, unilaterally to have acted to liberalise the law. Exceptions would be, in the area of public order – the removal of the absolute ban on demonstrations around Westminster (in 2011) – and repeal of the Identity Cards Act 2006 in 2010, both by the coalition government. By contrast, the judiciary has been active domestically – empowered and perhaps emboldened by the HRA – in seeking to protect human rights and preserve an appropriate balance between state power and civil liberties[2]. On the other hand, instances of legislation that greatly enhance the opportunities for the state to encroach on individual freedom are numerous. Taking as our focus policing powers in relation to counter-terrorism and surveillance, we might note the increase in the power to stop and search without requiring reasonable suspicion (though tightened up following a ruling of the ECHR), powers to detain and question

1 Specific examples include John Reid and Tony Blair after the so-called Afghan hijackers case and David Blunkett after a ruling in relation to the fining of lorry drivers who unwittingly brought in stowaways: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/dec/06/humanrights.immigration

2 Notable examples would include: the decision in the Belmarsh case (*A and Others v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2004] UKHL 56) – holding that it breached the ECHR to detain without charge only foreign terrorist suspects; the successful challenge by Tom Watson to the data retention scheme on grounds that it was in breach of EU Law (specifically the guarantee of privacy), and the challenge to the fact that placement on the sex offender register had no right of appeal (*R (on the application of F and Thompson) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2010] UKSC 17). The first and third led to parliament stepping in and passing legislation directly to rectify the matter. The second was referred back to the UK courts, where it had begun, by the EU Court, the CJEU.

at ports and airports, increased powers of proscription, expansion of the number of terrorism-related offences including speaking at terrorist meetings, and the replacement of indefinite detention without charge with control orders (limiting terrorist suspects' rights of association, communication and liberty to move freely) . In terms of surveillance, the last couple of years have seen two major Acts. The most recent, the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, supplants the earlier Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014. The 2016 Act, known to some as the 'Snooper's Charter', brings together all of the powers already available to obtain communications and data about communications and introduces a 'double-lock' for interception warrants. However, it also allows for obtaining and retaining communications data, such as internet connection records, for law enforcement to identify, for example, which websites or search terms a device has connected to, and makes provision for bulk interception, bulk acquisition, bulk equipment interference and bulk personal dataset warrants.

Generally speaking then, policy and law over the past decade – particularly when instigated by parliament and broadly supported by the main political parties – has tended to move in an illiberal direction, with the government acquiring greater authority and powers, at the expense of individual freedoms. We now turn to assess how far this policy position and direction chimes with current public attitudes and recent trends in attitudinal change.

Attitudes to civil liberties

Attitudes to the law

The BSA survey includes a range of questions which tap into respondents' attitudes to civil liberties in relation to the role of the law. Two long-standing questions measure the extent to which people prioritize freedom of conscience over adherence to the law. First of all, we ask respondents:

> ***In general, would you say that people should obey the law without exception, or are there exceptional occasions on which people should follow their consciences even if it means breaking the law?***

We also include a question on the survey each year, as part of our long-standing libertarian-authoritarian scale (further details on which can be found in the Technical details), which asks respondents whether they agree or disagree that:

> ***The law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong***

Currently, less than half of the public express a 'liberal' position in relation to these statements. Slightly less than half (47%) express the view that there are exceptional occasions on which people should follow their conscience (even if this means breaking the law) – while

an almost identical proportion (46%) express the alternative view – that people should obey the law without exception. Meanwhile, only around 1 in 4 (24%) disagree that the law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong – while around 4 in 10 (38%) agree with this view (35% neither agree nor disagree). The lower proportion expressing a liberal view in relation to the second question may reflect the availability of the less committal ("neither agree nor disagree") answer option. Regardless, these data provide little evidence that the public currently prioritizes freedom of conscience over adherence to the law.

Only around 1 in 4 (24%) disagree that the law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong – while around 4 in 10 (38%) agree with this view

The BSA survey includes two further questions on attitudes to the law, which can be interpreted as reflecting attitudes to civil liberties, in terms of individual rights to freedom and rights to life respectively. We regularly ask respondents:

> *All systems of justice make mistakes, but which do you think is worse ...to convict an innocent person or to let a guilty person go free?*

Meanwhile, as part of our libertarian-authoritarian scale, we ask respondents each year whether they agree or disagree with the following statement:

> *For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence*

Once again, there is little evidence of a public consensus on these issues. Just over half (55%) agree with the view that it is worse to convict an innocent person than to let a guilty person go free (a classic liberal standpoint) – while 1 in 4 (23%) adopt the opposite viewpoint (that, of the two options, it is worse to let a guilty person go free). Again, we encounter a considerable degree of ambivalence or uncertainty – with 2 in 10 (19%) indicating that they were unable to choose a response. Meanwhile, when it comes to views on the death penalty, slightly less than 4 in 10 (37%) disagree that for some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence, while a slightly larger proportion (45%) agree with this viewpoint (16% neither agree nor disagree).

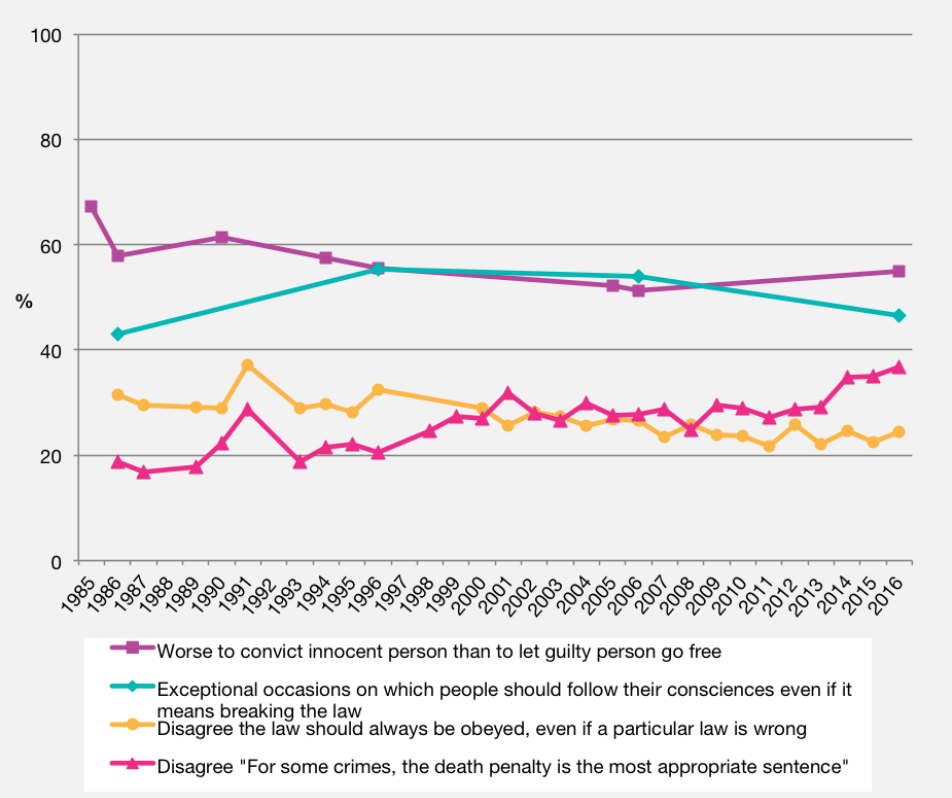
From the perspective of the application of the law, the public is relatively divided in its attitudes to civil liberties, with evidence of a considerable degree of ambivalence

Clearly then, from the perspective of the application of the law, the public is relatively divided in its attitudes to civil liberties, with evidence of a considerable degree of ambivalence. In none of the four scenarios asked about do a substantial majority of the public favour the more 'liberal' standpoint. This might imply that there is little evidence that public views are at odds with the illiberal direction in which policy and law in the UK in relation to civil liberties appears to be moving. We can explore this assumption further by examining whether responses to these questions have moved in a similar direction to the broad thrust of government policy (outlined in the previous section) over the past two decades.

Figure 1 depicts support for the 'liberal' position in relation to each of the questions discussed above and how this has changed over the

lifetime of the survey (in each case, the 'non-liberal' view has moved in a roughly opposing direction). A number of trends are immediately apparent. On the two questions which measure support for freedom of conscience as opposed to adherence to the law, support for the liberal position has declined since the early 1990s. Support for the view that there are exceptional occasions in which people should follow their own conscience, even if this means breaking the law, rose between the early 1980s and the mid 1990s, but has now declined to a level not significantly different to when the question was first asked (43% in 1986, 47% now). Similarly, disagreement with the view that the law should be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong has declined from a high point of 37% in 1991 to 24% now – somewhat lower than when the question was first asked in 1986. These trends lend weight to the theory that the broad direction of British policy and law in relation to civil liberties reflects, rather than conflicts with, changes in public attitudes.

Figure 1 Proportions expressing liberal attitudes to the law, 1985-2016



The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

When it comes to our measures of support for individual rights (to freedom and to life), a different pattern is evident – with greater evidence of a recent increase in support for the liberal position

When it comes to our measures of support for individual rights (to freedom and to life), a different pattern is evident – with greater evidence of a recent increase in support for the liberal position. Agreement with the view that it is worse to convict an innocent person than to let a guilty person go free declined up until 2006 – from 67% in 1985 to 51%, although there is some evidence that this trend has reversed in the last decade (support has risen by 4 percentage points to 55% - though, given the small number of data

points available, it is not possible to pin-point the exact timing of this change). However, it is in attitudes to the death penalty that we see the most consistent and dramatic shift towards a liberal position. Disagreement with the view that the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence for some crimes has risen by 9 percentage points since 2006 and has almost doubled since the question was first asked in 1986 – having risen by 18 percentage points overall – from 19% to 37%. Over the same period, levels of agreement with the view that the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence for some crimes changed even more dramatically, declining from 74% in 1996 to 45% now. Given the fact that the death penalty was abolished for murder in Britain in 1969 (but was technically still in force until 1999, when it was formally abolished by the signing of the Sixth Protocol of the European Convention of Human Rights), this trend indicates that, while public attitudes have to some extent moved into line with public policy, almost half still adopt a position which is less liberal.

Disagreement with the view that the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence for some crimes has risen by 9 percentage points since 2006 and has almost doubled since the question was first asked in 1986

Generally speaking then, attitudes to civil liberties, as they relate to the law, do not appear to have moved in a consistent direction in recent times. Yet, overall, they do not appear to be dramatically at odds with the recent general direction of government policy. While the public is clearly divided on these issues, in no case does a sizable majority support the more liberal position. And, generally speaking, attitudes have shifted over the last two decades in an illiberal direction or, in the case of the death penalty, still reflect a position, albeit to a lesser degree, which is less liberal than current policy and law.

The rights of individuals

We next consider a number of questions which measure attitudes to civil liberties from the perspective of individual freedoms and rights – in terms of freedom of expression and the rights to assembly and to protest. The BSA survey has asked two sets of questions which encapsulate attitudes to these rights and freedoms at regular intervals since 1985 – the first in relation to people or organisations in general and the second with regard to people whose views are considered extreme. Specifically, we ask respondents:

> *There are many ways people or organisations can protest against a government action they strongly oppose. Please show which you think should be allowed and which should not be allowed …*
>
> *Organising public meetings to protest against the government*
>
> *Organising protest marches and demonstrations*

There are some people whose views are considered extreme by the majority. Consider people who want to overthrow the government by revolution. Do you think such people should be allowed to…

… hold public meetings to express their views?

… publish books expressing their views?

The public is more supportive of the rights of "people and organisations" to express their views, compared with people whose views are considered extreme

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the public is more supportive of the rights of "people and organisations" to express their views, compared with people whose views are considered extreme. The vast majority, around 9 in 10, think that "people or organisations" should be allowed to organize public meetings to protest against the government, while almost 7 in 10 think they should be allowed to organise protest marches and demonstrations. Only small minorities disagree that people or organisations should be allowed to undertake these activities (9% and 20% respectively).

Table 1 Attitudes to the right of people and organisations to protest against the government, 1985–2016

	1985	1986	1990	1994	1996	2005	2006	2016
% saying "definitely" or "probably" should be allowed								
Organising public meetings to protest against he government	85	83	88	84	85	84	86	87
Organising protest marches and demonstrations	66	58	70	68	68	73	77	73
Unweighted base	*1530*	*1321*	*1197*	*970*	*989*	*860*	*930*	*1563*

Clearly, the public draws a distinction between the freedoms and rights they think that people or organisations in general, and extremists in particular, should be allowed

When it comes to the rights of those whose views are considered extreme to express their views, the public is more divided. Around half in each case think that such individuals should be allowed to hold public meetings to express their views (while 46% think this should probably or definitely not be allowed) or should be allowed to publish books to the same ends (38% express the opposing view). Clearly, the public draws a distinction between the freedoms and rights they think that people or organisations in general, and extremists in particular, should be allowed. In this sense, it is arguable that the tightening of public policy in relation to the latter group chimes with public attitudes by better reflecting this distinction.

Table 2 Attitudes to the rights of people whose views are considered extreme, 1985–2016

	1985	1990	1996	2005	2006	2016
% saying people who want to overthrow the government by revolution should "definitely" or "probably" be allowed to …						
… hold public meetings to express their views	52	49	47	42	46	50
… publish books expressing their views	64	58	58	47	50	53
Unweighted base	*1530*	*1197*	*989*	*860*	*860*	*1563*

Support for the right of people and organisations to protest against the government by organising public meetings has remained relatively stable since it was first measured in the mid 1980s, with between 8 in 10 and 9 in 10 people expressing support at any given point in time. Support for the organisation of protest marches and demonstrations has been rather more volatile, but has remained comparatively high over the past decade, with slightly more than 7 in 10 endorsing these activities. Different trends are evident in relation to the rights of extremists however. The level of support for the right of extremists to hold public meetings is not significantly different to that recorded in 1985; about half express support for this activity, although support has dipped and risen in the intervening decades. On the other hand, while support for the rights of extremists to publish books is considerably lower than when first measured in 1985 (53% compared with 64%) is has actually risen slightly, but significantly, in the past decade. In this area then, it is arguable that the adoption of a more 'illiberal' position by the government over the past two decades does not reflect (and has not prompted) comparable shifts in public opinion.

The role of government in national security

We finally consider two sets of questions which measure attitudes to civil liberties from the perspective of the role of the government in relation to national security. The first set of three questions, introduced in 2006, seeks to measure public preferences for the government's role in a time of terrorist attack. We ask respondents:

> ***Suppose the government suspected that a terrorist act was about to happen. Do you think the authorities should have the right to…***
>
> ***… detain people for as long as they want without putting them on trial?***
>
> ***… tap people's telephone conversations?***
>
> ***… stop and search people in the street at random?***

In each instance, the proposed government action can be viewed as being in direct conflict, to different degrees, with individual rights

and freedoms – for instance, the right for the authorities to tap people's telephone conversations can be seen as conflicting with an individual's right to privacy.

As shown in Table 3, in each case at least a majority of the public supports the government having the right to undertake the specified activity in a time of a suspected terrorist attack. Around half (53%) think that the government should have the right to detain people for as long as they want, without putting them on trial, while 7 in 10 (70%) think the government should be able to stop and search people in the street at random. Meanwhile, almost 8 in 10 (77%) think that the government should have the right to tap people's telephone conversations. In each case, only a minority express what can be interpreted as the 'liberal' view – that prioritizes individual civil liberties over the right of the government to intervene. Opposition to government intervention is most widespread in relation to detaining people indefinitely without putting them on trial, with 41% opposing this – while only around 2 in 10 oppose allowing each of the other activities asked about. Given that the questions broadly reflect the nature of the activities the government is currently permitted to undertake in times of a suspected terrorist attack and, in the case both of detention and stop and search[3] specify even greater powers than currently exist, these data suggest that public preferences for the government's role, at least in a time of terrorist attack, broadly reflect the current policy position.

Opposition to government intervention is most widespread in relation to detaining people indefinitely without putting them on trial, with 41% opposing this

Table 3 Attitudes to the rights of government in times of terrorist attack, 2006 and 2016

	2006	2016
Detain people for as long as they want without putting them on trial	%	%
Government should have right	64	53
Government should not have right	31	41
Tap people's telephone conversations	%	%
Government should have right	73	77
Government should not have right	20	16
Stop and search people in the street at random	%	%
Government should have right	73	70
Government should not have right	21	24
Unweighted base	*930*	*1563*

However, a comparison of these levels of support with those recorded in 2006 does not suggest that attitudes have moved unanimously in an illiberal direction, in line with government policy. Indeed, opposition to detaining people indefinitely has risen by 10

3 Detention has, since 2011, been limited to 14 days without charge, while stop and search since 2012 has required a senior officer reasonably to suspect that an act of terrorism will take place before authorising the blanket power to stop and search.

Opposition to detaining people indefinitely has risen by 10 percentage points since 2006 – suggesting that public opinion has moved in the opposite direction to policy and legal change around detention

percentage points since 2006 – suggesting that public opinion has moved in the opposite direction to policy and legal change around detention (and indeed may reflect a reaction to increased government powers in this area). On the other hand, however, opposition to tapping telephone conversations has fallen slightly but significantly by 4 percentage points, while opposition to stop and search has not changed significantly over the same period – despite the more extensive and wide-ranging use of these two practices detailed previously.

In the BSA 2016 survey, we introduced a further set of questions to measure support for the government's role in national security. We asked respondents:

> *Now some questions about civil liberties and public security.*
>
> *Do you think that the British government should or should not have the right to do the following:*
>
> *Keep people under video surveillance in public areas?*
>
> *Monitor emails and any other information exchanged on the internet?*
>
> *Collect information about anyone living in Britain without their knowledge?*
>
> *Collect information about anyone living in other countries without their knowledge?*

As shown in Table 4, levels of support for the different activities asked about vary markedly. While 8 in 10 (80%) people think that the government should have the right to keep people under video surveillance in public areas, only 5 in 10 (50%) think they should have the right to monitor emails and other information exchanged on the internet – perhaps because, in contrast to the first activity asked about, this is viewed as a 'private' rather than a 'public' sphere. Meanwhile, when it comes to collecting information about individuals without their knowledge, 6 in 10 (60%) think the government should have the right to do this in relation to people living in Britain, although the level of support is somewhat lower when this activity is proposed in relation to those living abroad (around 5 in 10 (50%) support this). Interestingly, less than half in each instance oppose the government having these rights – a similar pattern to that found in relation to government rights in a time of imminent terrorist attack discussed previously. Taken together, these data suggest considerable public support for government monitoring and surveillance of individual activities, both in peacetime and in time of terrorist attack.

Table 4 Attitudes to the rights of government

		Government "definitely" or "probably" should have the right	Government "definitely" "probably" should not have the right	*Unweighted base*
Keep people under video surveillance in public areas	%	80	14	*1531*
Monitor emails and any other information exchanged on the internet	%	50	43	*1531*
Collect information about anyone living in Britain without their knowledge	%	60	33	*1531*
Collect information about anyone living in other countries without their knowledge	%	49	42	*1531*

With the exception of attitudes to the death penalty and attitudes to detaining people indefinitely, there is little evidence of substantial attitudinal change over the past two decades

Overall then, we find little evidence that the current nature and direction of government policy is at odds with the views and preferences of a majority of the public. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the substantial nuances in public attitudes; while in the area of the law the public is fairly evenly divided, with around half expressing an illiberal position in relation to civil liberties, there is markedly greater support for civil liberties when examined in relation to individual rights (although this support becomes more muted when those rights are applied to extremists). Meanwhile, when it comes to the role of government, there is considerable support for an 'authoritarian' position in relation to national security – with majorities of the public supporting the range of activities the government is currently permitted to undertake in this area, which can be regarded as being in conflict with civil liberties. However, with the exception of attitudes to the death penalty and attitudes to detaining people indefinitely, there is little evidence of substantial attitudinal change over the past two decades. Attitudes to the death penalty continue to remain more illiberal than the current legal position, although they appear to be gradually moving in line with public policy. Meanwhile, opposition to the government's right to detain suspects indefinitely in times of terrorist attack has increased, which may be in response to the extension of government powers in this area.

Given current debates around the government's role in national security, we next examine attitudes on this topic in more detail – examining in particular the extent to which individual support for government action in relation to national security is consistent or nuanced and the attitudes and characteristics that link with and may help explain public preferences in this area.

National security: understanding public preferences

How consistent is support for government action?

As noted above, around half or more of the public (and often substantially higher proportions) think that each of the seven actions the government might undertake in relation to national security, when a terrorist attack is suspected or in peacetime, should be allowed. Do the majority of individuals tend to support government action in this area per se, or is support more nuanced, depending on the types of actions being considered and their potential impact on civil liberties? An examination of the correlations between each pair of items suggests that the former assumption is correct. Specifically, we find high positive correlations between support for the government tapping telephones and undertaking stop and search in a time of terrorist attack, and between support for the government collecting information about anyone living in Britain, and anyone living abroad, without their knowledge[4]. Overall, we find a moderate or high degree of correlation between nine of the 21 pairs of items examined. This suggests that it is worth considering how broader attitudes and values may be underpinning and influencing specific preferences in this area.

We undertook factor analysis to identify the presence of any 'latent' attitudes – that is, broader attitudes or value systems which might explain some degree of the variation on the seven measures of attitudes to the government's role in relation to national security. A model, depicted in Figure 2, emerged containing two factors which explain 66% of the variance in attitudes on the seven measures. The first of these 'factors', which explains 51% of this variance, can be interpreted as representing general support for government intervention in the area of national security. This factor might reflect an 'illiberal' stance in relation to civil liberties per se or more general support for government intervention or 'big' government.

4 For the purpose of this analysis, a very high correlation was defined as 0.8-1, a high correlation as 0.6-0.8, a moderate correlation as 0.4-0.6, a low correlation as 0.2-0.4 and a very low correlation as 0-0.2 (or, in each case, the negative equivalents).

Figure 2 Factors underpinning preferences for the role of government in the area of national security

The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

While the second factor explains far less of the variance (16%) in attitudes in this area, it nevertheless offers an interpretation of a further cross-cutting factor that may be influencing preferences in relation to the seven government activities examined. This second factor links with support for the three government activities asked about in relation to a time of terrorist attack - but links with opposition to allowing government to undertake the remaining four activities, where the specific circumstances in which they would be permitted were not specified. This suggests that views in this area to some extent reflect a reaction to the circumstances of government action, with a perception that actions are more acceptable or justified in times of suspected terrorist attack.

Broadly speaking then, this analysis lends support to the idea that views about the activities government should be allowed to

undertake in the area of national security are, to a large extent, underpinned by broader attitudes, values and considerations. This suggests that public preferences for government actions in relation to national security might tend to move in a consistent direction in the future – although the data on attitudes to detention presented above indicates that this may not always be the case and that reactions to policy change may have a greater impact.

Views about the activities government should be allowed to undertake in the area of national security are, to a large extent, underpinned by broader attitudes, values and considerations

Given there is considerable evidence that individuals tend to support or oppose government action in relation to national security per se, and that this support or opposition is underpinned by more general attitudes and considerations, we finally consider which sections of society tend to support and oppose government action in this area.

Who supports and opposes government action?

For each respondent we created a 'role of government' score (out of seven) with a high score reflecting the belief that a comparatively large number of government actions should definitely or probably be allowed and a low score indicating approval for a smaller number of government actions.

We envisaged that levels of support for government action in the area of national security might vary by a range of demographic characteristics and broader attitudes and values. Previous research has indicated that attitudes to civil liberties are linked to age and levels of education, with people who are younger and more highly educated being more likely to express a 'liberal' view (in other words, opposing the government's right to undertake various activities) (Johnson and Gearty, 2007). This was indeed the case; when we analysed our 'role of government' score by these demographic characteristics; the average number of government actions supported rose significantly with age, with those aged 18-24[5] and 25-34 expressing support for 3.6 and 4.2 government actions compared with 5.1 and 4.8 for those aged 65-74 and 75+. Similarly, people with a degree supported 4.3 interventions on average, compared with 4.8 among those with no qualifications. Interestingly, we did not find any significant variation by sex. We also envisaged that location might make a difference, as those living in London might perceive themselves to be at greater risk of a security or terrorist threat and thus be more supportive of government intervention in this area. However, this was not the case; the level of support for government actions expressed by those living in London was not significantly different to that reported by those living in other regions.

The level of support for government actions expressed by those living in London was not significantly different to that reported by those living in other regions

Logically, it seems plausible that attitudes to government intervention in the area of national security might relate to a range of broader value systems and to attitudes in associated areas. We have already seen that a factor analysis of these questions reveals a latent attitude or value system, explaining more than half of the variation in attitudes in this area. It therefore comes as no surprise that an analysis by our

5 Caution needs to be applied to this finding, as the number of respondents aged 18-24 is <100.

libertarian-authoritarian scale reveals that those who generally hold a 'libertarian' outlook are less supportive of government intervention, with the opposite being true for those who tend to hold an 'authoritarian' outlook. While the former group supports government intervention in 3.0 scenarios on average, the latter favours an average of 5.1 government activities. This suggests that the latent attitude identified by our factor analysis may in fact reflect a traditional libertarian-authoritarian value system.

There is a substantial literature demonstrating that attitudes to civil liberties are strongly associated with political outlook, although the most recent analysis of BSA data on this issue (Johnson and Gearty, 2007) indicated that this relationship had become less marked. Nevertheless, we find that those classified as having a 'left-wing' outlook on our left-right scale (see Technical appendix for further details) support 4.4 of the government actions asked about, while the equivalent average figure for those with a 'right-wing' outlook is 5.3. It has been argued that attitudes to civil liberties of supporters of different political parties have tended to converge as the stances of 'their' parties have become more alike, with the Labour Party in particular coming to advocate a less libertarian position throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s). Indeed, as demonstrated in our overview of recent policy and legislation, the positions of the main political parties have not been substantively different in the past decade, which might lead us to anticipate that the views of 'their' supporters in relation to national security are now fairly similar. Nevertheless, we find that the average level of support among Labour supporters for government actions in the area of national security is still markedly lower than that expressed by Conservative supporters – 4.0 compared with 5.3 (with the views of those with no party affiliation, at an average of 4.4, falling in between them). This may, in part, be explained by the fact that people whose party is in power tend to be more supportive of the activities the government of the day undertakes (Butler and Stokes, 1974).

The average level of support among Labour supporters for government actions in the area of national security is still markedly lower than that expressed by Conservative supporters

In addition to these broader attitudes, it seemed likely that attitudes to government intervention in the area of national security might link with and be influenced by attitudes to a range of related issues. In the first place, those with more favourable attitudes to the government might be more supportive of them undertaking the range of actions asked about. This indeed turns out to be the case. We regularly ask respondents how much they "trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party". Those who were more trusting of government tended to be more supportive of government action in the area of national security. People who trust government "just about always" or "most of the time" supported government intervention in an average of 4.8 scenarios, compared with 4.1 for those who said they trust government "almost never".

The 2016 survey also asked respondents how successful they thought the government in Britain is nowadays on a range of matters

including "dealing with threats to Britain's security". Generally, we found the public's assessment to be positive, with 72% rating the government as "very" or "quite successful", and just 9% regarding them as "very" or "quite unsuccessful". It was envisaged that attitudes on this matter could link with support for government intervention in the area of national security in a number of ways. First, it might be that those who view the government as inherently successful at dealing with threats to national security are more supportive of government intervention in this area – because they see it as having the potential to achieve effective results. Alternatively, it might be that those who perceive the government as unsuccessful in this area do so because they do not feel it has all the powers needed to be successful (and thus support a greater number of powers). On balance, the evidence suggests our first theory is more likely to be true; people who think the government is "very successful" at dealing with threats to national security support an average of 5.2 actions, compared with 3.6 for those who view the government as "neither successful or unsuccessful" and 4.3 for those (albeit a small proportion) who perceive the government to be "quite" or "very unsuccessful". Therefore, on both these measures, those who hold a more positive view of the government tend to be more supportive of its role in the area of national security.

Finally, we envisaged that an individual's support for government intervention in the area of national security might be mediated by more general priorities and concerns. The 2016 survey included a question asking respondents to identify, from a list, the areas they are "concerned or worried about at the moment". Two of the options listed theoretically have the potential to intersect with attitudes to the government's role in relation to national security. It seemed plausible that people who are concerned about "immigration" or "crime in your local area" might be more supportive of government intervention in the area of national security – as a mechanism for addressing these concerns. Indeed, when BSA data on civil liberties was last analyzed, concern about terrorism was found to have a considerable role to play in promoting support for government intervention (Johnson and Gearty, 2007). In both instances, this still appears to be the case. People who identify immigration as a current concern support government intervention in an average of 5.2 cases (compared with 4.3 for those who are not concerned about immigration). Less markedly, those who are concerned about crime in their local area support government action in the area of national security in 4.9 instances (compared with 4.5 for those who are not concerned about this issue).

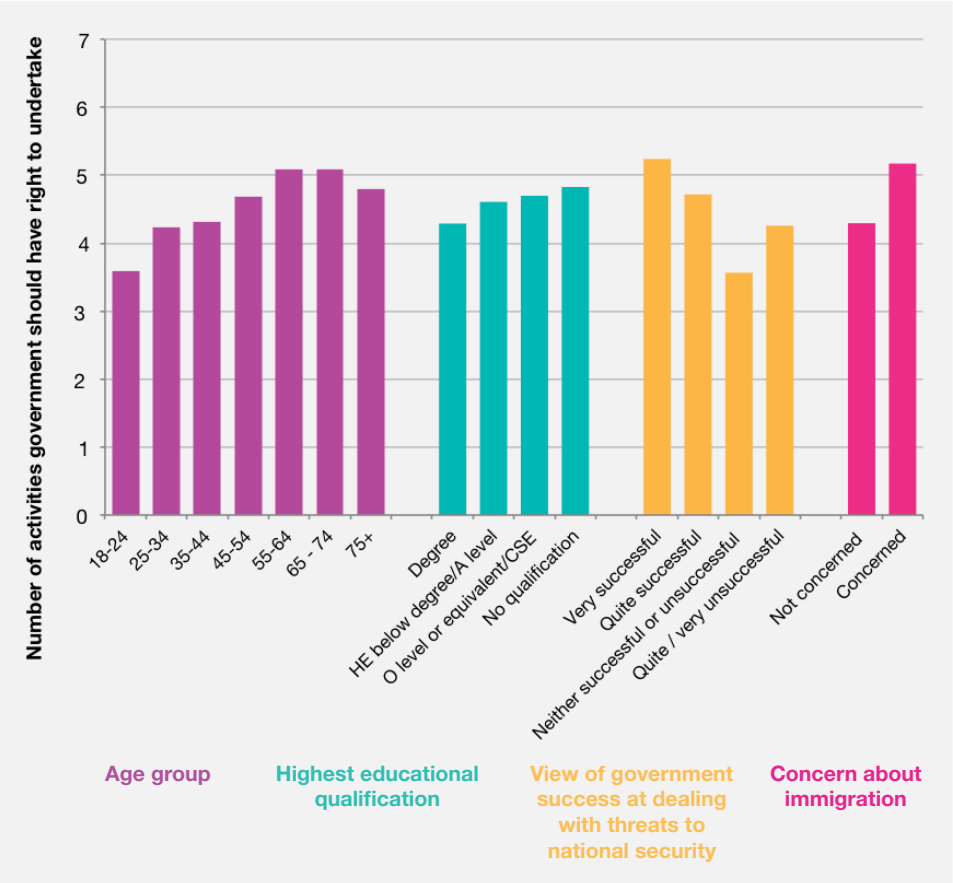
People who identify immigration as a current concern support government intervention in an average of 5.2 cases (compared with 4.3 for those who are not concerned about immigration)

Clearly then, support for government action in the area of national security links with, and may be influenced by, a wide range of characteristics, and broader and related attitudes. However, we know that many of these characteristics and attitudes relate to each other; for instance, younger age groups tend to be more highly educated (due to the recent expansion in higher education), while those who

express a 'libertarian' outlook also tend to be left-wing. To identify the characteristics which are significantly associated with attitudes to the government's role in the area of national security, once the relationships between them have been controlled for, we ran a linear regression model with the dependent variable being the number of government actions (out of seven) which the respondent thinks should be allowed. The results of this analysis are presented in the appendix to this chapter.

Of the seven measures included in the model (where a significant relationship with our 'role of government' score was identified in the analysis reported above), four were found to be significantly associated with support for government activities in the area of national security – age, level of education, views on the success of the British government in dealing with threats to national security, and current concern about immigration. The average 'role of government' scores of groups defined by these characteristics are depicted in Figure 3. The extent to which the individual holds right or left-wing views and their level of trust in government were less important in explaining attitudes to this topic, although both factors remain significantly associated with the 'role of government' score, even when their links with other measures had been controlled for. Concern about crime in the local area on the other hand did not remain significantly associated with levels of support for government intervention.

Figure 3 'Role of government' score, by age, highest educational qualification and related attitudes



The data on which Figure 3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Clearly, a wide range of characteristics link with support for government activities in relation to national security and, in most instances, this remains the case when the relationships between them have been controlled for. Unsurprisingly, we identified very similar results when we ran regression analysis on respondent scores on the first of our two latent attitudes or value systems, identified by the factor analysis reported above, as shown in Table 5 below. However, our second factor – which we define as representing support for government intervention only in times of terrorist attack, was only significantly associated with trust in government, once the relationships between all seven measures had been controlled for. Those who trusted government only some or none of the time achieved significantly more negative scores on this factor – suggesting that trust in government is key in driving support for government intervention in times of terrorist attack, as opposed to in peacetime.

Table 5 Characteristics linked with latent attitudes influencing support for government intervention

	Factor 1 Underlying support for government activities in area of national security	Factor 2 Support for intervention only in times of terrorist threat
Highest educational qualification	++	
Age group	++	
Left-wing vs. right wing		
Trust in government	++	+
Perceived success of government in dealing with threats to national security	++	
Concern about crime		
Concern about immigration	++	

+=significant at 95% level ++=significant at 99% level

It is not necessarily clear how future changes in the prevalence of the demographic characteristics and attitudes associated with support for government intervention may impact on the balance of public opinion in this area

What do these findings mean for the future development of public preferences for the government's role in relation to national security? In the first instance they suggest that, to some degree, levels of support for different types of government intervention are likely to move in unison, given they are largely underpinned by a broader value system which could potentially be interpreted as reflecting libertarian-authoritarian values. However, this conclusion should not be over-stated; the existence of a second underlying factor, distinguishing between activities in times of terrorist attack and peace-time indicates that the public does differentiate between the circumstances in which interventions are undertaken, while the recent decline in support for the right of the government to detain suspects indefinitely suggests that public views may also react to policy changes in relation to specific types of interventions. Meanwhile, it is not necessarily clear how future changes in the prevalence of the demographic characteristics and attitudes associated with support for government intervention may impact on the balance of public opinion in this area. While the trend towards an ageing society would suggest an increase in support for government activities (as the proportions of the populations in older age groups, which tend to be more supportive, are set to increase), the tendency towards a more educated society would imply the opposite pattern. What is clear, however, is that changes in levels of trust in government, in general and in relation to national security specifically, are likely to impact on levels of support for its actions in this area. In other words, the more successful the government is perceived to be, the more likely the public is to endorse activities in relation to national security that potentially conflict with civil liberties.

Conclusions

Overall, the public's attitudes to civil liberties can be characterized as being comparatively illiberal. Although attitudes clearly vary in relation to the context being considered (albeit the application of the law, individual rights of assembly, protest and expression or the role of government in relation to national security), on almost all measures less than half of people support what could be termed the 'liberal' position. Indeed, a majority of the public tend to support a view which reflects, or is even less liberal than, current public policy and law. In this sense, while there is little evidence of a consistent pattern of attitudinal change over the past two decades, we cannot conclude that the 'illiberal' direction in which British policy and law has recently travelled is at odds with the preferences of the public – although there is some evidence that the public has responded negatively to the introduction of more authoritarian policies in relation to the detention of terrorist suspects specifically.

A majority of the public tend to support a view which reflects, or is even less liberal than, current public policy and law

In particular, we see considerable public support for many of the activities the government might undertake in the name of national security in times of terrorist attack and peacetime (all of which have the potential to limit individual rights and freedoms in some way). Preferences for the role of government in this area are clearly underpinned by a broader value system – which is likely to reflect libertarian-authoritarian values; however, they also appear to be mediated by age, level of education, attitudes to government and broader concerns, primarily immigration. This multi-faceted relationship makes it difficult to predict precisely how public preferences in relation to national security might change in the coming years – particularly given the fast-moving policy, legal and technological environment which may continue to alter the context in which attitudes in this area need to be understood.

We see considerable public support for many of the activities the government might undertake in the name of national security in times of terrorist attack and peacetime (all of which have the potential to limit individual rights and freedoms in some way)

Acknowledgements

The National Centre for Social Research is grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council (grant reference ES/P002234/1) for their financial support which enabled us to ask the questions on civil liberties reported in this chapter and to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for allowing us to analyse their questions about current concerns. The views expressed are those of the authors alone.

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Appendix

The data for Figure 1 are shown below.

Table A.1 Proportions expressing liberal attitudes to the law, 1985-2016

	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996
% saying there are exceptional occasions on which people should follow their consciences even if it means breaking the law	n/a	43	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	55
% saying it is worse to convict an innocent person than to let a guilty person go free	67	58	n/a	n/a	62	n/a	n/a	n/a	58	56
Unweighted base	*1530*	*1321*			*1197*				*970*	*989*
% disagreeing "for some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence"	n/a	19	17	18	22	29	19	22	22	21
% disagreeing “the law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong”	n/a	32	30	29	29	37	29	30	28	33
Unweighted base		*1321*	*1281*	*2604*	*2430*	*1257*	*1306*	*2929*	*3135*	*3085*

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
% saying there are exceptional occasions on which people should follow their consciences even if it means breaking the law	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	54	n/a
% saying it is worse to convict an innocent person than to let a guilty person go free	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	52	51	n/a
Unweighted base								*860*	*930*	
% disagreeing "for some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence"	25	27	27	32	28	27	30	28	28	29
% disagreeing “the law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong”	n/a	n/a	29	26	28	27	26	27	27	24
Unweighted base	2531	2450	*2980*	*2795*	*2900*	*3621*	*2609*	*3559*	*3748*	*3578*

Table A.1 Proportions expressing liberal attitudes to the law, 1985-2016 (continued)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
% saying there are exceptional occasions on which people should follow their consciences even if it means breaking the law	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	47
% saying it is worse to convict an innocent person than to let a guilty person go free	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	55
Unweighted base									*1563*
% disagreeing "for some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence"	25	30	29	27	29	29	35	35	37
% disagreeing “the law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong”	26	24	24	22	26	22	25	23	24
Unweighted base	*3990*	*2942*	*2791*	*2845*	*2855*	*2832*	*2376*	*3670*	*2400*

n/a = not answered

The data for Figure 2 are shown below.

Table A.2 Factors underpinning preferences for the role of government in the area of national security

	Component matrix	Component
Variable	1	2
Video surveillance in public areas	.620	-.467
Monitor emails / other info exchanged on the Internet	.705	-.384
Collect info on anyone living in Britain	.785	-.262
Collect info on anyone living in other countries	.759	-.210
Detain people for as long as want without trial	.604	.538
Tap people's phone conversations	.750	.370
Stop and search in the street at random	.734	.440

The data for Figure 3 are shown below.

Table A.3 'Role of government' score, by age, educational qualification and related attitudes

Variable	Category	Number of activities government should have right to undertake	*Unweighted base*
Age group	18-24	3.6	*78*
	25-34	4.2	*195*
	35-44	4.3	*230*
	45-54	4.7	*255*
	55-64	5.1	*263*
	65-74	5.1	*278*
	75+	4.8	*177*
Highest educational qualification	Degree	4.3	*371*
	Higher education below degree/A level	4.6	*417*
	O level or equivalent/CSE	4.7	*408*
	No qualification	4.8	*250*
View of government success at dealing with threats to national security	Very successful	5.2	*268*
	Quite successful	4.7	*832*
	Neither successful or unsuccessful	3.6	*196*
	Quite / very unsuccessful	4.3	*138*
Concern about immigration	Not concerned	4.3	*976*
	Concerned	5.2	*504*

In Table A.4 we present an OLS regression where the dependent variable is the 'role of government' score in relation to national security described in the chapter. A positive coefficient indicates a higher score while a negative coefficient indicates a lower score. For categorical variables, the reference category is shown in brackets after the category heading

Table A.4 'Role of government' score (OLS regression)

	Standardised Coefficient (Beta)	Standard error	p value
Highest educational qualification (degree)			
Higher education below degree/A level	*.110	.193	.011
O level or equivalent/CSE	**.142	.202	.002
No qualification	.075	.253	.092
Age group (18–24)			
25-34	.070	.299	.171
35-44	**. 148	.286	.008
45-54	**.195	.288	.000
55-64	**.200	.293	.000
76-74	**.181	.308	.001
75+	.094	.354	.054
Left-right scale (left-wing)			
Neither	*.097	.156	.010
Right-wing	*.085	.246	.027
View of government success in dealing with threats to national security (very successful)			
Quite successful	**-.194	.186	.000
Neither successful or unsuccessful	**-.266	.257	.000
Quite / very unsuccessful	**-.180	.285	.000
Trust in government (just about always / most of the time)			
Only some of the time	-.039	.188	.402
Almost never	*-.117	.220	.014
Concern about crime in local area (concerned)			
Not concerned	.054	.184	.149
Concern about Immigration (concerned)			
Not concerned	**.154	.167	.000
Constant			
R2 (adjusted)	.162		
Unweighted base:1480			

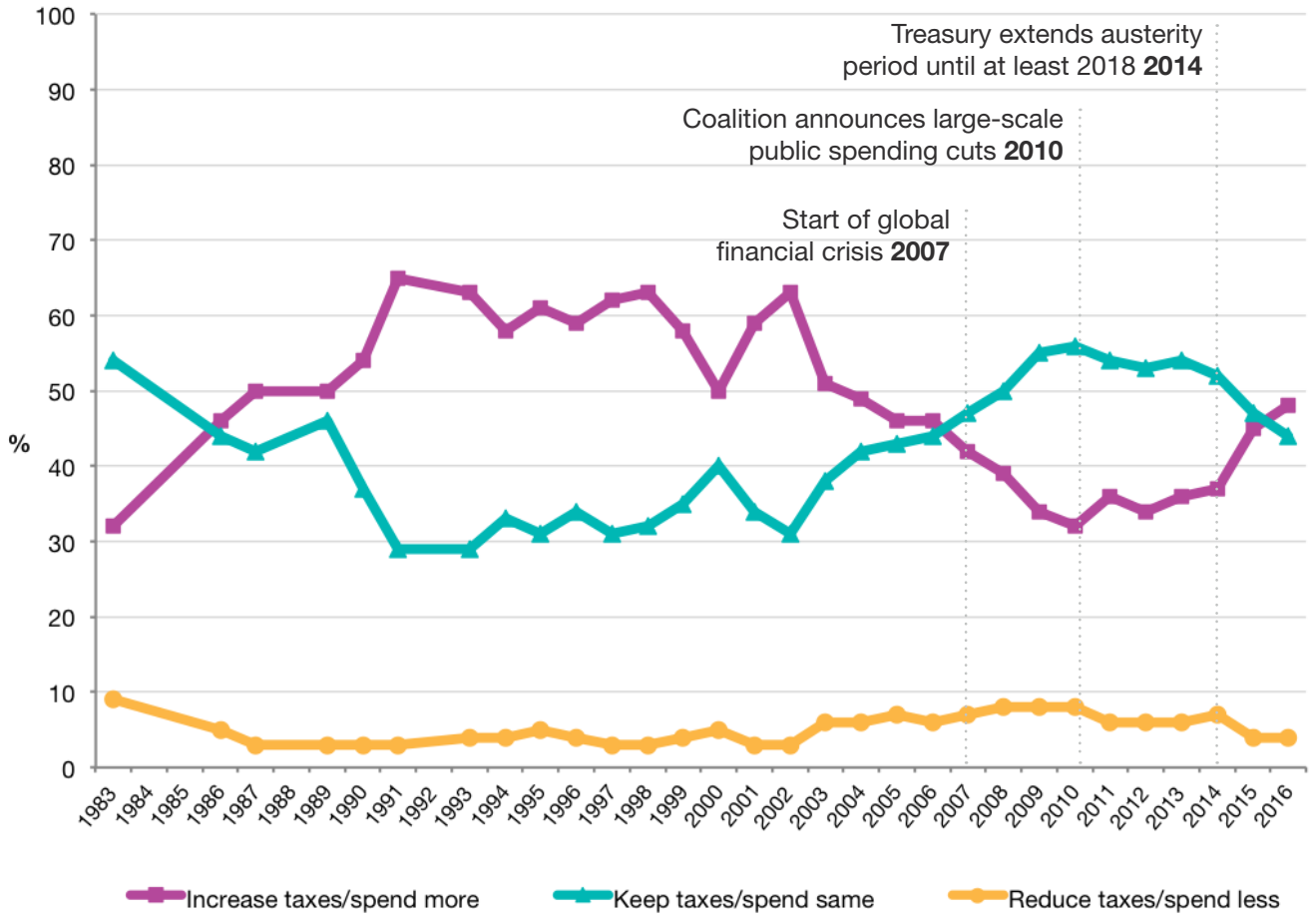
**=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level*

Role of Government

What do we want Government to do?

There are signs of a reaction against the fiscal discipline of recent years, 48% now say the government should increase taxes and spend more, a higher proportion than at any point during the last 10 years.

Support for 'tax more, spend more' at highest level in a decade



Overview

This chapter looks at trends in attitudes towards the proper role and responsibilities of government during the last 20 years. It looks in particular at the extent to which these trends appear to represent a reaction to recent developments in the pattern of public spending and to changes in external circumstances. Both seem to have played a role in changing views, as evidenced both by trends in attitudes towards the responsibility that government has for the welfare of pensioners and the unemployed in particular, and towards the merits of cutting public expenditure in general.

Pensioners

Improving the standard of living of pensioners has become less of a priority.

- 52% now think that the government "definitely" has a responsibility for providing a decent standard of living for the old, down from 69% in 1996.
- 55% are now in favour of spending more government money on pensions, compared with 76% in 1996.

The unemployed

There is less support for government meeting the needs of the unemployed.

- Only 48% now think the government has a responsibility to find a job for everyone who wants one, down from 65% in 1996.
- Support for more government spending on unemployment benefits has fallen from 33% in 1996 to just 16% now.

Government spending

There are signs of a reaction against the fiscal discipline of recent years.

- Only 29% now support cuts in government spending as a way of helping the economy, whereas 43% did so in 1996.
- As many as 48% now say the government should increase taxes and spend more, a higher proportion than for over a decade.

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Introduction

One of the perennial issues of political debate is what role and activities government should undertake and what should be left to others to do, be they private companies, charitable institutions or, indeed, individuals themselves. At one end of the spectrum are those who think government should play a minimal role, providing law and order and national security, but otherwise leaving decisions and activities predominantly in the hands of the market and individuals. At the other end are those who think that government should not only provide public services and a system of welfare benefits, but also run key industries itself. An inclination towards the former perspective is often regarded as being a 'right-wing' view, while expressing views more akin to the latter outlook is typically regarded as being on the 'left'.

However, there is no necessary reason why the role of government should be regarded as a question of ideological preference. It is quite possible that citizens take a more pragmatic, even reactive attitude towards what government should do. When they feel there is a problem that needs solving they look to government to fix it. But equally, when they reckon there is not any particular difficulty that needs addressing, they may be happy for government to step back.

People may be more inclined to want government to be active when there is believed to be a problem and less inclined to want it to take action when they feel that the status quo is satisfactory

This insight has previously led to the suggestion that citizens' attitudes react rather like a 'thermostat' when it comes to the role and activity of government (Wlezien, 1995; Seroka and Wlezien, 2005; 2010). If government starts spending more money on something, and as a result the quality and/or quantity of a service improves, voters gradually come to the view that no further action needs to be taken. If on the other hand, government cuts back on spending and as a result the service comes to be seen as less satisfactory, then there are calls for government to spend more. However, we might anticipate that people's perceptions of the role of government depend not only on how much it is currently spending but also on external circumstances. People may be more inclined to want government to be active when there is believed to be a problem and less inclined to want it to take action when they feel that the status quo is satisfactory. Thus, for example, people may want the government to be active in dealing with unemployment when many people are out of job, but are less concerned for it to do something when joblessness is low (Blekesaune and Quadango, 2003; Blekesaune, 2007). Similarly, they may want the government to be more active in regulating business if there has been recent evidence of corporate misbehaviour than if there has not.

In this chapter, we look at trends in attitudes towards the role of government during the last 20 years. We assess how far attitudes seem to reflect a stable, long-term orientation towards what government should and should not do, and how far they appear to vary in the light of changing circumstances. Our data come principally from questions that were asked as part of a module on

the role of 'government' that were included on the 2016 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey as part of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) (about which more details can be found in the Technical details). These questions were also fielded as part of the same programme in 1996 and 2006, while in some instances they have also been asked in other years too. In addition, we refer to the findings of some additional questions on government spending and activity that have appeared regularly in BSA surveys.

Much, of course, has happened during the last 20 years. After an initial period of fiscal constraint, the Labour government that came to power in 1997 presided over a considerable expansion of public spending. That, and a lot more, came to a halt in 2008 thanks to the worst financial crash since the 1930s and a subsequent depression that blew a large hole in the country's fiscal finances. Although economic growth has since picked up once more – while wage restraint helped ensure that the depression did not result in a sustained increase in unemployment – a period of public spending restraint has still left the country spending more than it raises in taxes. In short, if public attitudes towards the role and activity of government are influenced by changes of circumstances, there is every reason why attitudes might have changed during the last 20 years.

What should Government do?

Table 1 shows for a range of possible activities and objectives how many people during the last 20 years have said that they should "definitely" or "probably" be the responsibility of government. (To make the table easier to follow the figures for those saying they definitely or probably should not be the responsibility of government are not shown.) At first glance, what perhaps is most striking is just how wide-ranging the responsibilities of government are thought to be. Only in the case of one of the items in the table, the provision of a job for everyone, do less than half think it should either definitely or probably be the responsibility of government – and even in that case the figure is only just under half (48%). Most of us appear to think that the government has at least some responsibility for everything from the provision of health care to ensuring that the unemployed have enough to live on.

Most of us appear to think that the government has at least some responsibility for everything from the provision of health care to ensuring that the unemployed have enough to live on

Table 1 Perceptions of the responsibilities of government, 1996-2016

Should it be the government's responsibility to …	1996	2002	2006	2012	2016
… provide health care for the sick	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely	81	84	68	82	67
Probably	16	12	27	16	29
… provide a decent standard of living for the old	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely	69	79	58	74	52
Probably	26	17	36	22	41
… provide industry with the help it needs to grow	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely	38	n/a	27	58	31
Probably	50	n/a	54	33	52
… reduce income differences between the rich and the poor	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely	32	n/a	25	41	31
Probably	30	n/a	38	28	34
… provide decent housing for those who can't afford it	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely	34	n/a	24	38	29
Probably	50	n/a	57	44	50
… keep prices under control	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely	40	53	31	54	29
Probably	41	38	49	35	53
… provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely	26	n/a	10	21	14
Probably	46	n/a	40	38	42
… provide a job for everyone who wants one	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely	26	33	16	27	14
Probably	39	39	36	36	34
Unweighted base	*989*	*1911*	*930*	*956*	*1563*

n/a = not asked

That said, only in one case, the provision of health care, is there a widespread belief that this should "definitely" be the responsibility of government. In this instance two-thirds (67%) currently take that view. Otherwise only the provision of a decent standard of living for the old is also regarded by more than half of citizens as definitely the responsibility of government – and then only just (52%). In all other instances, it is always the case that more people say that an activity or objective should "probably" be the responsibility of government than say it "definitely" should. It seems that there is something of an 'it depends' character to many people's perceptions of what

government should do, not least, perhaps, because in many of these areas people feel that government is but one of several actors with a role to play.

As we would anticipate, those who say they support the Labour party are generally more likely to say that something should be a government responsibility than are those who support the Conservatives. However, the gap varies. It hardly exists at all in respect of the provision of a health service or providing help for industry. While 70% of Labour supporters think providing a health service should definitely be a government responsibility, so also do 65% of Conservative identifiers. Similarly, while 34% of Labour supporters say that government should provide industry with the help that it needs to grow, so also do 30% of Conservatives. Where, in contrast, the two sets of party supporters do particularly disagree is in respect of activities and objectives that imply government action in support of greater equality. Thus, for example, while 45% of Labour supporters think it should definitely be the government's responsibility to reduce income differences between rich and poor, and another 37% believe it probably should be, the equivalent figures amongst Conservative supporters are only 14% and 29% respectively. Much the same picture pertains in respect of the government providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed.

Those who say they support the Labour party are generally more likely to say that something should be a government responsibility than are those who support the Conservatives

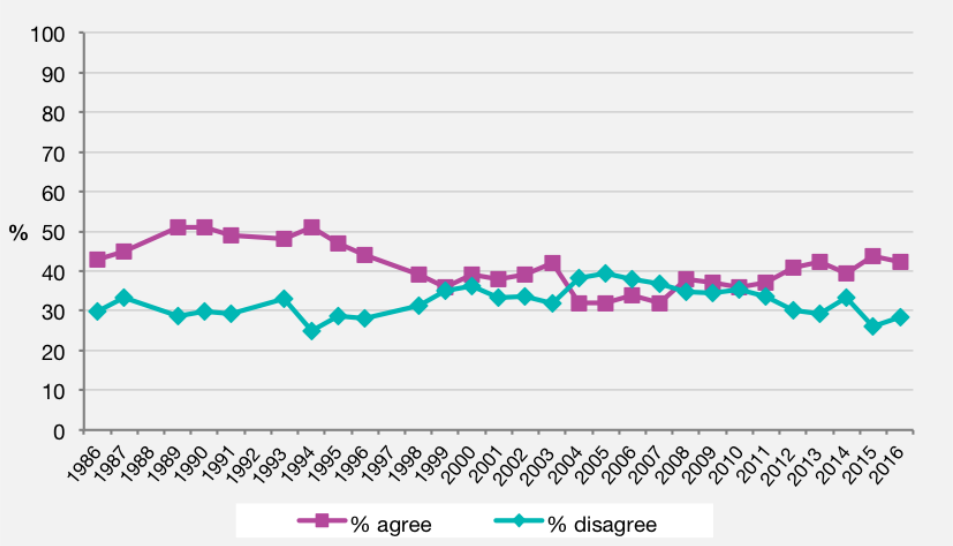
Yet these partisan differences do not mean that the balance of opinion amongst voters as a whole has not altered over time. The most marked change has been in respect of providing a job for anyone who wants one. Twenty years ago, around three-quarters (76%) believed it was either definitely or probably the responsibility of government; now, as we have already noted, a little under half (48%) take that view. The proportion has dropped both amongst Conservative and amongst Labour supporters, albeit more especially amongst the latter (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Chap. 8). This drop is just what we might expect to have happened given recent trends in unemployment (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). In the third quarter of 1996 unemployment stood at 8.1%, having been at a peak of 10.3% just three years earlier. By 2006 it was as low at 5.5% and had been at around 5% or so for the last five years. Equally, after (briefly) being almost as high in 2012 (7.9%) as it had been in 1996, unemployment was even lower, 4.8%, by the third quarter of 2016. In short, unemployment itself has, for the most part, been lower in recent years and, as a result, voters may well be more likely to feel that anyone who wants a job should be able to secure one, and should not have to rely on the government to find employment. Indeed, as noted in the chapter on 'Tax avoidance and benefit manipulation', whereas in 1996 39% agreed that "around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one", by 2006 that figure had risen to 67%, and is still as high as 56% now. This may also help explain why the proportion who think

There is relatively little change over time in the combined totals of those who say that something is either definitely or probably the government's responsibility

the government has a responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed has also fallen somewhat during the last 20 years.

Otherwise, however, there is relatively little change over time in the combined totals of those who say that something is either definitely or probably the government's responsibility. For example, in 1996 62% said that the government should reduce income differences between rich and poor, and 20 years later the figure is, at 65%, still much the same. Relative stability is also in evidence in response to another question about income inequality that is asked regularly on BSA. This asks respondents whether they agree or disagree with the proposition that "the government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well-off". Now, 42% say they agree with this proposition while 28% disagree, figures that are virtually identical to those that pertained in 1996 (44% and 28% respectively). True, the proportion who agreed was lower (and the proportion who disagreed higher) during much of the period in between (just as the proportion saying reducing income differences was definitely the government's responsibility was relatively low in 2006) but, as yet at least, there is no sign that support for redistribution is returning to the level that was in evidence on this measure before the late 1990s (on which see also Curtice, 2010). But then this, perhaps, is just what we might expect given that after rising sharply in the 1980s, there has not been any consistent long-term trend in income inequality during the last 20 years (McGuiness, 2017).

Figure 1 View of whether the government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well-off, 1986-2016



The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

However, in many instances there have been changes in the balance between those saying that an objective is "definitely" a government responsibility and those saying that it "probably" is. Indeed, a similar

pattern can be observed across many of the items in Table 1. In most cases, there was a decline between 1996 and 2006 in the proportion who said that something was "definitely" the government's responsibility. The proportion then rose again in 2012, only for the most part to return once again to what it was in 2006. It may be that the relatively benign economic circumstances that had long been in place by 2006 served to reduce the strength of the demand that the government should be taking responsibility for people's welfare and that, after the hiatus of the financial crash, that mood has now returned once more.

The proportion who think that the government should definitely be responsible for providing a decent standard of living for older people is, at 52%, rather lower than it was in 2006 (58%)

That said, there is one other item where the pattern of change over time is of particular note. The proportion who think that the government should definitely be responsible for providing a decent standard of living for older people is, at 52%, rather lower than it was in 2006 (58%). At the same time, the overall drop since 1996 in the proportion who assign the government definite responsibility for this objective, is second only to the equivalent drop in respect of providing a job for everyone. This is a subject to which we will return later in this chapter.

Managing the economy

One of the key arguments about the role of government is what it should do in order to manage the economy. Some will argue that it should primarily focus on providing a benign macroeconomic environment and then allow the private sector to get on with delivering economic growth. Others will feel that government has a more active role to play, not only providing some of the infrastructure that might help increase economic growth, but also providing financial help for specific industries and projects. In Table 2 we show how attitudes towards some of the things that the government might do for the economy have evolved during the last 20 years. The items were introduced as follows:

> ***Here are some things the government might do for the economy. Please show which actions you are in favour of and which you are against***

In the top half of the table we show attitudes towards some of the ways in which government might intervene directly in the economy, not least as a way of boosting employment, while in the bottom half we look at some of the ways in which government might be expected to step back in order to promote the economy.

Table 2 View of government actions for the economy, 1996-2016

	1996	2006	2016
Support for industry to develop new products and technology	%	%	%
In favour	86	81	83
Against	1	2	1
Government financing of projects to create new jobs	%	%	%
In favour	84	72	83
Against	3	6	3
Support for declining industries to protect jobs	%	%	%
In favour	62	57	56
Against	13	16	14
Reduce the working week to create more jobs	%	%	%
In favour	37	28	25
Against	30	32	36
Less government regulation of business	%	%	%
In favour	40	40	34
Against	14	10	19
Cuts in government spending	%	%	%
In favour	43	35	29
Against	26	29	39
Unweighted base	*989*	*930*	*1563*

Attitudes towards the ways in which the government might actively intervene in the economy have been relatively stable

For the most part, attitudes towards the ways in which the government might actively intervene in the economy have been relatively stable. In the case of each of the items in the top half of the table, the proportion who favour the action now is much the same as it was 20 years ago. There is, it seems, almost universal and consistent support for government action that might promote new products and new jobs, that is, what might be regarded as the engines of economic growth. There is, though, rather less support for 'propping up' declining industries, and indeed this is one activity where support does seem to have declined somewhat (from 66% to 57%) during the last 10 years. Meanwhile, there is remarkably little enthusiasm for the idea of reducing the length of the working week

There is rather less support now for reducing government regulation of business than there was 10 years ago

But if attitudes towards various forms of government intervention in the economy have been relatively stable, those towards ways in which government might step back have changed. There is rather less support now for reducing government regulation of business than there was 10 years ago. Now only 34% feel that way compared with 40% 10 years ago. This drop could conceivably have been occasioned by the experience of the financial crash, which might in part be thought to have been a consequence of inadequate

regulation of the banking sector (Crotty, 2009), together with continuing arguments about the level and oversight of executive pay (House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, 2017).

However, the biggest change has occurred in respect of attitudes towards cuts in government spending. Now only 29% feel that this would be beneficial to the economy, compared with 35% 10 years ago, and as many as 43% in 1996. Even more strikingly, perhaps, more people now say that they are opposed to such a policy than say they are in favour. This is not simply a partisan reaction to the fiscal constraint introduced by Conservative-led administrations. Although Labour supporters (23%) are less likely to be in favour of cutting expenditure than their Conservative counterparts (36%), there has been as much as an 11 point decline in support since 1996 amongst Conservatives, a drop that is almost as big as the 14 points drop over the same time period amongst Labour supporters. This trend comes, of course, at the end of a six-year period in which government has been trying to reduce the fiscal deficit by reducing (or, more accurately, stemming the overall increase in) government expenditure (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2015a). Public spending as a proportion of GDP fell from just under 48% in 2009-10 to 41% in 2016-17. Perhaps voters are beginning to react against the curb on public spending during this period?

Further evidence that this may be the case comes from the responses to a question that has been asked every year by BSA since the first survey in 1983. It reads as follows:

> *Suppose the government had to choose between the three options on this card. Which do you think it should choose?*
>
> *Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits*
>
> *Keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now*
>
> *Increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits*

Table 3 Attitudes to taxation and spending on health, education and social benefits, 1983–2016

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
View on level of taxation and spending	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Increase taxes/spend more	32	n/a	n/a	46	50	n/a	50	54	65
Keep taxes/spend same	54	n/a	n/a	44	42	n/a	46	37	29
Reduce taxes/spend less	9	n/a	n/a	5	3	n/a	3	3	3
Unweighted base	*1761*	*n/a*	*n/a*	*3100*	*2847*	*n/a*	*3029*	*2797*	*2918*

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
View on level of taxation and spending	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Increase taxes/spend more	n/a	63	58	61	59	62	63	58	50
Keep taxes/spend same	n/a	29	33	31	34	31	32	35	40
Reduce taxes/spend less	n/a	4	4	5	4	3	3	4	5
Unweighted base	*n/a*	*2945*	*3469*	*3633*	*3620*	*1355*	*3146*	*3143*	*2292*

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
View on level of taxation and spending	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Increase taxes/spend more	59	63	51	49	46	46	42	39	34
Keep taxes/spend same	34	31	38	42	43	44	47	50	55
Reduce taxes/spend less	3	3	6	6	7	6	7	8	8
Unweighted base	*3287*	*3435*	*3272*	*2146*	*2166*	*3240*	*3094*	*2229*	*1139*

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
View on level of taxation and spending	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Increase taxes/spend more	32	36	34	36	37	45	48
Keep taxes/spend same	56	54	53	54	52	47	44
Reduce taxes/spend less	8	6	6	6	7	4	4
Unweighted base	*3297*	*3311*	*3248*	*3244*	*2878*	*3266*	*2942*

n/a = not asked

As Table 3 shows, following a marked increase in public spending during much of the first decade of the twenty-first century, support for increased spending in response to this question fell away markedly from 63% in 2002 to just 32% in 2010. Now, having remained at little more than one third for a number of years, support has risen once again to 48%, higher than at any time since 2004. It would seem that voters are now beginning to react against the

'austerity' of recent years, just as we might expect them to do if they were behaving like a thermostat, though we should also note that support for more spending on this measure is still, as yet, to reach the 60% or so level that was commonplace for much of the 1990s.

Public spending

It would seem that voters are now beginning to react against the 'austerity' of recent years, just as we might expect them to do if they were behaving like a thermostat

This, however, still leaves the question of what precisely government should spend money on. In Table 4 we show how people have responded when asked the following question:

> *Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please show whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say "much more", it might require a tax increase to pay for it*

In each case respondents were presented with a set of five possible answers ranging from "spend much more" to "spend much less". In the table, we show the proportion who say that the government should spend either "much more" or just "more" combined.

The table reveals that some forms of spending are persistently more popular than others. Just as in Table 1 we saw that providing health care for the sick was more likely to be regarded as a government responsibility than any other activity, so spending on health has always been the most popular option for increasing spending. On the other hand, only a distinct minority has ever favoured spending more on culture and the arts, albeit that that minority appears to be slightly bigger now than 20 years ago.

Table 4 View of government spending levels in different policy areas, 1996-2016

% in favour of more government spending	1996	2006	2016
Health	90	78	83
Education	82	69	71
Police and Law Enforcement	70	58	57
Old Age Pensions	76	69	55
Environment	41	53	41
The Military and Defence	17	28	39
Unemployment Benefits	33	13	16
Culture and the Arts	6	10	13
Unweighted base	*989*	*930*	*1563*

Support for increased spending on unemployment benefits is, at 16%, only around half the level it was 20 years ago

That said, there have been some marked long-term changes in the popularity of increased spending for some particular items. First of all, in line with the decline in the proportion who think that the government has a responsibility for ensuring that unemployed people have a decent standard of living, support for increased spending on unemployment benefits is, at 16%, only around half the level it was

20 years ago. This finding is also consistent with the evidence of a further question about benefits for the unemployed that has been carried regularly on BSA. In 1996 as many as 48% said that benefits for unemployed people were "too low and cause hardship", but this figure had fallen to 23% in 1996 and was still only 24% in 2015. So here, it seems, is evidence further to that in Table 1 that the lower levels of unemployment in recent years has resulted in less demand to spend money on those who do find themselves without have a job.

Second, there has been a marked decline in support for extra government spending on old age pensions. Only 55% now think that more should be spent on funding pensions, compared with 69% 10 years ago, a drop that is evident irrespective of the party someone supports. This would appear to echo what we noted in Table 1 in relation to the drop in the proportion who felt that the government had a responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for older people. It is also reflected in the fact that, in response to a different question on the survey (see the Key Findings), only 60% now say that retirement pensions are among their two top priorities for more government spending, less than have done so in any BSA survey since the series began in 1983.

Thanks to the introduction of a 'triple lock' whereby the state old age pension has been increased each year by whichever was the highest of wage inflation, price inflation or 2.5%, pensioners have largely been protected from the government's attempts to reduce spending on welfare. Together with increased access amongst older people to private pensions, this policy has helped ensure that the standard of living of pensioners has grown more rapidly in recent years than it has amongst younger people (Office for National Statistics, 2017b).

As many as 41% now think that the government is successful at "providing a decent standard of living for the old", well up on the 30% who were of that view in 2012

It would appear this relative success in increasing the standard of living of older people has been recognised by many voters. In response to another question in the survey, as many as 41% now think that the government is successful at "providing a decent standard of living for the old", well up on the 30% who were of that view in 2012, let alone the 27% who felt that way in 2006. And it is this recognition that seems to have helped persuade some voters that spending on old age pensions is now less of a priority than it was. Amongst those who think that the government has been successful in providing a decent standard of living for older people, just 41% are in favour of more spending on pensions, whereas amongst those who think the government has been unsuccessful the figure is still as high as 76%. Interestingly, the decline in support for more spending on pensions is by no means confined to younger people of working age. Even amongst those aged 65 and over, support for more spending has fallen from 85% in 1996 to 53% now.

Although starting from a low level of just 17% in 1996, there has also been a substantial increase, to 39%, in the proportion who would like more spending on the military and defence

Third, although starting from a low level of just 17% in 1996, there has also been a substantial increase, to 39%, in the proportion who would like more spending on the military and defence. This is despite the fact that the proportion who think that the government has been

successful at "dealing with threats to Britain's security" has increased from 40% in 1996 to 55% in 2006 and 72% now. However, in this case it seems that a perception of success does not necessarily persuade voters to think that more money does not need to be spent. In our most recent survey, for example, those who thought that government was "very successful" at dealing with threats to security were actually more likely (43% were in favour) of spending more on the military and defence than were those who thought that government had neither been successful nor unsuccessful. This suggests that for some voters at least, past success in dealing with security threats is evidence that money spent on defence is money well spent (see also the chapter on 'Civil Liberties'). Meanwhile, we should bear in mind that the proportion of national income spent on defence by Britain has been in long-term decline, a trend that has continued during the last 20 years despite the cost of the country's military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2015b). So, once again, voters could be reacting to the recent trajectory in public spending.

Conclusion

The health service has consistently been the public's number one priority, while, conversely, meeting the needs of the unemployed has consistently been regarded as less important

Voters still, it seems have relatively high expectations of government. Most think it has some role at least both in managing and growing the economy and in providing universal public services such as health, education and pensions. Meanwhile, within that broad envelope, voters' priorities for what the government should do have changed little. The health service has consistently been the public's number one priority, while, conversely, meeting the needs of the unemployed has consistently been regarded as less important. At the same time, Labour supporters have always been somewhat more inclined than their Conservative counterparts to back a more active state.

Yet this does not mean that attitudes have not changed. Our analysis has uncovered three important trends during the last 20 years. First, voters have become less keen on the government becoming involved in meeting the needs of the unemployed. Second, there is now felt to be less urgency about spending more on pensions and on the financial needs of older people. Third, and in a sense despite these two trends, support for curbing public expenditure in general has fallen.

None of these trends appear to be result of partisan responses, confined to either Conservative or Labour supporters, but rather appear to have occurred across the political spectrum. Rather, all three seem to provide evidence of the public reacting to changing circumstances, including the recent trajectory in public spending. Unemployment has been relatively low during the last two decades and there is a relatively widespread feeling nowadays that anyone who wants a job should be able to find one. It is thus not surprising that voters should think that devoting scarce public resources to

Voters themselves appear to think that government has been relatively successful at meeting the financial needs of pensioners and it seems that some have now come to the view that spending more money on older people has become less of a priority too

tacking unemployment and its consequences has become a less pressing priority. Meanwhile, although their incomes are still lower than those in employment, the incomes of pensioners have grown more rapidly in recent years. Voters themselves appear to think that government has been relatively successful at meeting the financial needs of pensioners and it seems that some have now come to the view that spending more money on older people has become less of a priority too.

But while unemployment has been relatively low and many pensioners have seen a growth in their incomes, the last seven years have been ones of relative famine so far as public expenditure is concerned. It appears that gradually the public are beginning to react against that experience, as reflected in declining support for cutting expenditure as a way of helping the economy and some increase in support for spending on public services. True, the call for more spending is still well below what it was by the late 1990s, but it looks as though the tide may at least have begun to flow back in that direction.

For many a politician, what the government should or should not do is a question of belief, a largely unchanging ideological preference for either a government that does a little less or one that does rather more. However, it seems that many voters take a more pragmatic view. When a problem arises they often look to government to fix it. Once that problem is solved they look to government to shift its attention elsewhere. It means that a politician who looks for plaudits for what they have achieved is always at risk of being disappointed – for voters' focus is always on today's difficulty, not yesterday's achievement.

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Acknowledgements

The National Centre for Social Research is grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council (grant reference ES/P002234/1) for their financial support which enabled us to ask the questions reported in this chapter. The views expressed are those of the author alone.

Appendix

The data for Figure 1 are shown below.

Table A.1 View of redistribution, 1986-2016

	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996
The government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	43	45	51	51	49	48	51	47	44
Disagree	30	33	29	30	29	33	25	29	28
Unweighted base	*1321*	*2493*	*2604*	*2430*	*2702*	*1306*	*2929*	*3135*	*3085*

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
The government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	39	36	39	38	39	42	32	32	34
Disagree	31	35	36	33	34	32	38	39	38
Unweighted base	*3085*	*2450*	*2980*	*2795*	*2900*	*3621*	*2609*	*3559*	*3748*

	2007	2008	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
The government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	32	38	32	38	37	36	37	41	42
Disagree	37	35	37	35	34	35	34	30	29
Unweighted base	*3578*	*3990*	*3578*	*3990*	*2942*	*2791*	*2845*	*2855*	*2832*

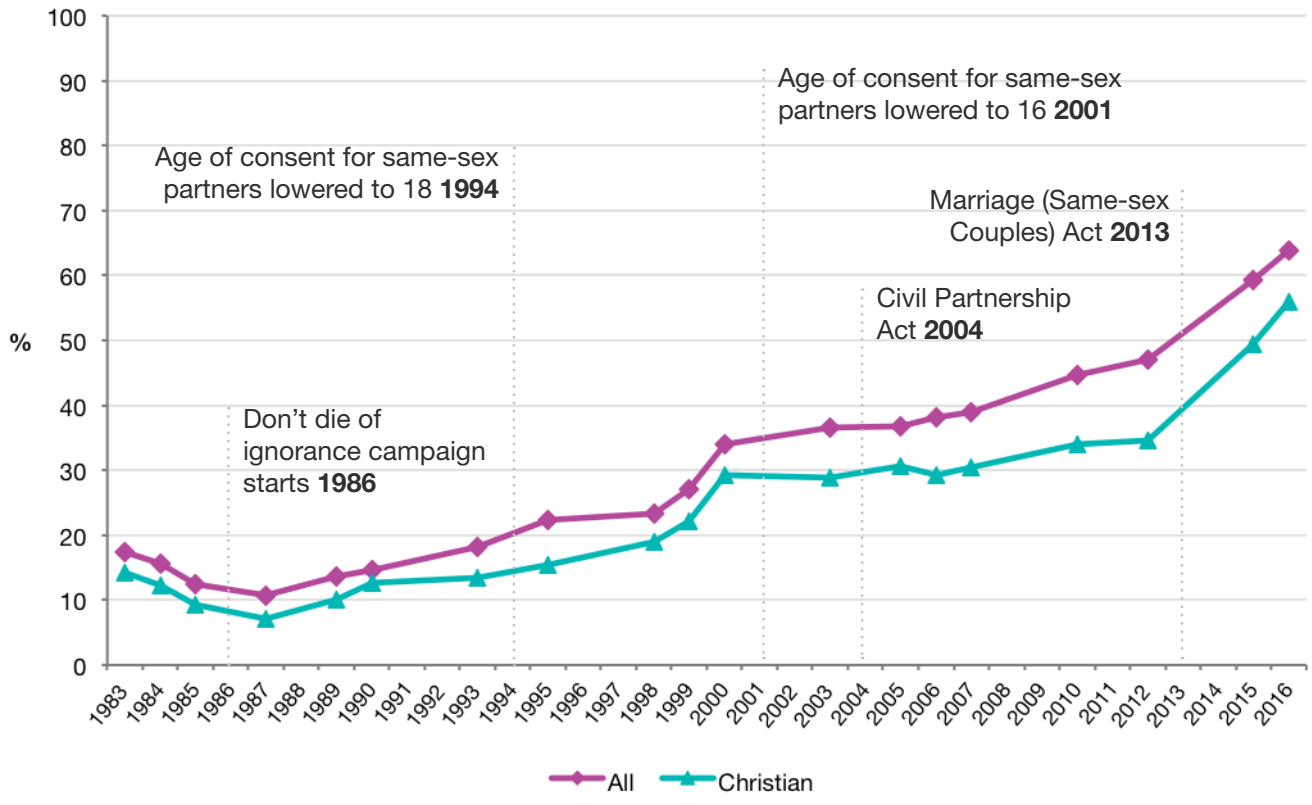
	2014	2015	2016
The government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off	%	%	%
Agree	39	44	42
Disagree	33	26	28
Unweighted base	*2376*	*3670*	*2400*

Moral issues

Sex, gender identity and euthanasia

Attitudes to sex before marriage, same-sex relationships, abortion and pornography have all become more liberal. While people who identify as religious, older people and those without a formal education are less liberal, there are signs this is changing.

Acceptance of same-sex relationships has increased quickly in the last four years, especially among Christians



Overview

This chapter explores attitudes to a range of personal and political issues and finds that the growth in social liberalism seen in recent decades continues. Attitudes to sex before marriage, same-sex relationships, abortion and pornography have all become more liberal, while attitudes to euthanasia remain largely unchanged. For the first time using the British Social Attitude (BSA) survey's method, attitudes to transgender people are also examined. Underneath this liberalising trend however, we find some important demographic dividing lines.

The growth in social liberalism continues

The liberalisation in attitudes to pre-marital sex, same-sex relationships, abortion and pornography continue. For the first two of these, this trend has accelerated in recent years.

- A significant majority of people (75%) say that sex before marriage is "not at all wrong", an increase of 11 percentage points since 2012, and 5 percentage points since 2015.
- Attitudes towards same-sex relationships have become significantly more liberal with 64% of people saying that they are "not wrong at all", up from 59% in 2015, and 47% in 2012.
- 93% of people think that if a woman's health is seriously endangered, an abortion should be allowed. Record-highs of people say an abortion should be allowed if a woman decides on her own she does not want the child (70%) or if a couple cannot afford any more children (65%).
- 41% of people feel some films are too violent or pornographic to be watched even by adults, down from 59% of people in 1996.

Some views contradict policy and practice

Broad support for a form of euthanasia continues and contrasts with its total legal prohibition. Meanwhile, low self-reported levels of prejudice to transgender people contrast with when people are asked about specific situations.

- 77% of people feel a person with a painful incurable disease should be able to legally request that a doctor end their life. This support has been stable for over 30 years.
- The vast majority of people (82%) describe themselves as "not prejudiced at all" to transgender people. However, less than half of people say suitably qualified transgender people should definitely be employed as police officers or primary school teachers (43% and 41% respectively).

Divides by age, religion and education

While social liberalism seems to be growing, there are notable divides by certain demographics.

- People who have a religion are less likely to hold liberal views than those with no religion on all of the topics we examine in this chapter.
- Similarly, older people are less likely to hold socially liberal views than younger people for all of the topics except transgender issues.
- People without formal educational qualifications are more likely to be socially conservative than those with qualifications in their views on same-sex relationships, abortion and transgender issues.

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Introduction

In this chapter we examine whether there is a further onward trend of 'social liberalism', typically the belief that there is a personal realm in which the only role of the state is as a guarantor of freedoms, counter-posed against 'social conservatism', which suggests that societal or state-sanctioned moral judgement is what keeps society cohesive and strong.

This year's BSA questions allow us to examine this question across a range of questions covering personal or private autonomy, including sex before marriage, same-sex relationships, the use of pornography, transgender rights and attitudes to abortion and euthanasia. While this is not an exhaustive list and spans different types of issues, it does nonetheless provide us with an indication of whether there has been continued growth in social liberalism. Further, this chapter also examines whether there is a pattern in which demographic characteristics typically predict answers to questions on these issues.

Previous analysis of BSA data over the last 30 years has found evidence of increasing acceptance of people having children before marriage, premarital sex, abortion and same-sex relationships. The latter, in particular, has seen a dramatic fall in intolerant attitudes from the late 1980s through to the 2010s.

By contrast, attitudes to euthanasia have been more mixed. Clery et al's (2007) chapter found a more complex picture of trends in views on euthanasia; while a large majority of people support doctor-assisted dying where the patient is painfully and terminally ill, in 2005 there had been a decrease in support for assisted dying where someone was not going to die from their illness.

This chapter will seek to update the findings from these previous BSA chapters, and also include some findings from questions not before presented in a BSA report. Firstly, views of pornography and adult content in films, and secondly, new questions on views towards transgender people, their use of public bathrooms and their employment in two public-facing jobs.

Sex and relationships

It is well documented that recent decades have seen great changes in the way British people approach marriage and family. Official statistics show a dramatic decline in marriage rates since the early 1970s, while the average age of marrying for the first time has increased from 26 for women and 29 for men in 1974, to 35 for women and 37 for men in 2014 (for opposite-sex couples) (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). This has been accompanied by an increase in cohabiting couples, either instead of marriage or for long periods before marriage.

Perhaps the most significant change to marriage in Britain in the more recent past was the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act in 2013. Britain is now one of 22 countries (at the time of writing) that legally

recognise same-sex marriages, and in 2014 there were around 5000 same-sex marriages in England and Wales. This forms part of a significant shift in societal and legal status for LGB people over the last 50 years.

We know from previous BSA surveys that the public has become increasingly accepting of same-sex relationships as well as sex outside of marriage. Park and Rhead previously speculated that this would likely steadily continue as each older, more conservative generation is replaced by a younger, more liberal one (Park and Rhead, 2013). Here we examine whether this has been the case in years since.

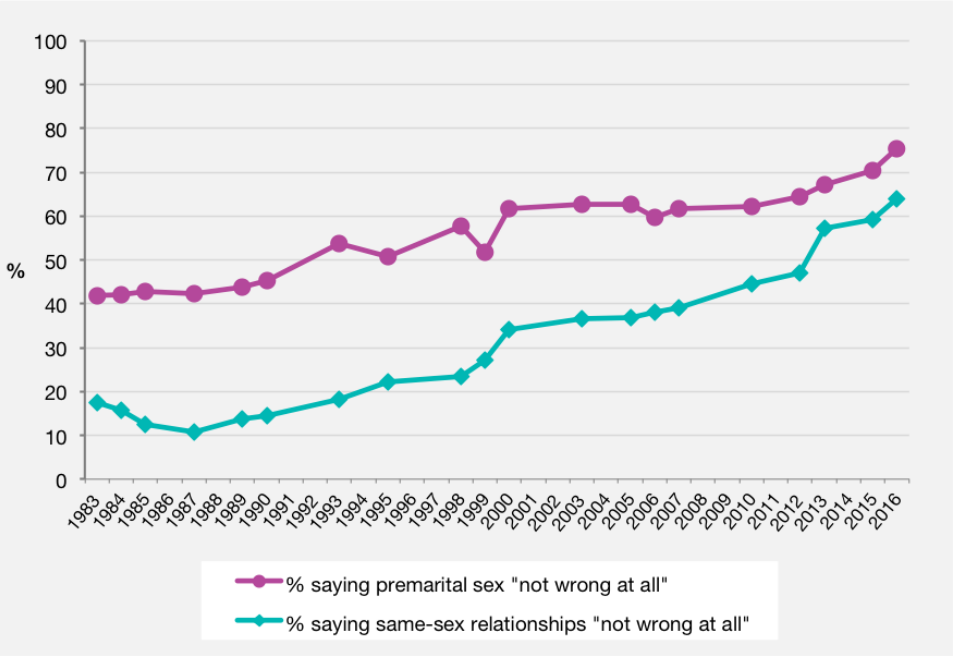
In this section we focus on changing attitudes to both sex before marriage, and same-sex relationships, using two questions that have been asked on the BSA survey since its inception in 1983:

> ***If a man and woman have sexual relations before marriage, what would your general opinion be?***
>
> ***What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex?***
>
> ***[Always wrong, Mostly wrong, Sometimes wrong, Rarely wrong, Not wrong at all]***

As shown in Figure 1, we see no evidence of a slowing down of this liberalisation of views towards premarital sex and same-sex relations – in fact data from the past 5 years appear to show acceleration towards more liberal attitudes. Attitudes to premarital sex were fairly stable between 2007 and 2012, however there has been a marked increase in acceptance of sex before marriage since 2012; 75% now say that sex before marriage is "not at all wrong", an increase of 11 percentage points since 2012, and 5 percentage points since 2015. Now just 8% think premarital sex is "always" or "mostly" wrong.

There has also been a significant increase in liberal attitudes towards same-sex relationships since the introduction of same-sex marriages in 2014; the proportion saying that same-sex relationships are '"not wrong at all'" is now a clear majority at 64%, up from 59% in 2015, and 47% in 2012. Looking further back to when the question was first asked in the 1980s an even starker picture emerges. In 1983 only 17% were completely accepting of same-sex relationships. Attitudes hardened further during the late 1980s at the height of the AIDS crisis; in 1987 just 11% said same-sex relationships were "not wrong at all". At that time three-quarters (74%) of British people thought same-sex relationships were "always" or "mostly" wrong, a view that has fallen to 19% today.

Figure 1 Views on premarital sex and same-sex relationships, 1983-2016



The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

While the British public is generally more accepting of premarital sex than same-sex relationships (75% and 64% respectively), this gap has narrowed substantially

Comparing the change over time in attitudes towards premarital sex and same-sex relationships we see that while the British public is generally more accepting of premarital sex than same-sex relationships (75% and 64% respectively), this gap has narrowed substantially from 26 percentage points in 2005 to 11 percentage points in 2016.

Premarital sex: generational differences or lifecycle change?

To further explore this attitudinal shift, we examine the differences between various societal groups and how these have changed over time. One particularly pertinent characteristic here is age; it may come as no surprise that past BSA reports have found older people to be less liberal in their views of sex and relationships than younger people, and our analysis confirms this pattern. In 2016 84% of 27 to 36 year olds say premarital sex is "not wrong at all", compared with 59% of people aged 67 to 76.

This age difference might be due to a **'generational effect'** (or 'cohort effect'); that is that each new generation develops views in their formative years, and retains similar attitudes throughout their life. Therefore as older generations formed their opinions in a more socially and politically conservative period in time, their views are likely to be more conservative than younger generations. If this is the case then as older generations grow older and are eventually replaced by younger, more liberal ones, the attitudes of society as a whole will become more liberal.

A second possible explanation for this age difference is a **'lifecycle effect'** (sometimes known as an 'ageing effect'); the concept that people become more conservative in their views as they become older.

As well as generational and lifecycle effects, looking at change over time might reveal a **'period effect';** which means all cohorts are changing their views in the same direction over time, due to changes in the societal climate. Often, the three drivers of change are interrelated.

One way to unpick these different possible effects is to follow how each generation change their views over time using cohort analysis. As the BSA survey uses a fresh sample each year we are not following the same individuals over time, however, the long-term nature of the project does allow us to examine how people born in the same era change their views over time. In this chapter we have chosen to group people by the decade they are born in, rather than larger conceptual groups (for example the groups of Pre-war, Baby boomers, and Generations X and Y used in Ipsos, 2012), because this allows us a more detailed view of generational attitudes and how they change over time.

There is a clear generational divide, with younger cohorts tending to be more liberal than older ones on premarital sex

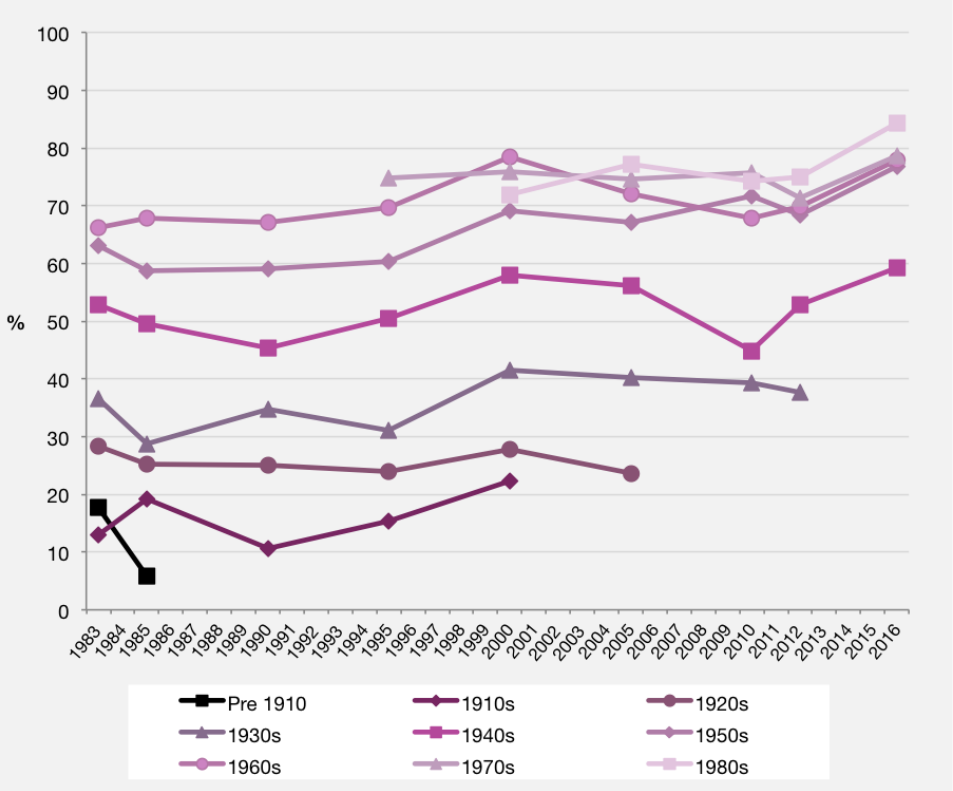
In Figure 2 we present attitudes to sex before marriage over time by age cohort, with lighter purple lines representing younger age cohorts, and darker lines older ones. In general there is a clear generational divide, with younger cohorts tending to be more liberal than older ones. And this is true across time; in general each generation retains similar views over time, reflected by the fact that each line is relatively stable and so suggests there is not a strong lifecycle effect on this measure. For example, if we look at those born in the 1940s, in 1983 53% said that premarital sex is "not wrong at all", and although the view of this cohort moved around slightly over the years, in 2016 we find a similar 59% of this group held this view. This pattern suggests that the change we have seen overall of an increased liberalism towards premarital sex is related to a generational effect; as older generations are being replaced by younger, more liberal ones, the views of society as a whole have become more accepting of premarital sex.

Two further points can be made about the data in Figure 2. Firstly, while in 1983 there was a wide range of views across the generations, from 17% of the oldest generation being accepting to 66% of the youngest group, in 2016 all but the oldest cohort are clustered together in a group with relatively homogenous views spanning from 77% to 84%. So while historically there were clear divisions between age cohorts in their views of premarital sex, most of the cohorts now sit together with little difference between their views.

The second point is that although looking at the long-term trend there has been little change over time within cohorts, between 2012 and 2016 there was a substantial increase in acceptance of premarital

sex among all age cohorts. This suggests that while the liberalisation of attitudes towards premarital sex has been driven by generational effects in the past, in the most recent 5 years other factors are also at play, leading to a society-wide shift.

Figure 2 Proportion saying premarital sex is "not wrong at all", by generation cohort, 1983-2016



The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

So if the increased acceptance of sex outside wedlock is not being only driven by age, are there particular societal groups that have changed their views over the past 5 years?

There has been an increased acceptance of sex before marriage over the past 5 years among all religious groups

Religious groups are more conservative in their views on premarital sex than people without a religion. However, there has been an increased acceptance of sex before marriage over the past 5 years among all religious groups and the gap in attitudes between the religious and non-religious appears to be narrowing (Table 1). Note that small sample sizes mean caution should be used when looking at figures for the Roman Catholic group in 2012 and 2016, and the Non-Christian group.

Table 1 Views on premarital sex, 1985-2016, by religion[1]

% saying premarital sex "not wrong at all"	1985	1995	2005	2012	2016	Change 2012-2016
Religion						
Church of England/ Anglican	37	43	58	54	73	+19
Roman Catholic	38	39	62	64	76	+12
Other Christian	28	36	47	45	62	+17
Non-Christian	‡	‡	36	21	33	+11
No religion	59	68	79	82	87	+6

The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

‡ = percentage not shown as base is under 50

There also appear to be differences by education level; those without any formal qualifications (62%) are least likely to be accepting of premarital sex, while those with higher education and A-levels (82%) and GCSEs or equivalent (80%) are most likely to be accepting of this. However, regression analysis found that once the relationship between level of education and other variables is controlled for[2], level of education is not significantly associated with attitudes to premarital sex. Nevertheless it is notable that people with qualifications are more likely than those with no qualifications to have become more liberal since 2012.

Who is most and least likely to be accepting of same-sex relationships?

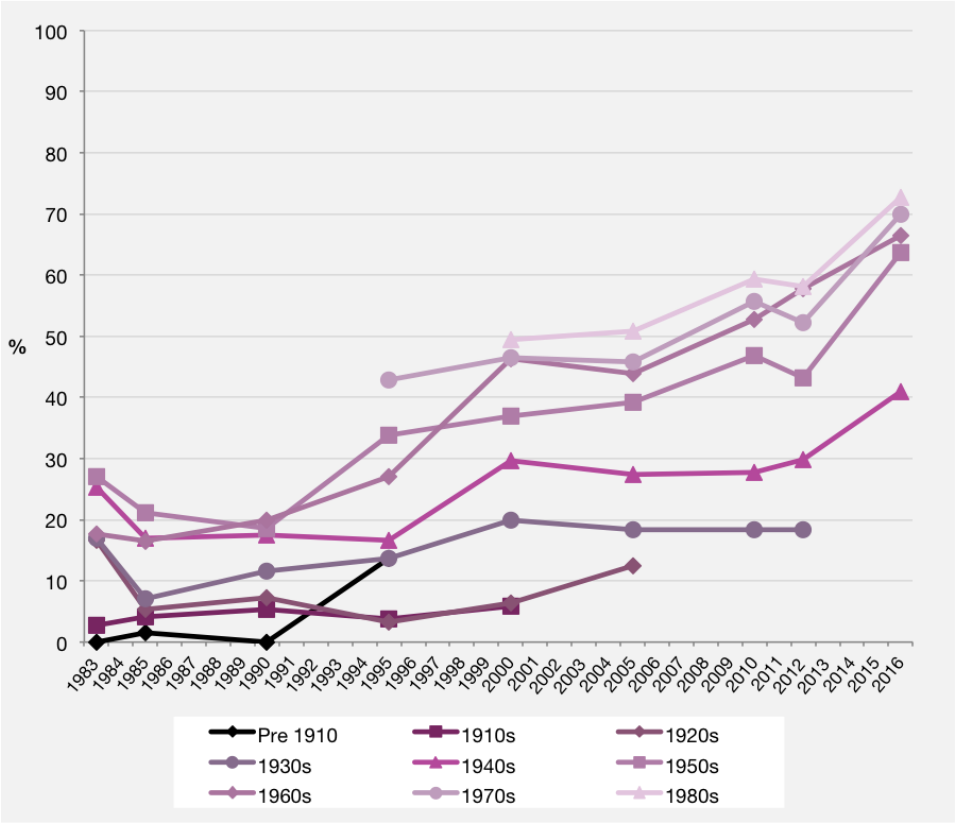
73% of people born in the 1980s say that same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all", compared with just 41% of people born in the 1940s

When we turn to views on same-sex relationships we again see a marked difference in views between age cohorts, for example 73% of people born in the 1980s say that same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all", compared with just 41% of people born in the 1940s (Figure 3). Unlike the pattern of generational differences we saw with premarital sex, attitudes towards same-sex relationships have changed markedly within cohorts; people born in all cohorts from the 1940s onwards have become more accepting of same-sex relationships since the early 1990s. The fact that nearly all cohorts have become markedly more accepting of same-sex relationships suggests that the shift in views over time has been caused by wider societal changes, rather than a predominantly generational effect. This increased liberalisation of views therefore appears to mainly be a period effect – driven by a society-wide cultural shift.

1 Figures showing change over time in this table are calculated from the exact data, rather than the rounded figures that appear in the table. As a result they will sometimes appear to be incorrect by +/-1%. This applies to all similar tables in this chapter.

2 Variables included in this binary logistic regression analysis (as well as other regression analyses in this chapter) were: highest level of education, age, sex, religion, party identification and social class. Education level is known to be associated with age, religion, party identification and social class. Full results of the multivariate analyses can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

Figure 3 Proportion saying same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all", by generation cohort, 1983-2016



The data on which Figure 3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Well over half (55%) of Anglicans say same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all"

Looking at attitudes by religion, education and party identification we find that that since 2012, all sub-groups have become more liberal in their views towards same-sex relationships. There has been a shift towards acceptance among every religious group in the past 5 years, notably now well over half (55%) of Anglicans say same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all", an increase of 24 percentage points since 2012 (Table 2). As with attitudes to pre-marital sex, we see a narrowing of the gap between the religious and the non-religious, as religious groups, specifically Christian groups, are increasing their acceptance at a faster rate, (note that again, small sample sizes for the non-Christian and Catholic groups mean caution should be used).

Table 2 Views on same-sex relationships, 1985-2016, by religion

% saying same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all"	1985	1995	2005	2012	2016	Change 2012-2016
Religion						
Church of England/ Anglican	9	14	31	31	55	+24
Roman Catholic	9	21	37	38	62	+24
Other Christian	9	13	25	37	53	+16
Non-Christian	‡	‡	19	19	30	+11
No religion	19	32	50	63	76	+13

The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

‡ = percentage not shown as base is under 50

There is particularly low acceptance of same-sex relationships among those without any formal qualifications, 38% of this group say that same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all", compared with 60% of people with GCSEs or equivalent, 75% of people with higher educational qualifications or A-levels, and 74% of people with a degree. This more conservative attitude among people with fewer qualifications holds up when we use regression analysis to control for variation in age and other characteristics, confirming that education level is significantly associated with attitudes to same-sex relationships. However, even those without any formal qualifications have become more liberal in the past 5 years; in 2012 only 27% of this group said that same-sex relationships were "not wrong at all", meaning an increase of 12 percentage points.

One might expect public opinion on this issue to divide clearly down party lines; however this is not the case. While acceptance of same-sex relationships is slightly lower among Conservative supporters (60%) compared with Labour supporters (69%), the gap is not large and it has narrowed since 2012 (from 13 to 9 percentage points). There are now comfortable majorities accepting of same-sex relationships amongst the supporters of both the country's largest parties.

This year's findings show that this growing liberalism has accelerated in recent years

Summary

In 2013 Park and Rhead suggested that based on their findings to date it was likely that liberalisation of attitudes to sex and relationships would steadily continue before plateauing. This year's findings in fact show that this growing liberalism has accelerated in recent years. This analysis shows that while changes continue to be driven by a generational effect of older, more conservative cohorts being replaced by younger ones with a more liberal outlook, there is a period effect at play too. With the exception of those without any formal qualifications, which merits further examination, there has been a society-wide liberalisation of views towards sex

and relationships. It is possible that the interesting acceleration in liberalisation we have seen has occurred because we have reached a tipping point after which normalisation occurs.

Transgender people

Transgender people and their stories are becoming increasingly visible in society; with the emergence of various public figures in the last decade or more such as celebrity Caitlyn Jenner, actress Laverne Cox, Big Brother winner Nadia Almada and former soldier Chelsea Manning. This has come alongside high-profile films and TV programmes centred on transgender characters, such as the 2015 film The Danish Girl starring Eddie Redmayne, Hayley Cropper on Coronation Street, and the first of its kind, BBC2 sitcom Boy meets Girl in 2016.

The first parliamentary inquiry into transphobia and discrimination in 2016 reported widespread societal and systemic transphobia

Nonetheless transgender people continue to face both personal prejudice and structural discrimination affecting many aspects of their lives. For example, the first parliamentary inquiry into transphobia and discrimination in 2016 reported widespread societal and systemic transphobia, citing a multitude of issues such as the way the NHS deals with transgender patients (in particular by medicalising trans identity, i.e. considering it as a condition that needs to be treated), as well as how the criminal justice system deals with transphobic crimes (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). The Trans Mental Health study (McNeil et al, 2012) found that 81% of its respondents feared and avoided certain social or public situations, such as gyms, public toilets and shops, while 38% had experienced sexual harassment and 37% physical threats or intimidation for being transgender. Some transgender people have also experienced attacks from the press, with primary school teacher Lucy Meadows taking her own life three months after transitioning to being a woman, after being hounded by media reporters (Brown, 2013). While her suicide note made no mention of the press, the coroner of the case criticised the "sensational and salacious" coverage, in particular an article by Richard Littlejohn in the Daily Mail entitled "He's not only in the wrong body … he's in the wrong job", which has since been removed from the newspaper's website.

We use data collected on BSA 2016 which, for the first time, measures public attitudes around transgender issues on a general population random probability survey

Another battleground is the use of gendered public toilets. In the UK in order to make trans and non-binary people feel more comfortable a number of universities and other spaces have introduced gender-neutral toilets. However in the US some states have passed bills requiring people to use public bathrooms according to the gender listed on their birth certificate rather than their gender identity, meaning transgender women would have to use a men's bathroom and vice-versa.

In this section we use data collected on BSA 2016 which, for the first time, measures public attitudes around transgender issues on

a general population random probability survey. For this survey we used a definition of transgender people that was developed in past research (Balarajan et al, 2011):

> *[people who] have gone through all or part of a process (including thoughts or actions) to change the sex they were described as at birth to the gender they identify with, or intend to. This might include by changing their name, wearing different clothes, taking hormones or having gender reassignment surgery*

Prejudice against people who are transgender

We first turn to prejudice against people who are transgender. We asked people to self-report transgender prejudice (also known as transphobia) using the following question:

> *How would you describe yourself...*
>
> *... as very prejudiced against people who are transgender,*
>
> *a little prejudiced,*
>
> *or, not prejudiced at all?*

Overwhelmingly, the public reports themselves as not prejudiced against transgender people. Over 8 in 10 (82%) describe themselves as "not prejudiced at all", while 15% say they are "a little prejudiced", and just 2% say they are "very prejudiced" (Table 3). Of course, this question does have the possibility of a social desirability bias affecting the responses. To get around this we also asked a second question placed on the self-completion element of the survey that approaches the topic of prejudice from a rather less subjective point of view:

> *Do you think that prejudice against transgender people is always wrong, sometimes wrong, rarely wrong or never wrong?*

Only 53% condemn transphobia completely, saying that prejudice against people who are transgender is "always wrong"

Here we find that only 53% condemn transphobia completely, saying that prejudice against people who are transgender is "always wrong", however a further 19% say that prejudice against transgender people is "mostly wrong", meaning a total of 72% have a largely negative view of prejudice against transgender people. A minority (15%) say that transphobia is "sometimes wrong", while very few (4%) say it is "rarely" or "never" wrong.

Table 3 Prejudice against people who are transgender	
Would you describe yourself ...	%
... as very prejudiced against people who are transgender	2
… a little prejudiced	15
… or not prejudiced at all	82
Unweighted base	*974*
View of prejudice against transgender people	%
Always wrong	53
Mostly wrong	19
Sometimes wrong	15
Rarely wrong	3
Never wrong	1
Unweighted base	*782*

Public-facing jobs

We also asked respondents how they feel about people who are transgender being employed in public-facing roles, in the following two questions:

> ***If they are suitably qualified, do you think that people who are transgender should be employed as …***
>
> ***… police officers?***
>
> ***… primary school teachers?***

Overall around 4 in 10 are completely accepting of transgender people being employed in public-facing jobs, with 43% saying that a qualified transgender person "definitely should" be employed as a police officer and 41% saying they "definitely should" be employed as primary school teachers (Table 4). Overall, acceptance (whether definite or more tentative) is slightly higher for employment as a police officer than as a primary school teacher, with 74% saying transgender people "definitely" or "probably" should be employed as police officers, compared with 67% saying the same for primary school teachers. This difference suggests there may be some who are accepting of a transgender person being employed in a general public-facing job, but not for a job working closely with children. The extent to which this is the case, and how attitudes vary by other types of role, could be worth exploring in further research.

Overall, acceptance (whether definite or more tentative) is slightly higher for employment as a police officer than as a primary school teacher

There is still a substantial minority who do not approve of transgender people being employed in these jobs, including 15% who say transgender people "probably" or "definitely" should not be employed as police officers, and 21% saying they should not be employed as primary school teachers.

Table 4 View of transgender people in public-facing jobs

	Should suitably qualified transgender people be employed as …	
	… police officers	… primary school teachers
	%	%
Definitely should	43	41
Probably should	32	26
Probably should not	10	12
Definitely should not	5	9
Unweighted base	*974*	*974*

Public toilets

To further examine people's levels of prejudice in less theoretical terms, we explore how comfortable the general public is with a transgender person using toilets according to their own gender identity. We asked separate questions to men and women. To women we asked the following question:

> ***Please think about a transgender woman - that is a man who has gone through all or part of a process to become a woman. How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be for a transgender woman to use female public toilets?***

For both sexes a majority say they are comfortable with a transgender person using a public toilet according to their gender identity

To men we asked the same question but concerning a transgender man, "that is a woman who has gone through all or part of a process to become a man".

For both sexes a majority say they are comfortable with a transgender person using a public toilet according to their gender identity (Table 5). Women tend to be more comfortable with this than men, with 72% of women saying they are "very" or "quite comfortable" with a transgender woman using a female toilet, compared with 64% of men saying they are comfortable with a transgender man using male toilets. Around 1 in 6 (14% of women, and 15% of men) say they are not comfortable with this.

Table 5 View of transgender people using public toilets

	How comfortable would feel for a …	
	… transgender woman to use a female toilet (asked of women only)	… transgender man to use a male toilet (asked of men only)
	%	%
Very comfortable	47	41
Quite comfortable	25	24
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	14	19
Quite uncomfortable	9	9
Very uncomfortable	4	6
Unweighted base	*561*	*413*

58% of women say transgender prejudice is "always wrong" compared with 46% of men

Who is most and least likely to be accepting of people who are transgender?

Women are more likely than men to condemn prejudice against transgender people (58% of women say it is "always wrong" compared with 46% of men). Younger people are also more likely to say that prejudice against people who are transgender is "always wrong"; while 61% of 18-34 year olds say this, 40% of those aged 65 or more do. However, this difference reduces when looking at the proportion of people saying transgender prejudice is "always or mostly wrong", which was 76% among the youngest group and 64% among the oldest. Further, on this measure regression analysis found that, once other characteristics are controlled for, age is not a significant factor in explaining transgender prejudice.

Anti-transgender prejudice is also linked to religious belief; people without a religion (59%) are more likely to think prejudice against transgender people is always wrong than those with a religion (46%).

Similarly, education is linked with views on transgender prejudice; people with degrees (64%) and higher education qualifications or A-levels (63%) are more likely than those with GCSEs or equivalent (43%) or no formal qualifications (35%) to say transgender prejudice is "always wrong".

Summary

Overall, these findings suggest the majority of the public have supportive attitudes towards transgender people and their interaction with public life. However, the low levels of people with overtly-stated prejudice against transgender people contrasts with the high proportions of transgender people who report facing regular harassment and intimidation found in previous research.

Only 4 in 10 people feel a suitably qualified transgender person should definitely be employed as a police officer or primary school teacher

This gap is perhaps explained by the questions that reveal prejudice more indirectly. Only 4 in 10 people feel a suitably qualified transgender person should definitely be employed as a police officer or primary school teacher. This stands in contrast to employment law and people's earlier, more accepting views. This implies a gap, seen elsewhere, between people's view of their prejudices and their revealed ones. This in turn might explain why many transgender people experience the country not to be as accepting as the first answers imply.

As this is the first time we have asked questions about transgender rights, we do not have any time series data to look at changes in attitudes over time. However we might speculate that in the context of increasingly liberal attitudes towards same-sex relationships, attitudes towards transgender people – another group that breaks out from traditional gender norms – are likely to become more liberal in future years.

Pornography and adult content in films

The ubiquity of the internet has dramatically increased the availability of pornography. This section explores whether this greater prevalence has normalised adult content and liberalised our views to it, or instead led to more conservative attitudes in response.

Attitudes to pornography and adult content in films touch on a huge number of issues. Traditional conservative perspectives often concern offending 'public decency' and whether adult content encourages sexual permissiveness. Feminist perspectives typically argue that pornography leads to an objectification of women (Hernandez, 2011), fuels an exploitative industry and can inspire or legitimise violence against women. In more recent developments, the high proportions of children now seeing pornography on the internet, often via smart phones, has led to government policy discussions about whether pornography should be more tightly censored, and whether this is indeed now possible.[3] Children's advocates have flagged serious concerns about whether the pervasiveness of pornography among young people is leading to children exploiting other children, to growing sexual anxiety and body confidence issues, and unrealistic or warped expectations about sex and relationships (Parker, 2014). Most recently concerns about how children manage the increased availability of porn have renewed debates about the delivery of sex education in schools (Turner, 2017). This is already a long but not exhaustive list of debates that pornography touches upon and it is not possible to do any of them justice in this section. BSA can nonetheless help us understand the degree to which cumulative changes to the technology, prevalence and societal responses surrounding porn have marked a shift in attitudes.

3 BBC (2014), *Online pornography to be blocked by default, PM announces,* BBC, London: available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23401076

The public is fairly evenly divided on the question of whether "adults should be able to see whatever films they like" or if "some films are too violent or pornographic even for adults". A similar proportion (just over two-fifths) choose each view, though 15% cannot choose or do not answer the question (Table 6).

Table 6 Views about pornography and adult content in films

Should adults be able to watch whatever they like?	%
Adults should be able to see whatever films they like	45
Some films are too violent or pornographic even for adults	41
Can't choose/not answered	15
How wrong is it for an adult to watch pornography at home	%
1 (Not wrong at all)	30
2	11
3	11
4	11
5	7
6	7
7 (Always wrong)	13
Can't choose/not answered	10
You shouldn't try to stop teenage boys from watching pornography	%
Agree strongly	6
Agree	24
Neither agree nor disagree	29
Disagree	21
Disagree strongly	14
Unweighted base	*1619*

To judge attitudes on the overall morality of pornography, people are asked the following question:

> ***On the scale below 1 means "not wrong at all", 7 means "always wrong" and 2 to 6 means something in between. The following question is about pornography that shows people having sex – not just actors pretending to do so.***
>
> ***How wrong do you personally think it is for an adult (18 or over) to watch pornography at home, or is it not wrong at all?***

The single most common view is that an adult watching pornography is "not wrong at all" and just over half of respondents (51%) choose categories 1-3 (Table 6). By contrast, there is a minority of people (28%) who choose categories 5 to 7, indicating they are not at all

comfortable with letting adults watch pornography. Again about 1 in 10 people are not able to answer this question.

Next, we asked people whether they agree or disagree that:

> ***You shouldn't try to stop teenage boys from watching pornography that shows people having sex (not just actors pretending to do so); it is just a normal part of growing up.***

More people disagree with this statement than agree with it (35% compared with 29%), highlighting there is not a strong body of support for a laissez-faire attitude towards teenage boys' consumption of pornography (Table 6). However, a similar proportion opt not to choose either way, indicating people find this a difficult question to answer and perhaps reflecting the practical difficulty in now restricting teenagers' access to pornography.

It appears that in just a decade that a lot more people are willing to allow any film to be viewed

Only one of the questions detailed above on attitudes towards pornography and adult content in films has featured in previous BSA surveys (see Table 7). However, this does show a clear and marked increase in the more relaxed attitude on this measure. It appears that in just a decade that a lot more people are willing to allow any film to be viewed. In 1996 the majority (59%) of people felt some films were too violent or pornographic, whereas that view was in a minority by 2016 (41%), albeit a sizable one.

Table 7 Views about adult content in films, 1996 and 2016

	1996	2016
	%	%
Adults should be able to see whatever films they like	32	45
Some films are too violent or pornographic even for adults	59	41
Can't choose / not answered	9	15
Unweighted base	*989*	*1619*

Men are much more likely than women to view adult content in films as acceptable

Who is most and least likely to have liberal views on adult content in films?

There are some important divides in views towards pornography among the major demographic subgroups of the population. Similar patterns were found across all three measures of attitudes towards pornography. In particular, men are much more likely than women to view adult content in films as acceptable, for example saying adults should be able to watch whatever films they like (58% for men compared with 32% for women). The youngest group is also most likely to say adult content is acceptable and the oldest group most likely to say it is unacceptable (60% of those aged 18-34 compared with 20% of those aged 75+ respectively say adults should be able to watch whatever films they like). Those with no religion are also more likely to say it is acceptable than all religious groups, with 54% of

people with no religion saying adults should be able to what whatever films they like, compared with 31%-39% among the religious groups.

Those with some educational qualifications (45%-49%) are more likely to be accepting than those with no qualifications (35%), however regression analysis found that once the relationships between level of education and other variables are controlled for, level of education is not significantly associated with attitudes to adult content. Instead, belonging to a younger age group, having no religion and being male remain significant in explaining views on adult content.

Finally, we looked at whether differences between subgroups have changed over time. Men have become more accepting over the period compared with women (16 percentage point increase between 1996 and 2016 compared with 9 percentage points for women). In terms of religion, the 'other Christian' (i.e. Christian but not Anglican or Catholic) and 'no religion' groups have seen the most increase. Finally, we found an educational divide, with the 'no qualifications' group seeing the smallest increase in acceptance since 1996 (5 percentage points). While some of this is likely to be related to age, even those in the oldest age groups saw an increase of 10 percentage points or more. This does therefore suggest that those with no qualifications have experienced the least liberalisation in their views in relation to pornography.

Summary

Unlike some other indicators of moral attitudes, the population as a whole is evenly balanced in reaction to questions of pornography and adult content. In this sense, it is very much a 'live' moral issue for society and there is not yet a settled view of what is acceptable or not, especially between the sexes. In common with other issues, there is also a clear divide by age and religiosity.

There has been a clear shift in the last decade towards people being more 'liberal' or 'relaxed' about the showing and use of pornography, at least for adults

Having said that, there has been a clear shift in the last decade towards people being more 'liberal' or 'relaxed' about the showing and use of pornography, at least for adults. It remains to be seen whether this continues or whether pornography's ubiquity creates any increased nervousness in the future, especially stemming from the impact on children.

Abortion

Abortions have been allowed by law in Britain since 1967, when the Abortion Act made it possible for abortions to be performed for pregnancies under 28 weeks. This was updated in 1990 by the Human Embryology and Human Fertilisation Act, which reduced the time limit for abortions from 28 to 24 weeks, although later-term abortions are allowed in special circumstance where there is grave risk to the mother or there is severe foetal abnormality.

The British public is almost unanimous in their belief that if a woman's health is seriously endangered, an abortion should be allowed by law

Recent years have seen a decline in abortion rates since a peak in 2007 of 17.9 abortions per 1,000 women in England and Wales of child-bearing age, down to 16 in 2015. At the same time there has been a shift in the age profile of women having abortions (Office for National Statistics, 2016), with fewer teenage abortions (the teenage pregnancy rate has been halved since 1998 (Office for National Statistics, 2017b)) and an increase in abortions among women aged 30 plus.

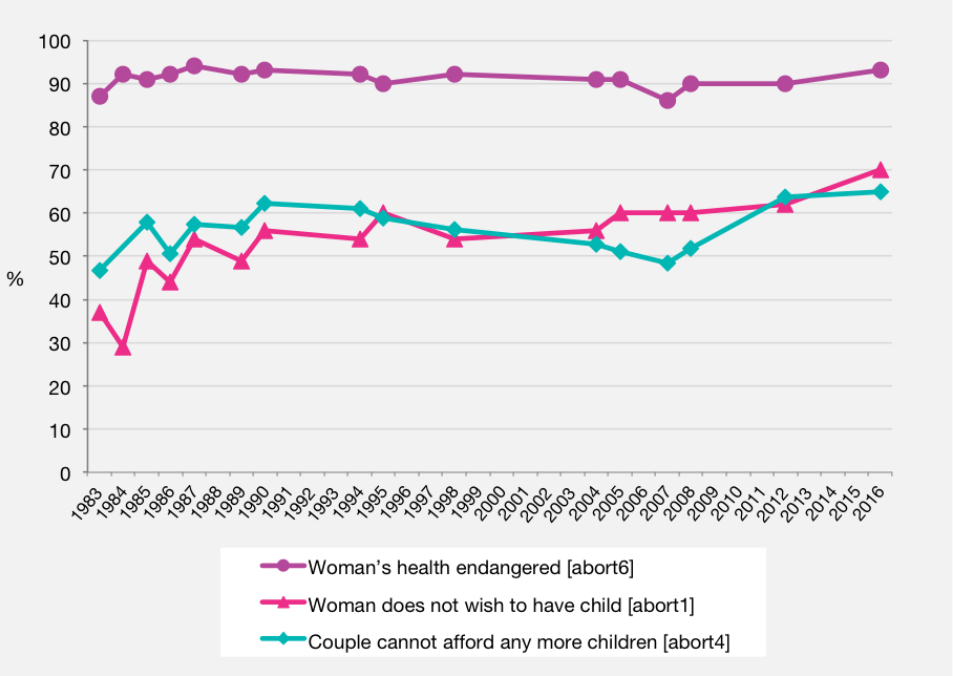
But have these changes been accompanied by a shift in public perceptions of abortion? BSA has included a number of questions on abortion since the survey's inception in 1983 that help us explore this:

> *Here are a number of circumstances in which a woman might consider an abortion. Please say whether or not you think the law should allow an abortion in each case.*
>
> *The woman decides on her own she does not wish to have a child*
>
> *The couple cannot afford any more children*
>
> *The woman's health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy*

The British public is almost unanimous in their belief that if a woman's health is seriously endangered, an abortion should be allowed by law. Over 9 in 10 (93%) say this, a figure that has changed very little in the last three decades (Figure 4).

Fewer people say that abortion should be allowed if a woman decides on her own she does not want the child (70%) or if a couple cannot afford any more children (65%), however, for both questions a clear majority of people think these abortions should be allowed, and in both cases these are the highest-recorded levels of approval. Views on whether abortions for parents who can't afford another child saw a decline in approval during the 1990s to a low of 48% in 2007 before a steady increase in support to 65% in 2016. Acceptance of abortions where the woman does not want the child has slowly increased from a low of 29% in 1984 to 70% in 2016.

Figure 4 Views towards abortion in different scenarios, 1983-2016



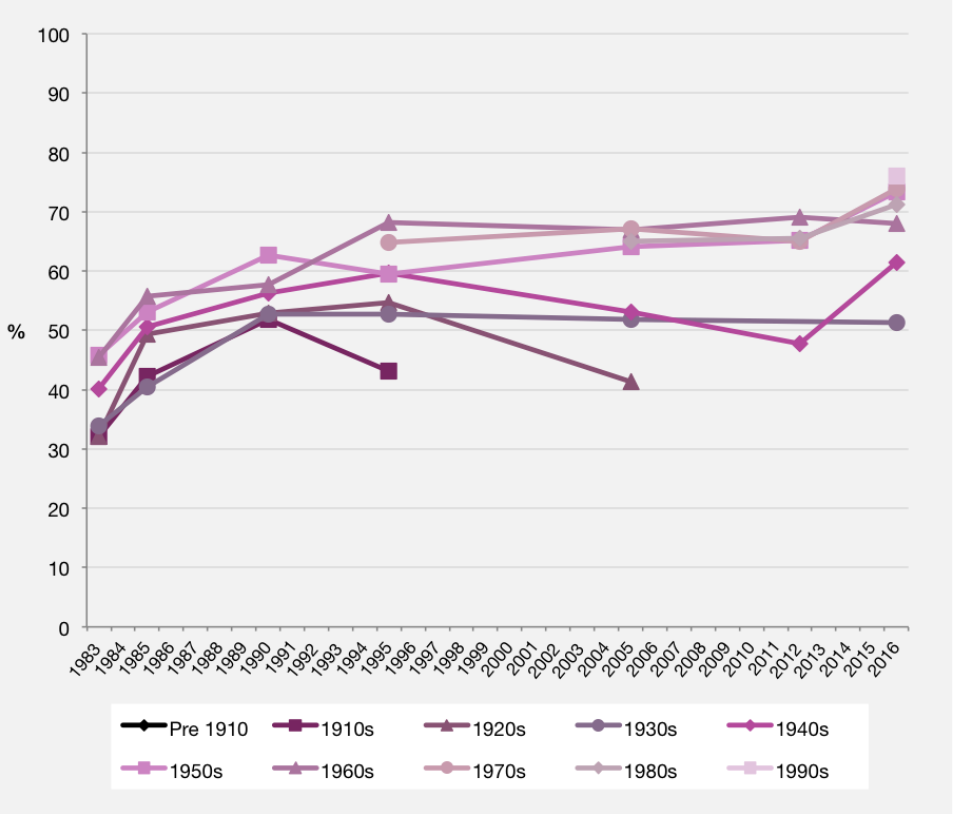
The data on which Figure 4 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Who is most and least likely to be accepting of abortion?

Older people are less likely to approve of abortions when a woman does not wish to have the child. Fifty-three per cent of people aged 77 to 86, and 61% of those aged 67 to 76 say they think abortion should be allowed in this situation, compared with 76% of the youngest age group aged 18 to 26.

However, unlike the views about sex before marriage, or same-sex relationships we saw in previous sections, there is not a clear pattern of trends in views towards abortion over time by birth cohort. Figure 5 shows the proportion saying that abortion should be allowed if the woman does not wish to have the child by generation cohort. The generational groups do not stay consistently in line, and do not cover a particularly large range of views. People born in the 1950s or later have a relatively narrow range of views from 68% to 76% saying abortion should be allowed in this situation. All cohorts have become more accepting of abortions in this situation over time, suggesting that the primary explanation for any change over time is not a cohort effect.

Figure 5 Proportion saying abortion should be allowed by law if the woman does not wish to have the child, by generation cohort, 1983-2016



The data on which Figure 5 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Religious groups are less likely than people with no religion to say that a woman should be allowed by law to have an abortion if she does not wish to have the child. Nearly 4 out 5 (78%) of people with no religion say abortions should be allowed in this situation. One might expect Catholics to be most likely to disagree with abortions in this situation given the Vatican's continued opposition. While this may be true historically, Catholics (61%) are now more likely than 'other' Christian groups (57%) to think these abortions should be allowed, and are not far behind Anglicans (67%). The increase in approval of this type of abortion by those of religion in general appears to have been driven in part by a change in views among Christian groups, in particular Catholics, among whom there has been a 22 percentage point increase in the view that abortions should be allowed if the woman does not wish to have the child (from 39% in 2012 to 61% in 2016). However, we need to treat these within-Christianity trends with some caution as the sample sizes are small.

Interestingly, among people with no formal qualifications, views on abortion when a woman does not want the child have changed very little since the mid-1980s. While overall approval of abortion in this situation has increased from 49% in 1985 to 70% in 2016, the increase was 49% in 1985 to 54% in 2016 among those with no qualifications. At the same time approval among those with qualifications has increased, resulting in a relatively large gap

between the most and least educated; in 2016 54% of those with no formal qualifications say abortion should be allowed if a woman does not want a child, compared with 77% of people with a degree.

Men and women are equally as likely to be supportive of abortion; there are no differences between the sexes in their views for any of the scenarios we asked about.

Summary

While religious divides are narrowing we see a deeper divide between those with qualifications and those without

In general the British public is accepting of abortions, both when it is vital for the health of the mother, and for other reasons. The past decade has seen modest increases in liberal attitudes towards abortion, which appears to have been driven by the more educated, and people with religion, while religious divides are narrowing we see a deeper divide between those with qualifications and those without.

Euthanasia

This final section looks at moral attitudes to voluntary euthanasia; that is whether it should ever be legal to help someone to end their life.

This has been subject of intense debate since the 1990s, which tends to peak when there are relevant private member's bills or high profile legal cases. Arguments for and against euthanasia have been rehearsed in detail during three private member's bills introduced by Lord Joffe (Clery et al., 2007) and cases where people have sought euthanasia abroad. In brief, advocates of legalisation tend to rely on a 'human-right' and 'autonomy' view. They also argue the law is inconsistent because there is already common use of what some people call 'passive' euthanasia, whereby treatment is denied in the expectation of death.

Opponents of legalisation argue that all life is sacred, that there would be a 'slippery slope' if any form of euthanasia was allowed, that older people will feel pressure to seek assisted dying, and/or that a doctor's job should never be to kill.

In looking at public opinion on helping someone to die, we use a number of hypothetical scenarios to assess the extent to which attitudes depend on the conditions and circumstances under which it may be done. In doing so, we try to be clear on the terms used and the issues of debate.

- Voluntary decision-making. By this mean we mean helping an individual *who wishes to die to do so*. There is clearly debate about whether it is always possible to be clear whether someone's wishes are genuine and considered. The term 'non-voluntary euthanasia' means ending the life of an individual when the views of the individual cannot be elicited, and it is requested or authorised by a doctor or relative.

- Euthanasia (otherwise known as 'assisted dying'). By this we mean that *someone else* is administering a substance that enables a person to die. The crucial distinction here is with 'assisted *suicide*', where someone takes their own life. There is a further sub-distinction between who that 'someone else' is, for example whether they are a medical practitioner or a relative.
- The nature of the person's situation. There are a number of dimensions to someone's condition/s that could influence whether euthanasia is considered acceptable, particularly whether the disease is terminal and/or to what extent someone is suffering pain or severe cognitive problems.

Different countries and US states have different approaches and the form of euthanasia varies according to these issues. In the Netherlands, both voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide are legalised, albeit only when performed by a doctor. However, in Belgium, only voluntary euthanasia has been legalised, while in the US state of Oregon doctor assisted suicide is only allowed if someone is terminally ill. In Switzerland, assisted suicide is allowed but only by non-medical practitioners.

We presented respondents with scenarios of patients with different descriptions and then asked if the law should allow someone (either a doctor or relative) to help them to end their lives should they wish. The four main scenarios are:

1. Voluntary euthanasia by a doctor for "a person with an incurable and painful disease who will die – for example, someone dying of cancer"
2. Voluntary euthanasia by a close relative for a person with an incurable and painful disease who will die
3. Voluntary euthanasia by a doctor for "a person with an incurable and painful illness, from which they will **not** die"
4. Voluntary euthanasia by a doctor for "a person who is **not** in much pain **nor** in danger of death, but becomes permanently and completely **dependent** on relatives for all their needs - for example someone who cannot feed, wash or go to the toilet by themselves"

For each question, we presented four response categories:

Definitely should be allowed

Probably should be allowed

Probably should not be allowed

Definitely should not be allowed

In contrast with UK law, there is strong support (78%) for allowing voluntary euthanasia

Table 8 shows levels of public support for euthanasia by grouping those who say it should definitely and probably should be allowed in the varying circumstances. In contrast with UK law, there is strong support (78%) for allowing voluntary euthanasia where it is carried out by a doctor for a person with an incurable disease. There is less

clear-cut support for the other scenarios, that is, where euthanasia is carried out by a close relative (39%), where the person is *not* suffering from a terminal disease (51%) or is completely dependent but not in pain or danger of death (50%).

Table 8 Attitudes to voluntary euthanasia

% saying the law should definitely or probably allow…	
... a doctor to end life of someone with an incurable and painful illness from which they will die	78
… a close relative to end life of someone with an incurable and painful illness from which they will die	39
… a doctor to end life of someone with an incurable and painful illness from which they will not die	51
… a doctor to end life of someone who is dependent on relatives for all of their needs, but not in pain or danger of death	50
Unweighted base	*1928*

The public is most opposed to voluntary euthanasia when it is done by a relative rather than a doctor (33% say it "definitely should not be allowed")

Table 9 explores the strength of support, or not, for euthanasia being allowed in each case. When looking at those who say whether or not voluntary euthanasia should "definitely" be allowed the support for the first scenario is even clearer (50% say it should be "definitely" allowed, compared with 16%-20% for the other scenarios). A similar breakdown shows the public is most opposed to voluntary euthanasia when it is done by a relative rather than a doctor (33% say it "definitely should not be allowed").

Table 9 Attitudes to voluntary euthanasia

	Scenarios for voluntary euthanasia			
	By a doctor for someone with an incurable and painful illness from which they will die	**By a close relative for someone with an incurable and painful illness from which they will die**	**By a doctor for someone with an incurable and painful illness from which they will not die**	**By a doctor for someone who is dependent, but not in pain or danger of death**
Should the law allow voluntary euthanasia in this situation?	%	%	%	%
Definitely should	50	16	20	19
Probably should	29	23	30	31
Probably should not	8	26	22	21
Definitely should not	12	33	25	26
Unweighted base	*1928*	*1928*	*1928*	*1928*

Attitudes towards voluntary euthanasia over time

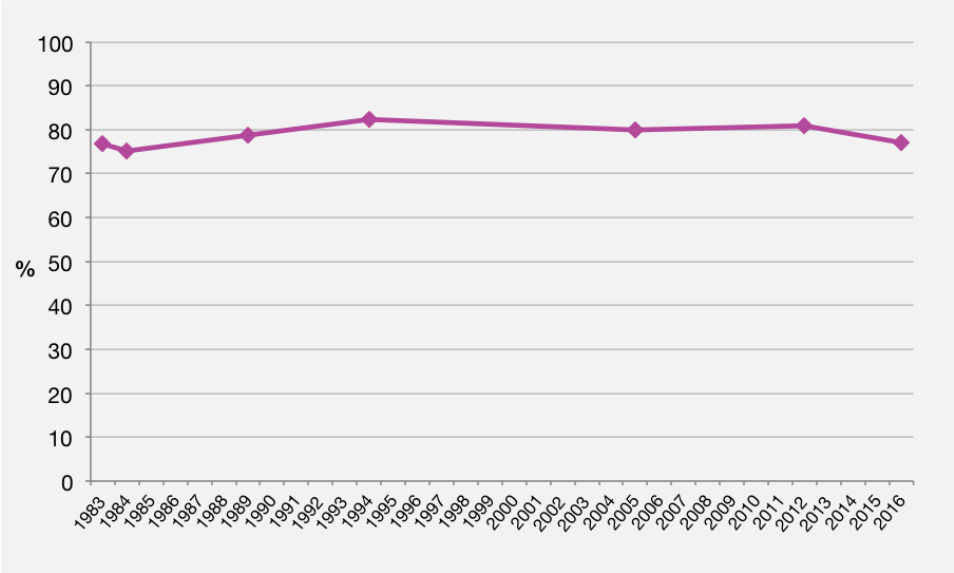
One general question on attitudes towards voluntary euthanasia has been asked on a number of occasions on previous BSA surveys: "Suppose a person has a painful incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?"

Just over three-quarters (77%) of people say "definitely" or "probably should be allowed" in answer to this question, which is in line with overall responses to the first scenario outlined above which also asks about a doctor ending someone's life if they have a painful incurable disease.

The levels of support for voluntary euthanasia are the same in 2016 as in 1983

Figure 6 shows that the overall trend has been relatively stable over time. It appeared as if there was a slow trend towards increasing support between 1983 and 1994, but that has now halted and the levels of support for voluntary euthanasia are the same in 2016 as in 1983.

Figure 6 Proportion saying voluntary euthanasia should be allowed for a person who has a painful incurable disease, 1983-2016



The data on which Figure 6 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

The BSA surveys are now building up a time series on some of the scenarios of interest, so it is possible for us to look further at change for each of the four scenarios. Table 10 presents the levels of support for each scenario in 1995, 2005 and 2016 using the summary indicator of all those who think the form of euthanasia should be definitely or probably allowed.

It shows that there has not been a clear change in attitudes over time and overall trends are broadly stable. Where there has been some minor change, for example on euthanasia by a relative it appears that there was greater change between 1995 and 2005 than there was during the last decade.

Table 10 Summary views about euthanasia over time: 1995, 2005 and 2016

% saying the law definitely/probably should allow …	1995	2005	2016
… voluntary euthanasia by a doctor for a person with an incurable and painful disease who will die	80	82	78
… voluntary euthanasia by a relative for a person with an incurable and painful disease who will die	31	45	39
… voluntary euthanasia by a doctor for a person with an incurable and painful disease who will not die[4]	41	46	51
… voluntary euthanasia by a doctor for a person who is completely dependent on relatives for all their needs	51	44	50
Unweighted base	*1234*	*2113*	*1928*

Who is most and least likely to support voluntary euthanasia?

There are relatively few major differences in views towards euthanasia among the major demographic subgroups of the population. We noted however the main differences occur by religious affiliation; those with no religion being most likely to support euthanasia (for example, 89% of people without a religion say euthanasia by a doctor for someone with a terminal disease should be allowed, compared with 67% of people with a religion). However, views towards euthanasia where someone is completely dependent appear to behave somewhat differently to views towards other forms of euthanasia, as there is little difference among the major religious subgroups for this specific scenario.

In general there are also some differences by age; those in the oldest age groups (75+) tend to be less supportive of euthanasia than younger age groups

In general there are also some differences by age; those in the oldest age groups (75+) tend to be less supportive of euthanasia than younger age groups. For example, 77% of the youngest age group say euthanasia by a doctor for someone who will die from a painful disease should be allowed, compared with 69% of the oldest age group. However it is the middle age groups who are most likely to approve of voluntary euthanasia in this situation, with 85% of 45-54 year olds and 84% of 55-64 year olds saying this. The same is also true of euthanasia for a person who is completely dependent on their relatives, with 57% of 45-54 year olds being accepting of this compared with 49% of 18-34 year olds and 42% of people aged 75 or older.

There is no suggestion in these data that those with higher educational qualifications are more likely to support euthanasia. Equally, there are no marked differences by party identification.

As there has been little change over time, we did not conduct any analysis of the generations and trends in their attitudes over time.

4 In 1995 this question referred specifically to arthritis, so any change over time should be viewed with caution.

Summary

In the collection of issues studied in this chapter, euthanasia is unique in having attitudes that are both relatively stable and not subject to major divides by age, education or sex. The most surprising aspect of this issue is, perhaps, how out of step UK law is with long-standing and significant majority public support for voluntary euthanasia by a doctor in cases where a person has an incurable and painful terminal disease.

By contrast, that half (50%) of people support euthanasia being allowed in cases where someone is completely dependent on relatives for all their needs perhaps highlights why some anti-euthanasia campaigners worry that a legal change could result in people ending their lives out of a sense of being a burden on others.

The most surprising aspect of this issue is, perhaps, how out of step UK law is with long-standing and significant majority public support for voluntary euthanasia

Conclusions

We have seen that across a number of issues Britain seems to be becoming more socially liberal in its response to these questions of personal autonomy. Even in the past few years there have been marked increases in the acceptance of same-sex relationships and premarital sex; while longer-term there has been a liberalisation of views towards abortions and pornography. We have also found that a significant majority are supportive of transgender people, though this falls when people are asked questions of practical application. Attitudes to euthanasia have remained relatively stable, but support for the most limited form of euthanasia is strong. Taken together these findings do point to a wider societal spread of a socially liberal attitude.

Across a number of issues Britain seems to be becoming more socially liberal

While the growth in social liberalism seems to be continuing there are notable divides in opinion. For example: we find particularly low acceptance of same-sex relationships among those without any formal qualifications; there is a 26 percentage point gap between men and women's views on whether adults should be allowed to watch whichever adult films they like; older age groups are less likely to support an option for allowing euthanasia than the youngest age groups in all scenarios presented, but in some instances support among the middle-aged is higher; and men and older people are less accepting of transgender people.

We found that religion is closely associated with attitudes in every one of the issues covered in this chapter, even when the relationship between religious affiliation and other demographic variables has been controlled for; across the board religious people are more likely to be conservative than people without a religion. The same is the case for older people, who are generally less liberal on all topics except on attitudes to transgender people. People without formal qualifications are more conservative about same-sex relationships, abortion and transgender people. Sex, in turn, is associated with views on same-sex relationships, pornography and transgender

people; with women being more liberal on same-sex relationships and transgender issues, while men are more likely to be liberal on pornography and adult content in film.

While across the board religious groups are more conservative in their views than the non-religious, they have become increasingly liberal in their views

While these divides are notable it is important to add that in many cases they do appear to be narrowing. While across the board religious groups are more conservative in their views than the non-religious, they have become increasingly liberal in their views towards premarital sex, same-sex relationships and abortion, and narrowed the gap between them and the non-religious.

Looking at age we also see some narrowing. While much of the growing social liberalism has been caused by a generational effect, meaning that older, less liberal people are being replaced by younger cohorts with more liberal attitudes, there have also been changes within generations. This is most notable with same-sex relationships, where older generations have become more socially liberal in recent years.

In conclusion, it seems clear from these issues that 'social liberalism' is a growing feature of British society and will seemingly remain so as the older age cohorts are replaced by young ones. Some important divides exist, although they do appear to be narrowing. It will be interesting to test in future whether this growth in social liberalism also holds for other issues, such as race and the status of women.

It seems clear from these issues that 'social liberalism' is a growing feature of British society and will seemingly remain so as the older age cohorts are replaced by young ones

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Acknowledgements

The National Centre for Social Research is grateful to the Government Equalities Office for their financial support which enabled us to ask the questions on same-sex relationships and people who are transgender reported in this chapter. The views expressed are those of the authors alone.

Appendix

The data for Figure 1 are shown below.

Table A.1 Views on premarital sex and same-sex relationships, 1983-2016

	1983	1984	1985	1987	1989
% saying sex before marriage "not wrong at all"	42	42	43	42	44
% saying sex between two adults of the same sex "not wrong at all"	17	16	13	11	14
Unweighted base	*1761*	*1675*	*1804*	*2847*	*3029*

	1990	1993	1995	1998	1999
% saying sex before marriage "not wrong at all"	45	54	51	58	52
% saying sex between two adults of the same sex "not wrong at all"	15	18	22	23	27
Unweighted base	*2797*	*2945*	*3633*	*3146*	*3143*

	2000	2003	2005	2006	2007
% saying sex before marriage "not wrong at all"	62	63	63	60	62
% saying sex between two adults of the same sex "not wrong at all"	34	37	37	38	39
Unweighted base	*3426*	*4432*	*4268*	*4290*	*4124*

	2010	2012	2013	2015	2016
% saying sex before marriage "not wrong at all"	62	64	67	70	75
% saying sex between two adults of the same sex "not wrong at all"	45	47	57	59	64
Unweighted base	*3297*	*3248*	*1097*	*3245*	*974*

The data for Figure 2 are shown below.

Table A.2 Proportion saying premarital sex is "not wrong at all", by generation cohort, 1983–2016

		1983		1985		1990
		Unweighted base		*Unweighted base*		*Unweighted base*
All	**42**	***1761***	**43**	***1804***	**45**	***1397***
Cohort						
1970s						
1960s	66	*177*	68	*326*	67	*227*
1950s	63	*317*	59	*336*	59	*270*
1940s	53	*346*	50	*348*	45	*268*
1930s	37	*281*	29	*270*	35	*207*
1920s	28	*269*	25	*243*	25	*193*
1910s	13	*241*	19	*168*	11	*115*
Pre-1910s	18	*112*				

		1995		2000		2005
		Unweighted base		*Unweighted base*		*Unweighted base*
All	**51**	***1172***	**62**	***3426***	**63**	***2102***
Cohort						
1980s			72	*104*	77	*207*
1970s	75	*111*	76	*524*	75	*307*
1960s	70	*241*	78	*730*	72	*427*
1950s	60	*210*	69	*556*	67	*359*
1940s	51	*191*	58	*495*	56	*360*
1930s	31	*157*	42	*483*	40	*223*
1920s	24	*153*	28	*388*	24	*217*
1910s			22	*134*		

		2010		2012		2016
		Unweighted base		*Unweighted base*		*Unweighted base*
All	**62**	***1081***	***64***	***1103***	**75**	***974***
Cohort						
1980s	74	*144*	75	*139*	84	*141*
1970s	76	*190*	71	*192*	79	*186*
1960s	68	*201*	70	*179*	78	*167*
1950s	72	*145*	68	*175*	77	*153*
1940s	45	*189*	53	*206*	59	*151*
1930s	39	*122*	38	*113*		

The bases for Tables 1 and 2 can be found below.

Table A.3 Views on premarital sex, by religion, 1985-2016,

% saying premarital sex 'not wrong at all'	1985	1995	2005	2012	2016
Religion					
Church of England/ Anglican	*653*	*367*	*631*	*269*	*166*
Roman Catholic	*197*	*111*	*196*	*85*	*87*
Other Christian	*296*	*184*	*408*	*183*	*186*
Non-Christian	*44*	*37*	*77*	*51*	*55*
No religion	*608*	*471*	*775*	*506*	*477*

The data for Figure 3 are shown below.

Table A.4 Proportion saying same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all", by generation cohort, 1983–2016

	1983	Unweighted base	1985	Unweighted base	1990	Unweighted base
All	**17**	***1761***	**12**	***1804***	**15**	***1397***
Cohort						
1980s						
1970s						
1960s	18	*177*	17	*326*	20	*227*
1950s	27	*317*	21	*336*	19	*270*
1940s	25	*346*	17	*348*	18	*268*
1930s	17	*281*	7	*270*	12	*207*
1920s	17	*269*	5	*243*	7	*193*
1910s	3	*241*	4	*168*	5	*115*
Pre-1910s	-	*112*				

	1995	Unweighted base	2000	Unweighted base	2005	Unweighted base
All	**22**	***1172***	**34**	***3426***	**37**	***2102***
Cohort						
1980s			49	*104*	51	*207*
1970s	43	*111*	46	*524*	46	*307*
1960s	27	*241*	46	*730*	44	*427*
1950s	34	*210*	37	*556*	39	*359*
1940s	17	*191*	30	*495*	27	*360*
1930s	14	*157*	20	*483*	18	*223*
1920s	3	*153*	6	*388*	12	*217*

	2010	Unweighted base	2012	Unweighted base	2016	Unweighted base
All	**45**	***1081***	***47***	***1103***	**64**	***974***
Cohort						
1980s	59	*144*	58	*139*	73	*141*
1970s	56	*190*	52	*192*	70	*186*
1960s	53	*201*	58	*179*	66	*167*
1950s	47	*145*	43	*175*	64	*153*
1940s	28	*189*	30	*206*	41	*151*
1930s	18	*122*	18	*113*		

The data for Figure 4 are shown below.

Table A.5 Views on abortion in different scenarios, 1983-2016

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1994
% saying "yes" the law should allow an abortion when …								
… the woman's health is endangered	87	92	91	92	94	92	93	92
… the woman does not wish to have child	37	29	49	44	54	49	56	54
… the couple cannot afford any more children	47	n/a	58	51	58	57	62	61
Unweighted base	*1761*	*1675*	*1804*	*3100*	*2847*	*3029*	*2797*	*3469*

	1995	1998	2004	2005	2007	2008	2012	2016
% saying "yes" the law should allow an abortion when …								
… the woman's health is endangered	90	92	91	91	86	90	90	93
… the woman does not wish to have child	60	54	56	60	60	60	62	70
… the couple cannot afford any more children	59	56	53	51	48	52	64	65
Unweighted base	*3633*	*3146*	*3199*	*4268*	*4124*	*4486*	*3248*	*1619*

n/a = not asked

The data for Figure 5 are shown below.

Table A.6 Proportion saying abortion should be allowed by law if the woman does not wish to have the child, by generation cohort. 1983-2016

		1983		1985		1990		1995
		Unweighted base		*Unweighted base*		*Unweighted base*		*Unweighted base*
All	37	***1650***	49	***1530***	**56**	***1197***	60	***1054***
Cohort								
1970s							65	*108*
1960s	45	*166*	56	*276*	58	*197*	68	*229*
1950s	46	*309*	53	*292*	63	*241*	59	*181*
1940s	40	*329*	51	*297*	56	*237*	60	*175*
1930s	34	*261*	40	*234*	53	*176*	53	*136*
1920s	32	*255*	49	*212*	53	*164*	55	*153*
1910s	32	*219*	42	*139*				

		2005		2012		2016
		Unweighted base		*Unweighted base*		*Unweighted base*
All	**60**	2645	**62**	***950***	***70***	***1619***
Cohort						
1990s					76	*131*
1980s	65	*228*	65	*114*	71	*231*
1970s	67	*387*	65	*154*	74	*282*
1960s	67	*518*	69	*164*	68	*277*
1950s	64	*458*	65	*155*	73	*287*
1940s	53	*472*	48	*187*	61	*266*
1930s	52	*325*			51	*114*
1920s	41	*256*				

The data for Figure 6 are shown below.

Table A.7 Proportion saying voluntary euthanasia should be allowed for a person who has a painful incurable disease, 1983-2016

	1983	1984	1989	1994	2005	2012	2016
Should doctors be allowed by law to end a patient's life, if they request it	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	77	75	79	82	80	81	77
No	22	24	20	15	18	16	21
Unweighted base	*1650*	*1562*	*1307*	*984*	*1786*	*956*	*1619*

Below are the results of five regression analyses referred to in this chapter. The multivariate analysis technique used is logistic regression, about which more details can be found in the Technical Details. Variables included in the analyses were education, age, sex, religion, party identification, and social class. Below we present results for education, age, sex and religion, as these variables were significantly associated with at least one of the five dependent variables.

In Table A.8 we present logistic regression analysis where the dependent variable is whether the respondent says pre-marital sex is "not wrong at all". A positive coefficient indicates that the group is more likely than the reference group (shown in brackets) to say that pre-marital sex is not wrong.

Table A.8 View of pre-marital sex, logistic regression

	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Education (degree)			.065
Higher education / A level	.426	.263	.105
O level / CSE	**.740	.281	.008
No qualifications	.392	.326	.230
Age (18-34)			.000
35-44	*-.698	.355	.049
45-54	**-1.406	.348	.000
55-64	**-1.415	.374	.000
65-74	**-2.037	.370	.000
75+	**-3.015	.412	.000
Sex (male)	-.041	.193	.832
Religion (no religion)			.000
Church of England	-.311	.280	.267
Roman Catholic	-.641	.348	.065
Other Christian	**-1.343	.239	.000
Non-Christian	**-3.208	.390	.000
Constant	**2.831	.373	.000
Unweighted base: 862			

**=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level*

In Table A.9 we present logistic regression analysis where the dependent variable is whether the respondent says same-sex relationships are "not wrong at all". A positive coefficient indicates that the group is more likely than the reference group (shown in brackets) to say that same-sex relationships are not wrong.

Table A.9 View of same-sex relationships, logistic regression

	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Education (degree)			.013
Higher education / A level	-.111	.242	.648
O level / CSE	*-.508	.247	.040
No qualifications	**-.895	.303	.003
Age (18-34)			.000
35-44	**-.773	.287	.007
45-54	**-.876	.284	.002
55-64	**-1.231	.302	.000
65-74	**-1.654	.310	.000
75+	**-2.912	.394	.000
Sex (male)	*.382	.173	.027
Religion (no religion)			.000
Church of England	-.444	.251	.077
Roman Catholic	*-.703	.304	.021
Other Christian	**-.994	.218	.000
Non-Christian	**-2.466	.366	.000
Constant	**2.317	.315	.000
Unweighted base: 862			

**=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level*

In Table A.10 we present logistic regression analysis where the dependent variable is whether the respondent says "adults should be allowed to see whatever films they like" (as opposed to saying "some films are too violent or pornographic even for adults"). A positive coefficient indicates that the group is more likely than the reference group (shown in brackets) to say that adults should be able to see whatever films they like.

Table A.10 View of adult content in film, logistic regression

	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Education (degree)			.348
Higher education / A level	.198	.166	.235
O level / CSE	.275	.182	.132
No qualifications	.394	.237	.096
Age (18-34)			.000
35-44	*-.401	.187	.032
45-54	**-.751	.187	.000
55-64	**-.893	.197	.000
65-74	**-1.744	.230	.000
75+	**-2.027	.293	.000
Sex (male)	**-1.084	.122	.000
Religion (no religion)			.001
Church of England	*-.406	.182	.026
Roman Catholic	-.468	.244	.055
Other Christian	*-.469	.165	.005
Non-Christian	**-.817	.277	.003
Constant	1.208	.201	.269
Unweighted base: 1453			

**=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level*

In Table A.11 we present logistic regression analysis where the dependent variable is whether the respondent says abortion should be allowed by law when a woman decides she doesn't want the baby. A positive coefficient indicates that the group is more likely than the reference group (shown in brackets) to say that abortion should be allowed in this scenario.

Table A.11 View of abortion when a woman decides she doesn't want the baby, logistic regression

	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Education (degree)			.035
Higher education / A level	-.260	.180	.149
O level / CSE	*-.389	.193	.044
No qualifications	**-.655	.226	.004
Age (18-34)			.012
35-44	.022	.219	.919
45-54	-.128	.217	.555
55-64	-.152	.216	.483
65-74	-.409	.226	.070
75+	**-.783	.250	.002
Sex (male)	.192	.125	.125
Religion (no religion)			.000
Church of England	-.325	.172	.058
Roman Catholic	**-.799	.221	.000
Other Christian	**-.900	.161	.000
Non-Christian	**-1.607	.291	.000
Constant	1.731	.230	.294
Unweighted base: 1453			

**=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level*

In Table A.12 we present logistic regression analysis where the dependent variable is whether the respondent says prejudice against transgender people is wrong. A positive coefficient indicates that the group is more likely than the reference group (shown in brackets) to say that transgender prejudice is always wrong.

Table A.12 View of prejudice against transgender people, logistic regression

	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Education (degree)			.000
Higher education / A level	-.265	.235	.260
O level / CSE	**-.905	.248	.000
No qualifications	**-1.102	.326	.001
Age (18-34)			.085
35-44	-.482	.270	.074
45-54	-.368	.276	.182
55-64	-.548	.288	.057
65-74	-.517	.311	.096
75+	**-1.155	.384	.003
Sex (male)	**.548	.173	.002
Religion (no religion)			.004
Church of England	-.302	.248	.223
Roman Catholic	-.314	.340	.355
Other Christian	*-.487	.228	.033
Non-Christian	**-1.334	.376	.000
Constant	**1.166	.295	.000
Unweighted base: 706			

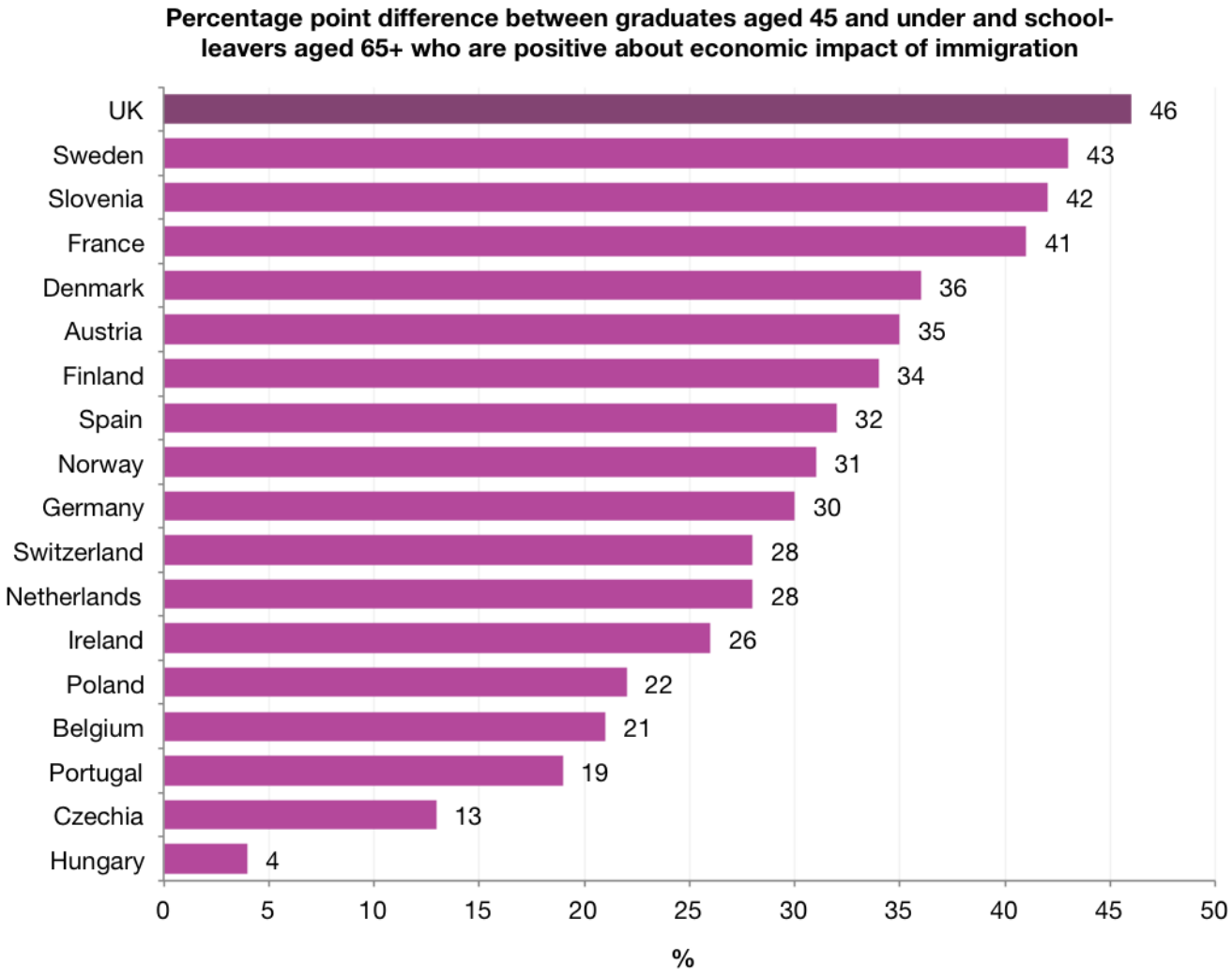
**=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level*

Immigration

How attitudes in the UK compare with Europe

In the years leading up to the Brexit vote we see a stark and growing divide in people's views on the economic impact of immigration between the young degree-educated and older school-leavers. Across Europe young graduates are more likely than older school-leavers to say immigration is good for the economy, and this divide is biggest in the UK.

The UK is the most divided country in Europe on the economic impact of immigration



Overview

Despite the debate about immigration becoming more prominent and contentious, this chapter finds that in the 12 years up to 2014 our attitudes on immigration's impact on the country became largely more positive. However, underneath this change hides a social divide in attitudes which is among the starkest in Europe.

Attitudes more positive but more selective

From 2002-2014 the public has, on balance, become more positive about the benefits of immigration, but also more selective on who they wish to see migrate.

- In 2002 the proportion believing immigration was bad for the economy outweighed those who thought it good by 16 percentage points. By 2014 this had changed, to the extent that the proportion with a positive view of its impact were 4 points ahead.
- The public have become slightly more sceptical about the cultural benefits of immigration, but those with a positive view still just outweigh those with a negative one by 4 percentage points.
- During this period the public have not noticeably become more or less keen on restrictions to migrant numbers. However, they are more selective. Significant majorities feel the ability to speak English (87%, up from 77%), a commitment to the British "way of life" (84%, up from 78%) and possessing needed skills (81%, up from 71%) are important criteria for selecting migrants.

UK attitudes more divided than in most European countries

UK attitudes to the economic impact of immigration have gone from being some of the most negative to being middling in the list of countries we examine. This overall trend however, masks a comparatively stark social divide in views.

- People in the UK now have a mid-ranking view of how positive immigration is for the economy (The UK is 7th out of 18 European countries, compared with 16th in 2002). By contrast, UK attitudes to immigration's cultural impact rank amongst the less positive countries in Europe (14th out of 18).
- By contrasting views about immigration's economic impacts among young degree-educated people with those of older school-leavers, we find that the UK has the starkest social divide in views in Europe. The UK's divide in attitudes about immigration's cultural impact is also one of the deepest in the continent.

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Introduction

The public has not typically been enthusiastic about immigration, but they have often shown a degree of pragmatism about it. For as long as we have had public opinion data, the prevalent public attitudes on the issue have been acceptance that some migration is useful, coupled with demands for strict government controls on its scale, particularly whenever the numbers of migrants arriving has risen. In the 1950s and 1960s, Britain experienced significant migration from Commonwealth nations. Commonwealth citizens took advantage of rights to live and work in Britain and responded to the British Government's calls to help fill labour shortages. This inflow triggered intense public hostility, making migration an explosive political issue. Immigration remained a controversial issue until a series of reforms by successive governments curtailed Commonwealth migration rights, a process completed by the British Nationality Act of 1981 (Hansen, 2002; Ford et al., 2014).

Over the past twenty years, a similar story has played out. Political reforms eased access to Britain, in particular to citizens from the new EU members in central and eastern Europe, to whom Britain (uniquely among western Europe's large economies) granted immediate and full free movement rights on their accession to the EU in 2004. Growing numbers of migrants opted to exercise the option to move to Britain, attracted by (among other things) a growing economy, buoyant labour markets and educational opportunities (Somerville, 2007). The result has been the largest, most sustained and most diverse inflow of migration in British history. As in the 1960s, the public has reacted to this with steadily mounting concern and demands for greater control of migration inflows (Ford et al., 2014). Immigration has been rated by voters as one of the most important issues facing the country continuously for most of the past decade (Duffy and Frere-Smith, 2014). Surging public concern about immigration was a central factor in both the rise of UKIP as a new political force (Ford and Goodwin, 2014) and in the majority vote for "Brexit" in the 2016 EU membership referendum (see the chapter on 'The vote to leave the EU', along with Ford and Goodwin, 2014; Clarke et al., 2017).

Immigration has been rated by voters as one of the most important issues facing the country continuously for most of the past decade

Past British Social Attitudes (BSA) reports on immigration have highlighted how the British public have reacted to recent rises in immigration by increasing their demands for control of inflows, while becoming much more socially divided about the economic and cultural effects of immigration (Ford et al., 2012; Ford and Heath, 2014). These earlier analyses also suggest that the public is highly responsive to differences between particular migrant groups; they are much more positive about the arrival of migrant students or skilled professionals than they are about family reunion migrants or unskilled labourers (Ford et al., 2012; Hainmuller and Hiscox, 2010).

With the Government signalling that Brexit will entail the end of the free movement rights for EU citizens to Britain, the Brexit process represents an opportunity for the most comprehensive debate of immigration policy in decades. This is therefore an opportune moment to examine how attitudes in the UK have changed over the past 15 years, and how they compare to those in other European Union countries. To do this we look at immigration views in two waves of the European Social Survey (ESS); wave 1 (2002-2003), fielded before the accession of new European members, and wave 7 (2014-2015), fielded long afterwards. The ESS collects data from 18 countries across Europe. Unlike BSA, it draws on a whole of UK sample and therefore includes Northern Ireland[1]. The use of the ESS means we will be considering data from 2014 and therefore before the UK's EU referendum vote. While more recent data are available, and partly analysed in the chapter on 'The vote to leave the EU' in this year's BSA report, the ESS data here allow us to make important comparisons across Europe and time. However, as high profile debates about immigration in the context of the EU referendum and the refugee crisis have occurred since this latest ESS wave was conducted, it is important the conclusions from the 2014 data are treated with caution.

In this chapter we address three questions. Firstly, we look at whether the increase in migration over the past 15 years has made the public more selective about the migrants they think Britain should accept, and more sceptical about the effects of migration on the country. Next we examine whether the UK has become more divided in its views about migration. Finally we look at how UK attitudes stand in contrast to those in other European countries, over time, at an aggregate level and in terms of how internally divided each country is in its views.

A more sceptical public?

The scale of migration to Britain over the past 15 years is unprecedented, but has this increased public demands for greater control of migrant inflows? Four questions from ESS give us some insight on this. Firstly, respondents were asked:

> ***To what extent do you think Britain should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most of Britain's people to come and live here?***

The same structure was then used to ask respondents about people of a different race or ethnic group; people from poorer countries in Europe; and finally, about people from poorer countries outside Europe. These categories are broad, as are the response categories: "allow many to come and live here", "allow some", "allow few" and "allow none". We therefore need to ensure conclusions drawn from these responses are treated with caution as "allow some migrants

1 ESS collects data from the whole of the UK, including Northern Ireland which represents approximately 1% of the sample. For the questions on immigration, respondents living in Britain were asked about "people coming to live in Britain". Respondents living in Northern Ireland were asked about "people coming to live in the UK".

from different ethnic groups to come to Britain" could mean a range of things.

While these are important limitations, the distribution of responses on these items give us a broad sense of public sentiment and whether it has shifted. There is no evidence of a large or general movement in views towards the restriction of migration over the past 15 years, but there are some small and potentially interesting changes in attitudes to particular groups (Table 1). Views of migrants from the same ethnic group as the majority remain stable, but the public has become more positive about accepting ethnic minority migrants: 57% feel that "many" or "some" should be allowed in the 2014 survey, up from 50% in 2002.

Table 1 Views on migration from different groups, 2002 and 2014[2]

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
How many immigrants from same race/ethnic group as majority should Britain allow to come and live here?	%	%	%
Allow many	12	14	+2
Allow some	52	50	-2
Allow few	27	26	-1
Allow none	8	9	+1
How many immigrants from different race/ethnic group to majority should Britain allow to come and live here?	**%**	**%**	**%**
Allow many	8	11	+4
Allow some	42	46	+4
Allow few	34	29	-4
Allow none	15	12	-3
How many immigrants from poorer countries in Europe should Britain allow to come and live here?	%	%	%
Allow many	9	11	+2
Allow some	45	40	-4
Allow few	33	31	-2
Allow none	12	16	+4
How many immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe should Britain allow to come and live here?	%	%	%
Allow many	8	9	+1
Allow some	41	34	-6
Allow few	36	34	-1
Allow none	14	21	+7
Unweighted base	*2052*	*2264*	

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

2 Figures showing change over time in this table are calculated from the exact data, rather than the rounded figures that appear in the table. As a result they will sometimes appear to be incorrect by +/-1%. This applies to all similar tables in this chapter.

The public has become slightly more restrictive regarding immigration from poorer countries outside Europe

While the significant increase in migrants from central and eastern Europe has been a major focus of political and media debate, public sentiment about migrants from poorer European countries has barely changed. The percentage saying "none" should be allowed has risen slightly (from 12% to 16%). The public has become slightly more restrictive regarding immigration from poorer countries *outside* Europe, with the percentage saying no migration should be allowed rising 7 percentage points to 21%, and the proportion favouring "some" migration dropping by the same amount, from 41% to 34%. While there are some modest changes in views of particular groups, the overall picture here is remarkably stable given the scale of the migration Britain experienced in the period between these two surveys.

BSA 2013 findings broadly corroborate these trends and found this resulted in most people wanting a reduction in immigration (Ford and Heath, 2014). In 1995 63% of people wanted immigration reduced "a little" or "a lot", with 39% wanting the larger of the two reductions. By 2013 these proportions stood at 77% and 56% respectively, but these figures were largely unchanged since 2008. While the time periods covered by BSA are different, the results are consistent with ESS finding attitudes having been broadly stable between 2002 and 2014. Interestingly, together the studies suggest the big negative changes in attitudes to immigration occurred between 1995 and 2002 when immigration levels were much lower.

While there are some modest changes in views of particular groups, the overall picture here is remarkably stable given the scale of the migration Britain experienced in the period between these two surveys

Judged by ESS measures, there has been no general intensification in public demand for migration control. But how about views of the economic and social impact of migration? Has the increase in migration raised public concerns about disruptive effects? Table 2 takes a look at the following four questions asking about the impact of migration:

> *Would you say it is generally bad or good for Britain's economy that people come to live here from other countries? [11-point scale where 0 is Bad for the economy, 10 is Good for the economy]*
>
> *Would you say that people who come to live here generally take jobs away from workers in Britain, or generally help to create new jobs? [11-point scale where 0 is Take away jobs, 10 is Create new jobs]*
>
> *Are Britain's crime problems made worse or better by people coming to live here from other countries? [11-point scale where 0 is Crime problems made worse, 10 is Crime problems made better]*
>
> *Would you say that Britain's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries? [11-point scale where 0 is Cultural life undermined, 10 is Cultural life enriched]*

The public has become more positive about the economic impact of immigration

Again, we find little evidence that the significant recent increases in immigration have resulted in a major negative change in public sentiment. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case in some areas. The public has become more positive about the economic impact of immigration, with the proportion judging immigration to be good for the British economy rising 14 points from 27% to 40%, and the percentage saying immigration creates jobs rising 10 points from 22% to 32%. These rises are from a low base, so even after a significant positive swing immigration enthusiasts barely outnumber sceptics on overall economic impact, and in 2014 slightly more people still see immigration as threatening to jobs than see it as an engine of job creation.

Table 2 Views on the impacts of migration, 2002 and 2014[3]

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
Is immigration good or bad for the British economy	%	%	%
Good	27	40	+14
Neither good nor bad	28	22	-6
Bad	43	36	-7
Net good - bad	**-16**	**+4**	**+20**
Do immigrants take jobs away in Britain or create new jobs	**%**	**%**	**%**
Create new jobs	22	32	+10
Neither	35	30	-6
Take jobs away	41	36	-5
Net create jobs - take jobs away	**-19**	**-4**	**+15**
Crime problems made better or worse by immigrants			
Made better	8	13	+5
Neither	30	33	+3
Made worse	60	50	-9
Net crime better- crime worse	**-52**	**-37**	**+14**
Cultural life enriched or undermined by immigrants			
Enriched	44	43	-1
Neither	22	17	-5
Undermined	32	38	+6
Net enriched - undermined	**+12**	**+4**	**-8**
Unweighted base	*2052*	*2264*	

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

3 For each of the questions presented in Table 2, the 11-point scales have been grouped into 3 categories where ratings 0 to 4 are coded as positive (e.g. "Good", or "Create new jobs)", 5 as neutral (e.g. "Neither"), and 6 to 10 as negative (e.g. "Bad" or "Take jobs away").

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the public did not react to a decade of high immigration and economic crisis by becoming more anti-migration by these measures. This may suggest, in line with earlier work, that migration attitudes are pragmatic and responsive to context. Britain's labour market performed relatively well both before and after the financial crisis, with high levels of job creation and employment rates close to record highs. It seems that mass migration amid such benign economic conditions may have encouraged greater acceptance of the positive economic effects of immigration on the labour market and the economy in general.

There is a similar positive change in attitudes about immigration and crime, although here a very negative overall view remains in 2014, with roughly half of the public continuing to see immigration as a potential threat to crime levels (down from over 60% in 2002). There is, however, a negative change in views about the cultural impact of immigration, the item which attracted the most positive responses in 2002. The proportion who think migration undermines British culture rose 6 points from 32% to 38%. A buoyant economy may assuage economic concerns about immigration; it is less likely to alleviate worries about the impact mass migration has on British identity and culture. Yet even here, the negative change in attitudes is relatively modest given the scale of change. The largest inflow of migrants in British history has not produced a general negative change in the public mood about migration's effects.

The proportion who think migration undermines British culture rose 6 points from 32% to 38%

It is worth recalling that these questions were asked well before the prominent discussions of immigration surrounding the EU referendum, which may have changed views.

A more selective public?

In both ESS waves, respondents were presented with a list of characteristics and asked which they believed were important qualifications in choosing which migrants to accept:

> ***Please tell me how important you think each of these things should be in deciding whether someone born, brought up and living outside Britain should be able to come and live here***

Table 3 shows the proportion of respondents who rate various qualifications as being important[4] for selecting migrants.

Skills and being committed to the British way of life matter most to the public as criteria for immigrants

Here we do find evidence of a significant change in sentiment: the public has become more selective. They are very clear about what matters most as criteria for selection: skills and being committed to the British way of life. Achieved qualifications - things such as speaking English, work skills and education which can be acquired with time and effort - already mattered a great deal to people in 2002, with large majorities rating them as important factors to use in selecting migrants. The emphasis placed on all of these criteria is even higher in 2014.

4 "Important" is defined as scores of above 5 on a scale from 0 "extremely unimportant" to 10 "extremely important.

Migrants being "committed to the way of life in Britain" has also grown in importance and remains a top-two criterion for the public. Of the criteria in this question this is arguably the most subjective and the ESS leaves it open to personal interpretation. Earlier BSA research on identity found people struggled to define what values, behaviours or customs are typically British (Heath et al., 2007). The answers offered ranged from "politeness" and "fair play", to "history", "roast dinners" and "drinking tea". It is therefore likely that people are interpreting "committed to the way of life in Britain" in a wide variety of ways. For some it may concern observation of the law, for others customs, and for some it will be upholding certain values. This warrants further examination in subsequent research in this area given its importance to the public.

Table 3 Proportion of respondents thinking particular qualifications are important for selecting immigrants, 2002 and 2014

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
% saying that to be able to come and live here it is important for someone from outside Britain to …			
… be committed to the way of life in Britain	78	84	+6
… be able to speak English	77	87	+10
… have work skills that Britain needs	71	81	+10
… have good educational qualifications	63	74	+11
… come from a Christian background	19	16	-3
… be white	11	7	-5
% saying it's important to have good educational qualifications AND speak English AND have work skills that Britain needs	**49**	**65**	**+16**
Unweighted Base	*2052*	*2264*	

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

Overall it is clear that there is a growing selectiveness from the public about immigration. This is even more evident if we combine the qualification-related criteria. Two-thirds (65%) of people in 2014 note that educational qualifications, work skills and English language skills are *all* important requirements when selecting migrants - up from half (49%) of people in 2002. While people are more aware of the positive economic effects of migration, it seems they might also be more sensitive to the skills and abilities which they see as maximising those positive effects.

Fewer than 1 in 5 regard a Christian religious background as an important qualification for migrants

While the public places a strong and rising emphasis on the achieved qualifications or behaviour of migrants, the same is not true for aspects of migrants' identities that are difficult or impossible to change. Fewer than 1 in 5 regarded a Christian religious background as an important qualification for migrants in 2002 and 2014. The

percentage of the public who see white ethnicity as important is even lower, and declining even faster (from 11% in 2002 to 7% in 2014).

Deepening social divides?

ESS evidence suggests that the UK has not, in the aggregate, become more negative about immigration. In fact, across some measures attitudes to immigration's impact have become more positive between 2002 and 2014. Yet this aggregate result might mask deepening social divisions over the issue. Recent work analysing both BSA data (Ford et al., 2012; Ford and Heath, 2014) and ESS data (Heath and Richards, 2016) have revealed strong social divisions in attitudes to immigration by age, education, social class, and migrant heritage.

This analysis confirms what previous evidence has shown: the public is deeply divided over immigration

Tables 4 and 5 look at the social divides in attitudes to migration from different groups, and in attitudes to the economic and social impacts of migration, in 2014. Here we take the top and bottom groups from each characteristic or attitudinal measure (full question wording for the attitudinal measures can be found in the appendix to this chapter). The tables confirm what previous evidence has shown: the public is deeply divided over immigration. On nearly every measure we find gaps of 9 to 30 percentage points in views between the social groups which are most positive about migration and those which are most negative. Majorities of 18-29 year olds support allowing "many" or "some" migrants from each group asked about, while majority support from the 70+ group for "many" or "some" migrants only extends to those of the same ethnic group.

The majority of the "higher service" classes believe we should allow "many" or "some" migrants from every migrant group tested, and see migration as enriching British culture and benefitting the British economy. In contrast, unskilled workers are much less likely to want more or some migration from poorer countries, and less than a third see economic or cultural benefits from migration. The education divides are particularly deep, with majorities of degree-holders backing the more pro-migration options on every item presented here, often by notable margins. In contrast, only one pro-migration option (migration from the same ethnic group) receives majority support from those with GCSEs or less (for ease referred to as "school leavers" from here on). There is also a large heritage divide in the UK; with the fast-growing proportion of UK residents born abroad being a great deal more enthusiastic about migration than those who were born in the UK to two UK-born parents.

Table 4 Views on levels of immigration from different migrant groups, by socio-demographic and attitudinal group

	Migrant group			
	Same ethnic group as majority	Different ethnic group as majority	From poorer country inside Europe	From poorer country outside Europe
% saying should allow "many" or "some" migrants from group into Britain				
Age:18-29	69	66	60	51
Age: 70 plus	58	42	38	27
Age gap	**11**	**24**	**22**	**24**
Class: higher service (professionals and managers)	76	67	61	54
Class: unskilled workers	56	51	45	36
Class gap	**20**	**16**	**16**	**17**
Education: Degree	78	74	70	62
Education: GCSE or less	56	47	40	33
Education gap	**21**	**27**	**30**	**29**
Heritage: Born abroad	75	73	66	53
Heritage: UK born, UK-born parents	60	53	47	40
Heritage gap	**14**	**21**	**19**	**13**
Social trust: most people can be trusted	71	65	60	51
Social trust: you can't be too careful	53	47	39	32
Social trust gap	**18**	**18**	**21**	**19**
Satisfaction with economy: satisfied	73	66	60	48
Satisfaction with economy: not satisfied	54	49	43	38
Satisfaction with economy gap	**18**	**16**	**17**	**10**

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)
Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
The class variables are drawn from the 5-Class OESCH class schema (Oesch, D., 2006a; 2006b)

Table 5 Views about impacts of immigration on Britain, by socio-demographic and attitudinal group

	% saying it enriches culture	% saying it is good for economy	% saying it creates jobs	% saying it makes crime worse
Age: 18-29	48	48	31	45
Age: 70 plus	31	29	29	60
Age gap	**17**	**18**	**2**	**15**
Class: higher service (professionals and managers)	61	57	45	43
Class: unskilled workers	32	27	24	52
Class gap	**29**	**30**	**20**	**10**
Education: Degree	68	62	52	37
Education: GCSE or less	30	29	25	57
Education gap	**39**	**34**	**26**	**19**
Heritage: Born abroad	62	61	55	37
Heritage: UK born, UK-born parents	36	34	27	54
Heritage gap	**26**	**26**	**29**	**17**
Social trust: most people can be trusted	52	50	40	45
Social trust: you can't be too careful	30	27	23	60
Social trust gap	**22**	**23**	**17**	**15**
Satisfaction with economy: satisfied	54	53	44	47
Satisfaction with economy: not satisfied	34	30	24	56
Satisfaction with economy gap	**20**	**22**	**19**	**10**

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)
Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
The class variables are drawn from the 5-Class OESCH class schema (Oesch, D., 2006a; 2006b)

Finally, we compare the attitudes of people with different levels of social trust and economic satisfaction. These are both commonly cited as possible drivers of opposition to immigration (Hainmuller and Hopkins, 2014; Duffy and Frere-Smith, 2014; Herreros and Criado, 2009) - economically insecure people may worry more about competition from migrants, while those who are low in social trust may regard “outsiders” with more suspicion, and be less inclined to believe political or expert arguments in favour of migration. In accordance with these theories, we find more negative attitudes to migration are more prevalent among economically dissatisfied and distrustful groups. The bottom of Table 4 shows that those expressing satisfaction with the economy are far more likely to support entry of “many” or “some” migrants to Britain compared with those expressing dissatisfaction with the economy. Economic perceptions show an even stronger relationship with views about the cultural and economic impact of migration. More than half of those satisfied with the state of the economy are positive about the

cultural and economic impact of migration compared with a third or less of those who are dissatisfied with the economy. The around 20-percentage point (17-22 point) divides in views on the cultural and economic impact of migration that we see by levels of trust and economic satisfaction are also apparent to a similar degree in views on immigration's impact on job creation. With immigration's impact on crime, this divide narrows slightly to 10-15 percentage points.

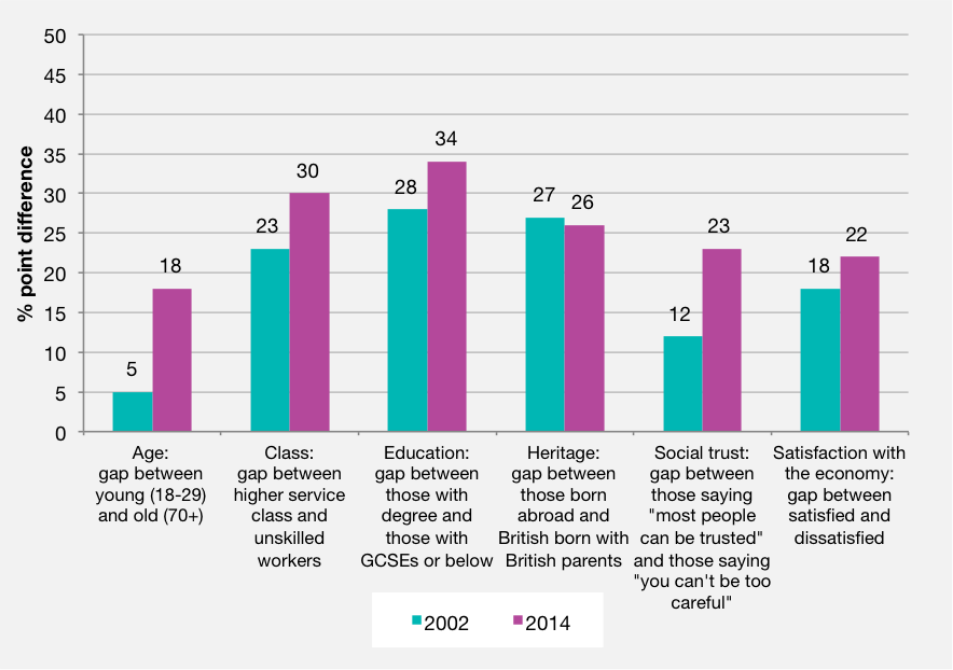
The majority of those expressing trust towards others also support entry of "more" or "some" migrants into Britain, while support among those who are distrustful is lower, with only two fifths supporting entry of "more" or "some" migrants from poorer countries outside Europe. More than half of those who express trust in others felt migration enriches British culture and benefits the economy, compared with less than a third of those who express distrust towards others.

The UK is more divided than it was in 2002 by age, class, education, social trust and personal economic satisfaction

When we compare the depth of social divides in 2002 and 2014, we find that the biggest change has occurred in divides over the economic impact of immigration - where overall attitudes have become more positive. Figure 1 illustrates this, showing the depth of divides in views about the economic impact of migration by various factors in 2002 (light bars) and 2014 (dark bars). While the public is more positive overall about the economic effects of migration, this aggregate change masks deepening division on all but one of our measures. The growth in this divide is largely the result of young graduates becoming more positive about the economic impact of immigration, whereas older less qualified people's views have remained the same.

The UK is more divided than it was in 2002 by age, class, education, social trust and personal economic satisfaction, while the divides by migrant heritage remain as large as they were before. This poses problems for policymakers. While, on aggregate, people have a balanced view about the positive or negative economic effect of immigration, most people don't actually hold such a middling view. In practice, people are either positive about immigration's economic effects - in which case they opt for allowing "more" or "some" migrants in - or negative about the economic impact of migration - in which case they are more likely to opt for "few" or "none". While a compromise policy may best match the overall average, when views are polarised like this - and growing more so over time - centrist positions may backfire, angering both sides in the political debate.

Figure 1 Differences (in percentage points) between social groups in their view that immigration is good for the economy, 2002 and 2014



Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)
The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

The persistent and often deepening social divides in views about migration may also help to explain why the issue has become more politically contentious

The persistent and often deepening social divides in views about migration may also help to explain why the issue has become more politically contentious (Duffy and Frere-Smith, 2014), despite no negative adjustment in overall public attitudes. The social groups who are untroubled by immigration usually do not see the issue as important, and tend to focus on other issues when voting, whereas, for immigration-sceptics the issue seems to have become ever more central to their electoral decisions (see the chapter on 'The vote to leave the EU'). While overall views have not changed dramatically between 2002 and 2014, opponents to immigration became more politically mobilised and more focused on the issue, creating the impression of a population-wide backlash against immigration.

Is the UK different?

The prominent and divisive role played by immigration in the debate about the UK's membership of the European Union has led some to speculate that the public is unusually negative about the effects of immigration, and unusually hostile towards immigrants. In Table 6 below we compare UK attitudes about the economic and social impact of immigration to those in all the other European countries surveyed in both 2002 and 2014. In 2002, the UK was indeed unusually negative about economic effects of immigration, with sceptics outnumbering optimists by a larger margin than in any other western European country surveyed. UK pessimism about the economic effects of immigration at this point was more similar to that

After a decade of unprecedented migration inflows, the UK is not unusually positive or negative about the economic effects of immigration compared with other EU countries

in post-Communist Europe where migration was (and remains) very low, than views in the migrant-receiving nations of western Europe.

Things are different in 2014. The UK saw the largest positive change in views of the economic impact of immigration between 2002 and 2014, moving attitudes overall from unusually negative to mid-ranking among the countries we analyse. Both of the other countries to experience large positive changes - Germany and Poland - also had relatively strong economies and labour markets between the two survey years. By 2014, after a decade of unprecedented migration inflows, the UK was not unusually positive or negative about the economic effects of immigration compared with other EU countries. By contrast, other large migrant-receiving western European EU members such as Austria, Netherlands, Belgium and France, saw their attitudes about the economic effects of immigration become more negative.

Table 6 European views about cultural and economic impact of immigration, by country, 2002 and 2014

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
Net view about economic impact of immigration (% positive – % negative)			
Switzerland	+32	+42	+10
Germany	+7	+23	+16
Sweden	+20	+23	+3
Norway	+16	+22	+6
Ireland	+3	+8	+5
Finland	+15	+7	-8
UK	**-16**	**+4**	**+20**
Poland	-13	+2	+15
Spain	+17	+2	-15
Austria	+22	-2	-24
Portugal	-2	-2	-
Netherlands	+2	-5	-6
Denmark	-7	-7	-
Belgium	-11	-16	-4
France	+6	-17	-23
Slovenia	-20	-27	-8
Czechia	-16	-43	-27
Hungary	-25	-42	-17
Net view about cultural impact of immigration (% positive – % negative)			
Sweden	+67	+64	-3
Finland	+77	+59	-18
Netherlands	+44	+40	-3
Poland	+39	+37	-3
Germany	+38	+35	-2
Switzerland	+42	+34	-8
Spain	+31	+31	+1
Belgium	+31	+27	-4
Norway	+29	+23	-5
Denmark	+24	+19	-4
Ireland	+18	+19	-
Portugal	+13	+16	+3
France	+9	+6	-3
UK	**+12**	**+4**	**-8**
Slovenia	+7	+3	-4
Austria	+26	-2	-28
Hungary	+5	-6	-11
Czechia	-8	-34	-25

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)
Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
Countries are ordered by 2014 result

In contrast to their views on the economic impact, people in the UK are on aggregate, less positive about the cultural impact of immigration than most of their European neighbours. While the UK's aggregate view of the cultural impact has become more negative between 2002 and 2014, we witness a similar trend in most other countries resulting in the UK remaining at the bottom end of the table.

The two other wealthy European countries with similarly pessimistic views on the cultural impacts of immigration - France and Austria - both have very large and electorally successful anti-migrant radical right-wing parties. Radical right-wing candidates made the run-off round for Presidential elections in both countries over the past year, suggesting that the rising concerns about the cultural effects of immigration the EES had detected in 2014 can be a potent electoral force.

Table 7 summarises the wide range of different views about the economic and cultural impacts of immigration found across the continent (though note the baseline level of positivity about cultural impacts is higher). Germany, Sweden and Switzerland are positive about the economic effects and very positive about the cultural effects of immigration, while Norwegians on balance see economic benefits but are comparatively less positive about the cultural impact. A cluster of four countries - Finland, Poland, Spain and the Netherlands - see immigration as very enriching to the national culture, but are uncertain that it brings economic gains. Ireland, Portugal and Denmark combine similarly balanced attitudes to the economic impact with a comparatively middling view on the cultural impact. The UK, along with Austria, has a balanced and mid-ranking view on economic impacts, but a comparatively sceptical view of the positive cultural effects. Finally, five countries have comparatively negative aggregate views on the economic and (aside from Belgium) cultural impacts. France, where the anti-migrant Front National recently secured its strongest-ever presidential election performance joins a cluster of low immigration central European countries (Hungary, Czechia and Slovenia) in expressing the most negative views about both effects of immigration.

The UK, along with Austria, has a balanced and mid-ranking view on economic impacts, but a comparatively sceptical view of the positive cultural effects

Interestingly, while there is a large cluster of countries that are on aggregate positive about the cultural effects of immigration but negative about the economic impacts, whereas the opposite pattern – positive about the economic impact but on balance negative about the cultural impact - never occurs (though the UK comes close). The continuing economic struggles in many parts of Europe following the financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis may have reinforced anxieties about the economic effects of migration, but they do not seem to have undermined the broadly positive stance about cultural impacts in most of the continent. However, it is important to remember that these views were gathered before the refugee crisis of 2015-16, which affected many parts of Europe, and may have further changed patterns of attitudes.

Table 7 Distribution of attitudes about economic and cultural impacts of immigration

	Positive about economic impact (+10 or more)	Neutral about economic impact (-10 to +10)	Negative about economic impact (under -10)
Strongly positive about cultural impact (+30 or more)	Switzerland, Germany, Sweden	Finland, Poland, Spain, Netherlands	
Positive about cultural impact (+10 to +30)	Norway	Ireland, Portugal, Denmark	Belgium
Neutral or negative about cultural impact (under +10)		**UK**, Austria,	France, Slovenia, Czechia, Hungary

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)

Social divides over immigration in the UK and Europe

Overall UK views about the effects of migration are not a major departure from European norms. Partly, this is because there is no consistent European norm to depart from; immigration views vary widely across the continent. But it is also because where UK attitudes have shifted, the change has made the UK more typical: the public was unusually negative about the economic effects of migration in 2002, when the British economy was booming and migration was relatively low. In 2014, after a major economic crisis and a massive inflow of migrants, the public became comparatively more positive on migration's economic impact while many European countries moved in the opposite direction (though the UK's aggregate view was overall neutral). However, as we have seen earlier, a focus on the overall changes to UK migration attitudes risks masking growing social polarisation on the issue. Perhaps it is the divisiveness of immigration that sets the UK apart?

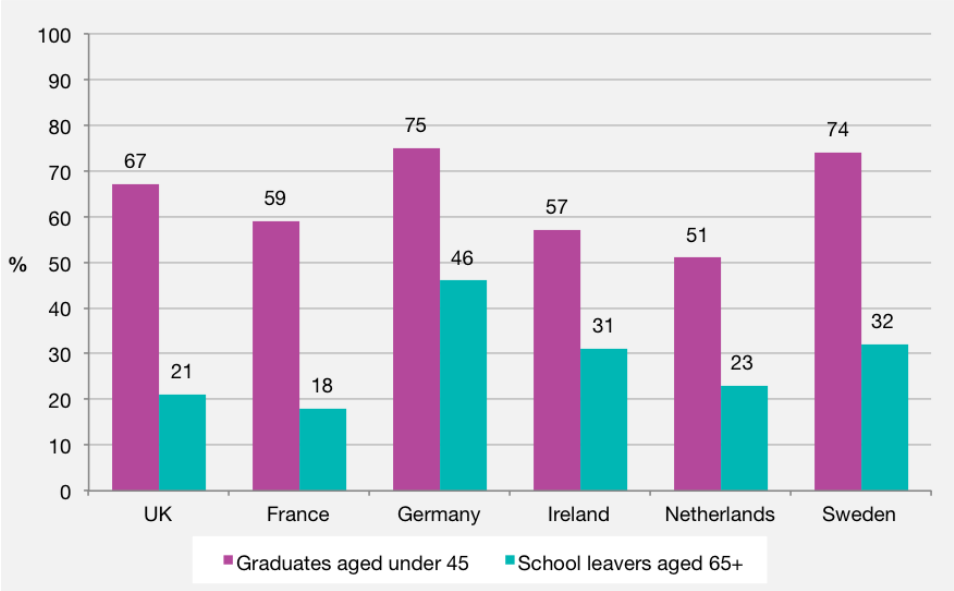
Summarising the full range of social divisions in the full range of immigration attitudes across many nations is a major task, beyond the scope of this chapter. So we focus on two of the social factors that have been most strongly associated with immigration attitudes in past research: age and education. To get a sense of the depth of social divides, we combine these measures to compare two large social groups on opposite sides of the immigration debate: university graduates under the age of 45 (9% of respondents in the overall 2014 ESS sample) and those with lower secondary education over the age of 65 (11% of respondents). Given limited space, we focus on views about the economic and cultural impact of immigration, which have been central in both academic and political debates about the issue.

Figures 2 and 3 take a look at the social divide in views about the economic and cultural impacts of migration in the UK and a selection of nearby European countries - France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden - using the 2014 ESS data. Divisions over

Divisions over immigration in the UK are certainly not unique: deep divides exist in every country charted

immigration in the UK are certainly not unique: deep divides exist in every country charted. Between half and three-quarters of young graduates in all six countries said they think immigration is good for their country's economy. The percentage of older school-leavers who feel similarly ranges from a fifth to a third in every country except Germany - and even there only 46% of older school-leavers see immigration as economically beneficial.

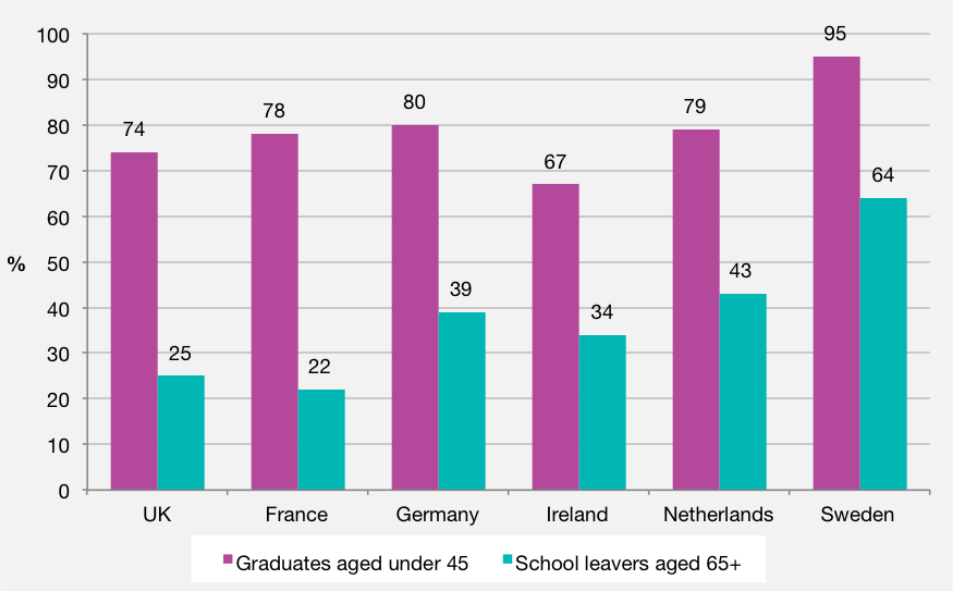
Figure 2 Proportion who are positive about the economic impact of immigration, comparing graduates under 45 years old and school leavers over 65 years old, by country



Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)
The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

The divides on cultural effects are even deeper. The vast majority of young graduates across all these countries see immigration as enriching their national cultures, with even the lowest proportion being 67% in Ireland, and the highest being 95% in Sweden. Older school-leavers by contrast are much more sceptical. Around a quarter see migration as culturally enriching in the UK and France (22%), a third (34%) in Ireland, 39% in Germany and 43% in the Netherlands. Only in Sweden do older school-leavers have a majority of positive views about the cultural impact of migration - and even in Sweden they are much more sceptical than young graduates.

Figure 3 Proportion who are positive about the cultural impact of immigration, comparing graduates under 45 years old and school leavers over 65 years old, by country



Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)
The data on which Figure 3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Concerning views on the economic impact of immigration, the social divide in the UK has grown more rapidly since 2002 than in any other country

In Table 8 we look at these social divides in a bit more depth, examining the difference in the prevalence of positive views about immigration across the full range of ESS countries, and seeing how it has changed since 2002. Including details on the changes in each social group's attitudes would make the table unmanageably large and complicated, so instead we discuss the drivers of the changes in levels of social division below.

Here we see that the UK is among the most deeply divided nations of those covered by the ESS in 2014. Concerning views on the economic impact of immigration, the social divide in the UK has grown more rapidly since 2002 than in any other country. While this division in attitudes is strong in the UK, it is found in many other countries too.

Where the division within a country on the economic impact has grown, we find this is due to young university graduates becoming more positive

Where the division within a country on the economic impact has grown, such as in the UK, Sweden, Spain and Ireland, we find this is due to young university graduates becoming more positive, while the more sceptical views of older school-leavers have changed little, or not at all. A similar trend explains the growing divides in attitudes to the cultural impact found in Slovenia, France, Denmark, Spain, Ireland and Portugal.

In Germany, Switzerland and Norway, immigration remains divisive but the divides have on the whole reduced, and views are positive on aggregate. Perhaps not coincidentally, these are three of Europe's richest nations, and three of the countries whose economies weathered the financial crisis best.

At the bottom of both tables we find the two countries, Czechia and Hungary, with the smallest divides in opinion and the most negative

overall views on the impacts of immigration. In both countries the reduction in divide on the economic impact is due to aggregate positivity of young graduates having disappeared. Scepticism in these two countries - where immigration is very low - is now near universal.

Table 8 Social divides (percentage point difference) over the economic and cultural impact of immigration, 2002 and 2014

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
Difference between younger graduates and older school-leavers in attitudes about economic impact of immigration (% graduates under 45 positive – % school-leavers over 65 positive)			
UK++	**+27**	**+46**	**+19**
Sweden	+27	+43	+16
Slovenia	+25	+42	+16
France	+34	+41	+8
Denmark	+27	+36	+10
Austria	+26	+35	+9
Finland	+30	+34	+3
Spain	+26	+32	+6
Norway+	+37	+31	-6
Germany+	+37	+30	-7
Switzerland+	+45	+28	-16
Netherlands	+21	+28	+7
Ireland	+18	+26	+8
Poland	+25	+22	-3
Belgium	+23	+21	-2
Portugal	+23	+19	-4
Czechia+	+41	+13	-28
Hungary	+15	+4	-12

Table 8 Social divides (percentage point difference) over the economic and cultural impact of immigration, 2002 and 2014 (continued)

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
Difference between younger graduates and older school-leavers in attitudes about cultural impact of immigration (% graduates under 45 positive – % school-leavers over 65 positive)			
Slovenia	+24	+57	+33
France	+50	+55	+6
Denmark	+43	+50	+6
UK++	**+46**	**+49**	**+3**
Spain	+39	+45	+7
Austria	+40	+44	+5
Germany	+45	+41	-4
Switzerland	+39	+39	1
Finland	+34	+39	+6
Belgium	+45	+37	-8
Netherlands	+44	+36	-8
Portugal	+27	+34	+8
Poland	+45	+32	-13
Ireland	+26	+33	+7
Norway	+46	+33	-13
Sweden	+38	+30	-8
Hungary	+47	+26	-21
Czechia	+37	+21	-16

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)
Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
+Bases for some groups in these countries fell below 100; therefore caution should be used with these figures
++derived from country specific variable

Conclusions

We set out to answer three questions about how attitudes to immigration have changed in response to the largest inflow of migrants in British history. Firstly, has the UK reacted to the recent increases in immigration by becoming significantly more negative overall about migration and its effects? We find they have not. Attitudes on the economic impacts of immigration have instead become more positive (while neutral overall),and views on the cultural impact of migration have become slightly more negative. Attitudes to the impact of immigration on crime have also become more positive, but nonetheless remain strongly negative overall. It is possible therefore that the UK's comparatively well-performing labour market

during this period did enough to neutralise any growing concern about immigration's impact on the economy, jobs and crime, but understandably did not halt the slight growth in concern about its cultural impact.

We find that views about the admission of different migrant groups are also largely stable, though we note a small increase in opposition to migration from poorer countries. The UK has, however, become more selective, placing an ever-stronger emphasis on acquired skills such as language, work skills and educational qualifications, as well as a commitment to a British "way of life".

The UK public has responded to high migration not by demanding migration by intensifying their demands for greater selection in immigration policy

This continues a trend identified in earlier research: the UK public has responded to high migration not by demanding migration be halted across the board, but by intensifying their demands for greater selection in immigration policy (see also Ford et al., 2012; Ford and Heath, 2014). It is migrants' skills and their commitment to a British way of life, not whether they are white or Christian or where they migrate from that chiefly matter to the public in the UK. Support for selecting migrants on ascribed criteria such as religion or race, which was already low in 2002, has declined further since.

We do however find that the public's views on the economic impact of immigration have become more polarised, and views on the cultural impact are also divided but not more or less so than they were in 2002. This, in turn, may explain a paradox about immigration over the past 15 years; that its political importance has increased dramatically even though public attitudes on average have not shifted in a negative direction. There are big social divides in views about immigration. These divides fuel political conflict between groups such as graduates, the young and the middle class who see immigration increasingly positively and those, such as pensioners, the working class and school-leavers, who see it in a more negative light. Where the divide has deepened, this is not the result of mounting hostility in the sceptical groups but instead because the social groups with more positive views have become even more positive about migration.

In 2002, public opinion about immigration was more negative than practically every other large west European country with a significant migrant population. Since then the UK has shown the biggest positive change in attitudes on the economic impact of migration. As a result, the UK's aggregate view is now mid-ranking in the list of European countres analysed. By contrast, the UK public's aggregrate view on the cultural impact of immigration remains towards the sceptical end of this table of countries.

What sets the UK apart from the rest of Europe is the depth of the social divides over views on the economic impact of immigration, and the degree to which this divide has increased. The UK is more divided over migration on this measure than any other European society measured, and the divide has grown more here than anywhere else. These attitude changes were visible well before the debate over Brexit got underway - ESS data are from 2002 and 2014.

Yet the social divides over immigration we find map well onto the social divides researchers analysing the Brexit vote have also found (see the chapter on 'The vote to leave the EU'; Goodwin and Heath, 2016; Clarke et al., 2017). The deep Brexit divide between Remain young graduates and Leave older school-leavers already existed in 2002 on attitudes to immigration's economic impact and was even deeper in 2014. While the Brexit decision did not create these social divides, the EU referendum campaign and the vote to leave the EU have politically mobilised them. Policy makers looking to build a new immigration settlement for the post-EU era will face a major challenge in bridging the huge and longstanding gap between the UK's migration supporters and sceptics.

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Acknowledgements

The European Social Survey (ESS) is a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC). Participating countries contribute to the central coordination costs of the ESS ERIC as well as covering the costs of their own fieldwork and national coordination. In the UK these funds are provided by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The views expressed are those of the authors alone.

Appendix

The bases for Tables 4 and 5 can be found below.

Table A.1 Views on levels of immigration from different migrant groups, and impacts of immigration on the UK, by socio-demographic and attitudinal group

	Unweighted Base
Age	
18-29	*253*
70 plus	*458*
Class	
Higher service (professionals and managers)	*378*
Unskilled workers	*456*
Education	
Degree	*569*
GCSE or less	*771*
Heritage	
Born abroad	*314*
UK born, UK-born parents	*1747*
Social Trust	
Most people can be trusted	*1099*
You can't be too careful	*653*
Satisfaction with the economy	
Satisfied	*861*
Not satisfied	*979*

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)

Full question wording for the attitudinal questions in Tables 4 and 5 is shown below.

Social trust:

> ***Using this card, generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? Please tell me on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.***

Satisfaction with the economy:

> ***On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [Britain / the UK]? Still use this card. [where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied.]***

The data for Figure 1 are shown below.

Table A.2 Differences between social groups in attitudes about the economic impact of immigration, 2002 and 2014

	2002	2014
Age: gap between youngest (18-29) and oldest (70+)	5	18
18-29 Unweighted base	*283*	*253*
70 plus Unweighted base	*338*	*458*
Class: gap between higher service class and unskilled workers	23	30
Higher service unweighted base	*368*	*378*
Unskilled workers unweighted base	*484*	*456*
Education level: gap between those with degree or higher and GCSEs or below	28	34
Degree unweighted base	*480*	*569*
GCSE or less unweighted base	*1140*	*771*
Heritage: gap between those born abroad and those UK born with UK-born parents	27	26
Born abroad unweighted base	*191*	*314*
UK born, UK-born parents unweighted base	*1716*	*1747*
Social trust: gap between those saying "most people can be trusted" and those saying "you can't be too careful"	12	23
"Most people can be trusted" unweighted base	*884*	*1,099*
"You can't be too careful" unweighted base	*707*	*653*
Satisfaction with the economy: gap between those who are "satisfied" and those who are "dissatisfied"	18	22
"Satisfied" unweighted base	*885*	*861*
"Not satisfied" unweighted base	*705*	*979*

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

The bases for Table 6 can be found below.

Table A.3 European views about cultural and economic impact of immigration, by country, 2002 and 2014

	2012	2014
Country	*Unweighted Base*	*Unweighted Base*
Switzerland	*2040*	*1532*
Germany	*2919*	*3045*
Sweden	*1999*	*1791*
Norway	*2036*	*1436*
Ireland	*2046*	*2390*
Finland	*2000*	*2087*
UK	***2052***	***2264***
Poland	*2110*	*1615*
Spain	*1729*	*1925*
Austria	*2257*	*1795*
Portugal	*1511*	*1265*
Netherlands	*2364*	*1919*
Denmark	*1506*	*1502*
Belgium	*1899*	*1769*
France	*1503*	*1917*
Slovenia	*1519*	*1224*
Czechia	*1360*	*2148*
Hungary	*1685*	*1698*

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

The data for Figure 2 are shown below.

Table A.4 Proportion who are positive about the economic impact of immigration, comparing graduates under 45 years old and school leavers over 65 years old, by country

% saying immigration good for the economy	Graduates under 45 years old	School leavers over 65 years old
Country		
UK	67	21
Unweighted base	*291*	*342*
France	59	18
Unweighted base	*196*	*214*
Germany	75	46
Unweighted base	*262*	*95*
Ireland	57	31
Unweighted base	*264*	*382*
Netherlands	51	23
Unweighted base	*240*	*292*
Sweden	74	31
Unweighted base	*233*	*204*

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)

The data for Figure 3 are shown below.

Table A.5 Proportion who are positive about the cultural impact of immigration, comparing graduates under 45 years old and school leavers over 65 years old, by country

% saying immigration enriches culture	Graduates under 45 years old	School leavers over 65 years old
Country		
UK	74	25
Unweighted base	*291*	*342*
France	78	22
Unweighted base	*196*	*214*
Germany	80	39
Unweighted base	*262*	*95*
Ireland	67	34
Unweighted base	*264*	*382*
Netherlands	79	43
Unweighted base	*240*	*292*
Sweden	95	64
Unweighted base	*233*	*204*

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)

The bases for Table 8 are shown below.

Table A.6 Social divide over the economic and cultural impact of immigration, 2002 and 2014

	2002		2014	
	Graduates under 45	**School-leavers 65+**	**Graduates under 45**	**School-leavers 65+**
Country	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Austria	*163*	*194*	*114*	*127*
Belgium	*303*	*191*	*203*	*173*
Switzerland	*289*	*126*	*133*	*96*
Czechia	*67*	*105*	*132*	*62*
Germany	*300*	*99*	*262*	*95*
Denmark	*218*	*97*	*217*	*106*
Spain	*166*	*408*	*186*	*339*
Finland	*253*	*257*	*257*	*273*
France	*257*	*228*	*196*	*214*
UK	***338***	***360***	***291***	***342***
Hungary	*94*	*194*	*124*	*167*
Ireland	*381*	*237*	*264*	*382*
Netherlands	*279*	*305*	*240*	*292*
Norway	*295*	*132*	*233*	*98*
Poland	*138*	*197*	*218*	*213*
Portugal	*104*	*346*	*110*	*377*
Sweden	*220*	*264*	*233*	*204*
Slovenia	*117*	*140*	*137*	*102*

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

The vote to leave the EU

Litmus test or lightning rod?

We are more Eurosceptic than ever, with long term trends in Euroscepticism continuing to rise after the referendum in June 2016.

Post Brexit, Britain is more Eurosceptic than ever

*Data collected between July and November 2016

Overview

This chapter considers two popular explanations for the vote by the British public in June 2016 to leave the EU. The first is that the vote reflects the concerns of more 'authoritarian', socially conservative voters about the social consequences of EU membership – and especially about immigration. The second is that the vote was occasioned by general public disenchantment with politics. The chapter suggests that the first of these two provides the better explanation. The EU referendum can therefore be characterised as a litmus test of the merits of the EU project, and perhaps of globalisation more generally, rather than as a lightning rod for wider political discontent.

Social consequences of EU membership

Concerns about the social consequences of EU membership were key in influencing how people voted in the EU referendum.

- 73% of those who are worried about immigration voted Leave, compared with 36% of those who did not identify this as a concern.
- 72% of those holding 'authoritarian' views voted to leave, compared with 21% of those holding 'libertarian' views.
- Multivariate analysis found that, for the most part, only items associated with people's sense of national identity and cultural outlook were significantly associated with vote choice.

Dissatisfaction with politics

Dissatisfaction with politics was less important in influencing how people voted in the EU referendum.

- 45% of those who trust government a great deal or tend to trust it voted to leave, compared with 65% of those who distrust it greatly.
- However, there was a greater increase in turnout among those with little interest in politics, as compared with the 2015 general election. 43% of those with no interest in politics voted in the EU referendum, up from 30% in the 2015 general election. Nevertheless, these proportions remain markedly lower than those for people with a "great deal" (90% in 2016 and 88% in 2015) or "quite a lot" of interest in politics (89% and 86%).

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Introduction

The outcome of the European Union (EU) referendum, in which a majority of 52% to 48% voted to leave the EU, came as a surprise to most commentators and many voters. Indeed, although previous chapters in the series had reported an increase in scepticism about Europe, they also suggested that the majority of voters were still minded to stay in the EU (Curtice and Evans, 2015; Curtice, 2016). Scepticism was expressed primarily in support for the proposition that Britain should stay in the EU while trying to reduce its powers rather than in the form of outright opposition to continued membership. And it was that sentiment to which the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, appeared to be appealing when he prefaced the referendum with a renegotiation of the UK's terms of membership, on which agreement was reached with the EU in February 2016 (European Council, 2016). So why in the end did a majority of voters back leaving the EU, thereby instigating the most important rejection of a government policy in any referendum held to date in the UK? That is the question this chapter endeavours to address.

Why in the end did a majority of voters back leaving the EU, thereby instigating the most important rejection of a government policy in any referendum held to date in the UK?

In so doing we focus in particular on two principal explanations, both of which are rooted in previous research on why people (not just in Britain, but across the EU) express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the EU. While one of these suggests that the explanation lies – as one might immediately anticipate - in people's evaluations of the EU itself, the other suggests – less obviously - that it may have little or nothing to do with the purpose or operation of the institution at all. So, in part we are going to examine whether the outcome of the referendum necessarily represents a rejection of the EU at all.

Our first possible explanation starts from the observation that the EU is a supra-national organisation that distributes resources across sovereign nation states and creates regulations with which those states have to comply. It has also created a single market that not only means that goods manufactured in one country can be sold in any other EU country but also that citizens of any one EU country have the right to live and work in any other part of the EU. It has thus, to some extent at least, taken on powers and responsibilities that would usually be regarded as the preserve of individual states, while acting as a conduit through which some of the forces of globalisation have been able to flow.

Not everyone is necessarily happy with this development, however. In taking on some of the attributes and characteristics of a state and creating a degree of uniformity across Europe, people may feel that their distinctive national identity and the culture that they associate with that identity are being undermined (Carey, 2002; Deflem and Pampel, 1996; McLaren, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Taggart, 1998). That might particularly prove to be the case if, as has happened recently in the UK, the EU's freedom of movement provisions have served to facilitate relatively high levels

of immigration (Vargas Silva and Markaki, 2016). The new migrants may well speak their own language among themselves and certainly may not be immediately well acquainted with the cultural peculiarities and social mores of the society that they have now joined. For some existing residents at least, this social change may represent a challenge that makes them feel uncomfortable – and a litmus test for what they think of the European Union (Ford and Goodwin, 2017; Sides and Citrin, 2007).[1]

However, the EU is for the most part a relatively remote institution. Few voters have a deep appreciation of what it does, of how it operates, or of the personnel that occupy its principal political positions. In contrast, most will have at least some acquaintance with their principal domestic politicians and political institutions. So when they are asked what they think about the EU, voters might be inclined to think about how they are being governed in general, rather than about the EU in particular. And if their view is that they are not in fact being governed that well, they may decide that at least part of the blame lies with an EU they do not understand but seemingly enables its politicians and bureaucrats to enjoy a comfortable life. In short, the EU becomes a lightning rod for their discontent (Anderson, 1998).

So, perhaps on the one hand, a majority of voters in the UK wanted to leave the EU because they were concerned about the cultural consequences of EU membership, including not least what they regard as the adverse consequences of immigration. Or perhaps the vote represented a more general dissatisfaction with the way in which voters feel that they are being governed. Moreover, not only might these perspectives help us understand what distinguished Leave and Remain voters as they cast their ballots in the referendum, but also how voters' views evolved and developed during the course of the referendum campaign.

We begin our analysis by looking at who turned out to vote, before turning to examine who voted to Remain and Leave and why they appeared to do so. We then consider how attitudes shifted during the course of the referendum campaign before considering the implications of the referendum result for the political parties and the debate about what relationship the UK should seek to have with the EU after it has left.

Turnout

According to the official result declared by the Electoral Commission no less than 72% of those eligible to vote participated in the referendum. By historical standards, this is not particularly impressive – until 2001 post-war elections were always graced by a turnout of more than 70%. However, turnout at each of the last four general elections was well below that level. Further, when the UK as a whole was last invited to vote in a referendum – on whether the House of

1 Of course, immigration may also be thought to pose an economic challenge, both in terms of its impact on the labour market and on public services. Such concerns can also lead to the 'othering' of migrants, and a concern about a loss of national control over immigration.

Commons should be elected using the Alternative Vote (AV) rather than the existing single member plurality system – just 42% made it to the polls. In short, by recent standards at least, a relatively large number of voters voted in the referendum.

If more people voted in the referendum than at other recent ballots, does this also mean that the kind of voter who made it to the polling station was a little different too?

But if more people voted in the referendum than at other recent ballots, does this also mean that the kind of voter who made it to the polling station was a little different too? Perhaps those with little interest or engagement in the political process regarded the ballot as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the way they were governed and thus turned up in greater numbers than was previously the case. Such a pattern is certainly what we might anticipate if voters were using the referendum to express their dissatisfaction with how they were governed in general.

The role of political interest

Nearly all of the increase in turnout occurred among those with "not very much" or no interest in politics at all

Of this, Table 1 suggests that there is some evidence. Nearly all of the increase in turnout as compared with the 2015 UK general election occurred among those with "not very much" or no interest in politics at all. In contrast, turnout barely increased at all among those with at least some interest in politics. This, of course, to some extent is almost arithmetically inevitable, as turnout among those with "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of interest in politics was already close to 90% and thus could not increase much further. Indeed, we can see that as compared with the 2011 referendum on the Alternative Vote, when turnout was much lower irrespective of how interested someone was in politics, the participation rate this time around was more than 20 points above what it was in 2011 across all categories in Table 1. Still, even this comparison suggests that those with less interest in politics were relatively speaking a little more likely to have voted in the referendum on the EU than in the one on AV – though it was still the case that those with "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of interest in politics were much more likely to have voted than those with no interest at all.

Table 1 Turnout in 2011 AV Referendum, 2015 UK General Election and 2016 EU Referendum, by interest in politics[2]+

	% Turnout				
	2011	2015	2016	Change since 2011	Change since 2015
Interest in politics					
Great deal	69	88	90	+21	+1
Quite a lot	67	86	89	+22	+3
Some	55	77	78	+23	+2
Not very much	40	54	65	+25	+11
None at all	14	30	43	+28	+13

Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of turnout.

Older people tend to be more interested in politics than their younger counterparts. We thus might anticipate from the evidence that we have seen so far that the increase in turnout among younger people was more marked than among older people. Of this however, there is no more than a hint, as Table 2 shows. Turnout was up by 9 points as compared with the general election among those aged under 35, while it increased by a more modest 5 points among those aged 65 or over. Comparison of the increase in turnout on the 2011 referendum in these two groups also points to a somewhat bigger increase among younger people. That said, it remained the case that younger people were much less likely to vote than their older counterparts, even though it might be felt that it was their futures above all that would be affected by the outcome of the referendum.

It remained the case that younger people were much less likely to vote than their older counterparts

Table 2 Turnout in 2011 AV Referendum, 2015 UK General Election and 2016 EU Referendum, by age group+

	% Turnout				
	2011	2015	2016	Change since 2011	Change since 2015
Age group					
18-34	33	55	64	+31	+9
35-64	53	73	80	+26	+7
65+	69	84	89	+21	+5

Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of turnout.

Thus it appears that the EU referendum was somewhat more successful at bringing the reactively uninterested and disengaged to the polls, including some younger voters – but no more than that. Many of the demographic differences in turnout that are in evidence

2 Figures showing change over time in this table are calculated from the exact data, rather than the rounded figures that appear in the table. As a result they will sometimes appear to be incorrect by +/-1%. This applies to all similar tables in this chapter.

in almost every ballot in the UK once again made an appearance. Thus, for example, not only were younger voters still much less likely to vote than older voters, but so equally were graduates (83% of whom voted) more likely to participate than those without any educational qualifications (68%). And in this case, there is little evidence that the demographic divide in participation narrowed much at all.

The importance of education and age

Younger voters were far more likely than older voters to say they voted Remain, while graduates were more likely to do so than were those without any educational qualifications

Traditional though they might have been, these demographic differences in turnout by age and education potentially had particular significance in the EU referendum. For among those who did vote, younger voters were far more likely than older voters to say they voted Remain, while graduates were more likely to do so than were those without any educational qualifications. As Table 3 shows, just 22% of graduates voted to leave the EU, compared with 72% of those without any educational qualifications. Equally, if only a little less dramatically, just 28% of those aged 18 to 24 voted to leave whereas 63% of those aged 65 and over did so. This was evidently a referendum marked by some strong social divisions.

Table 3 EU Referendum vote, by age group and highest educational qualification+

		EU Referendum vote		
		Leave	**Remain**	*Unweighted base*
Age group				
18-24	%	28	72	*108*
25-34	%	37	63	*254*
35-44	%	37	63	*326*
45-54	%	47	53	*406*
55-64	%	55	45	*425*
65+	%	63	37	*732*
Highest educational qualification				
Degree	%	22	78	*569*
Higher education below degree	%	53	47	*271*
A-level	%	41	59	*387*
GCSE A-C	%	62	38	*419*
GCSE D-G	%	69	31	*166*
None	%	72	28	*405*

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of voting behaviour.

The differences in referendum vote choice by social class are less marked than those in respect of education

Education is, of course, linked to social class. Someone with a degree is quite likely to be in a professional or managerial occupation, while someone without any qualifications at all is most likely employed in a routine or semi-routine (working class) occupation. However, the differences in referendum vote choice by social class are less marked than those in respect of education. While 36% of those in a professional or managerial occupation voted to leave, the proportion among those in a routine or semi-routine job was 60% - the resulting difference between these two groups of 24 points is much less than the 50 point difference evident in Table 3 between graduates and those without any educational qualifications. Thus, it would seem that it is educational experience rather than class position that primarily shaped people's attitudes towards the EU.

At the same time though education is also intertwined with age – younger voters are more likely than older voters to have been to university and less likely not to have any qualifications at all. We thus might wonder whether one of the patterns that we can see in Table 3 is simply occasioned by the other. To examine whether or not this is the case in Table 4 we show the level of support for Remain broken down by age and highest educational qualification combined. From this it is clear that, of the two, it is educational background that is by far the more important. Within each age group, there is a big difference between graduates and those whose highest qualification is a GCSE or less in the level of support registered for staying in the EU. In the case of those aged between 35 and 54, for example, as many as 81% of graduates voted to remain, compared with just 37% of those whose highest qualification is a GCSE or less; a difference of 44 points. In contrast, older graduates were only 10 points less likely than younger ones to vote for Remain, while the age gap among those with a GCSE or less is only 7 points. Only among those whose highest qualification is less than a degree but more than a GCSE is there a substantial age difference. Even so, at 30 points, it is less than the gap within all of our age groups between graduates and those with a GCSE or less.

Table 4 Percentage voting Remain, by age and highest educational qualification combined

	Age group		
% Remain	**18-34**	**35-54**	**55+**
Highest educational qualification			
Degree	80	81	70
Higher below degree/A-level	71	54	41
GCSE or less	37	37	30

Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of turnout.

Such a pattern is precisely what we would expect to find if voters' choices reflected their views about immigration

The pattern of voting in the EU referendum reflected then, above all, an educational divide. At one end of the spectrum most graduates voted to remain in the EU – at the other, most with few, if any educational, qualifications voted to leave. To that was then added something of a generational divide. Such a pattern is precisely what we would expect to find if voters' choices reflected their views about immigration. Graduates and younger people tend to be less concerned about both the economic and cultural consequences of immigration (Ford and Heath, 2014), a pattern that is consistent with their tendency to have more liberal views generally about social and moral issues (Park and Rhead, 2013; Park and Surridge, 2003). On the other hand, those with fewer educational qualifications also tend to be less interested in politics or to feel that they cannot do much to influence politics (Lee and Young, 2013), and indeed it can also be shown that they are rather less likely to trust politicians. So the demographic division in the referendum appears to be consistent with both of the possible explanations of the referendum vote that we outlined at the beginning of this chapter. We thus need to look more directly at which appears to provide the better explanation.

Motivations

Views on the implications of EU membership

Our first potential explanation is that those who voted for Remain and those who voted Leave can best be distinguished by their attitudes towards the implications of EU membership for the country's culture and identity, as epitomised above all by people's attitudes towards immigration. That those who voted for Remain and those who voted to leave have very different views about immigration is certainly clear. In our survey, respondents were presented with a list of a dozen items about which they might possibly be worried, ranging from more immediate personal issues such as their health and their family, to wider social issues such as crime and immigration. Among those who named immigration, as many as 73% voted to leave; among those who did not cite this as a concern just 36% did so.

One of the particular issues in the debate about migration from the EU has been the level of access that EU citizens living in the UK should have to welfare benefits. Willingness to grant someone access to welfare may be regarded as an indication that they are thought to be part of the same society and thus as someone who is entitled to support from the rest of that society in a time of need. Conversely, those who consider EU migrants to be 'different' may well be reluctant to extend such support. Indeed, this issue was one of the central topics in the renegotiation of Britain's terms of membership in which David Cameron engaged in advance of the EU referendum. Those talks secured the concession that EU citizens would have to have lived in the UK for at least four years before they could have the same level of entitlement as a British citizen.

Attitudes towards this aspect of the immigration debate were also related to how people voted in the referendum. The longer a voter felt that an EU migrant should have to have lived here before being entitled to the same level of welfare benefit as a British citizen, the more likely they were to vote to leave the EU. Among those who felt that EU citizens should had to have lived here for four years, or who felt that they should never be granted the same level of entitlement, 67% voted to leave the EU. In contrast, among those who felt the time period should be no more than two years (including, perhaps, not at all), just 31% voted to leave. Meanwhile, among those who lay between these two extreme positions and reckoned a three to four year time period was appropriate, 54% voted to leave.

Concern about immigration can also be thought to be an indicator of a wider set of attitudes about the kind of society in which people wish to live. Some may feel that everybody in society should acknowledge and accept a common set of social mores and cultural practices, as this helps to maintain a more cohesive society. Others may feel that people should largely be free to choose their own moral and cultural compass and thus feel relatively happy about living in a diverse society. This distinction has long been captured by BSA in a set of questions that are designed to tap whether somebody is an 'authoritarian' or a 'libertarian'. Full details of these questions can be found in the technical appendix to this report. Here we use these questions to divide our respondents into three groups: those whose responses to our questions place them among the one-third or so who are most 'authoritarian'; those who by the same criterion belong to the one-third most 'libertarian'; and the remaining one-third who fall in between.

No less than 72% of the most 'authoritarian' group voted to leave, while just 21% of the most 'libertarian' group did so

There is a sharp difference between the voting behaviour of these three groups. No less than 72% of the most 'authoritarian' group voted to leave, while just 21% of the most 'libertarian' group did so. Meanwhile, those falling in between these two groups leaned just slightly in favour of leaving, with 53% voting that way. How people voted in the referendum thus not only exposed a big social divide between graduates and those with few, if any, educational qualifications, but also a major cultural divide between those who prefer a relatively homogenous society and those who are content with a more diverse one.

But there is also clearly a link between how people voted in the EU referendum and their sense of identity more broadly. Every year BSA presents its respondents with a list of all of the national identities associated with one or more parts of the islands of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and invites them to select as many of them as they wish as applying to themselves. Among those who included European in their selection, just 15% voted to leave. However, this group represented just 18% of all respondents to the latest survey and thus had relatively little influence on the eventual outcome. Still, the fact that relatively few feel that way – albeit that slightly more do so now than ever before (Curtice, 2016) – helps explain why for many

voters membership of the EU might be felt to represent a challenge to their sense of identity.

Among those who described themselves as 'British', only 45% voted to leave the EU

However, whether or not someone felt European was not the only way in which their attitudes were linked to their sense of identity. Among those who described themselves as 'British', only 45% voted to leave the EU. In contrast, among those who included 'English' among their selection of identities, 54% voted to leave. This is not simply a reflection of the fact that a majority of voters in England voted to leave, whereas in Scotland the opposite was the case. Within England itself, those who felt British (46%) were less likely than those who felt English (54%) to vote to leave.

This link between feeling English and feeling British becomes even clearer if we look at the link between how people in England voted and a different measure of national identity, the so-called Moreno question (Moreno, 2006) that asks:

> ***Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?***
>
> ***English, not British,***
>
> ***More English than British***
>
> ***Equally English and British***
>
> ***More British than English***
>
> ***British, not English***

Table 5 shows that those who said their sense of being English was more important than their sense of being British were more likely to vote to leave than were those whose British identity was the more important. Indeed, among those who said they were English and denied that they were British, nearly three-quarters (74%) voted to leave, whereas less than two in five (38%) of those who rejected feeling English did so. This should not come as a surprise. Within England at least, Britishness rather than Englishness has long been promoted as a 'multi-cultural' identity, and thus there has also long been a link between feeling British and holding a more liberal attitude towards migrant minorities (Curtice and Heath, 2000). It is thus unsurprising that this group should also be more inclined to back the EU. Even so, we should also bear in mind that for many people their sense of Britishness is closely intertwined with their sense of being English, with as many as 42% saying they feel equally both, and thus this aspect of identity can hardly be said to have played an important role for many voters.

Table 5 Referendum vote, by national identity (England only)

		EU Referendum vote		
		Leave	**Remain**	*Unweighted base*
National identity (England only)				
English, not British	%	72	28	*306*
More English than British	%	57	43	*212*
Equally English and British	%	53	47	*853*
More British than English	%	50	60	*171*
British, not English	%	38	62	*269*

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of voting behaviour.

So there does then appear to be considerable support for the expectation that how people voted in the referendum reflected their sense of national identity and the extent to which EU membership might have been regarded as a challenge to that sense of identity, not least as a result of migration. But that, of course, does not mean that people's vote in the referendum also reflected wider concerns about the way they are being governed.

Views on how we are being governed

There certainly does appear to be some link. This emerges first of all if we look at the link between how people voted in the referendum and the extent to which people say they trust some of the country's political institutions. Respondents were asked whether they tended to trust or distrust (a) government, and (b) parliament. As can be seen in Table 6, in both cases those who said they distrust the institution greatly were around 20 points more likely to have voted Leave than were those who said they trusted the institution. However, this gap is rather less than we have seen so far when we have divided people according to their sense of identity or their attitudes to immigration, where we have observed differences of up to 50 points.[3]

3 The BSA survey asks respondents a second question about trust in government in which they are asked whether they trust "British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party". The pattern of voting in the EU referendum when broken down by responses to this question proved to be much the same; just 37% of those who said they trusted governments "just about always" or "most of the time" voted to leave the EU, compared with 60% of those who said they "almost never trusted governments".

Table 6 Percentage voting Leave, by trust in government and Parliament

	% voting Leave	*Unweighted base*
Trust in Government		
Trust a great deal/tend to trust	45	*638*
Tend to distrust	46	*554*
Distrust greatly	65	*266*
Trust in Parliament		
Trust a great deal/tend to trust	43	*698*
Tend to distrust	50	*541*
Distrust greatly	62	*215*

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of voting behaviour.

Among those who agree with the statement that "voting is the only way people like me can have any say about how the government runs things", 50% voted to leave, whereas among those who disagreed just 34% did so

A similar picture of a clear but rather weaker link emerges when we look at the link between how people voted in the referendum and their sense of 'political efficacy', that is, the extent to which they feel able to have some influence on what politicians and government do. For example, among those who agree with the statement that "voting is the only way people like me can have any say about how the government runs things", 50% voted to leave, whereas among those who disagreed just 34% did so. Similarly, among those who agree that "People like me don't have any say about what the government does" 55% voted to leave, while among those who disagreed, 37% did so. Meanwhile, in a similar vein, perhaps, while 62% of those with not very much or no interest at all in politics voted to leave, only 40% of those with quite a lot or a great deal of interest did so. Meanwhile when it came to questions that asked people to agree or disagree that "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country" or that "people we elect as MPs try to keep the promises they have made during the election", the difference in their level of support for leaving the EU between those who agreed and those who disagreed was no more than five points.

Still, perhaps there is another sense in which how people voted in the referendum reflected discontent with the direction of government in Britain, as opposed to their views about the EU. Perhaps, for example, those who would like the government to be more active in creating a more equal society or to improve the economy took the opportunity to protest about that? Of the former possibility there is certainly little sign. As in the case for 'libertarianism' versus 'authoritarianism', each year the BSA survey carries a suite of questions designed to ascertain whether or not people would like to see greater equality and whether they would like the government to do something about it. Those who would like greater effort at reducing inequality can be regarded as being on the 'left' while those who take the opposite view may be described as being on the 'right' (again, the details can be found in the technical appendix to this

report). But if as in the case of our 'libertarian-authoritarian' scale we divide our sample into the one-third most 'left-wing' and the one-third most 'right-wing', we find relatively little difference between them in terms of how they voted in the EU referendum. The 52% level of support for leaving among those with left-wing views is only a little higher than the 45% support to be found among those with right-wing views.

There is little sign that the Leave vote was motivated by a wish to see greater government intervention in the economy

Meanwhile, there is little sign that the Leave vote was motivated by a wish to see greater government intervention in the economy. If anything, the opposite was the case. Support for leaving was actually rather higher among those who favour "less government regulation of business" (55%) than oppose the idea (34%). Equally, support was also rather higher among those who favour "cuts in government spending" (55%) than among those who are opposed (37%). In any event the differences are rather small, while we might note that support for leaving was actually higher among those who favour "support for declining industries to protect jobs" (50%) than it was among those who are opposed (39%).

But to establish more clearly which of our two sets of motivations are the more strongly associated with which way people voted in the EU referendum we need to undertake a multivariate analysis in which we can assess the strength of the relationship between vote choice and each of the variables discussed above[4], after taking into account all of the other important relationships we identify. Might it be the case, for example, that the links that we have found between people's attitudes towards politics and government and the way that they voted in the referendum actually prove to be relatively important once we take into account people's sense of identity and their cultural attitudes? Or, weaker though they may be at first glance, did they still play an independent role in shaping the way people voted in the referendum?

The full results of the multivariate analysis are shown in the appendix to this chapter. The headline, however, is straightforward. For the most part, only those items associated with national identity and cultural outlook proved to be significantly associated with vote choice. Where someone stands on the libertarian-authoritarian scale, whether they are concerned about immigration, whether or not they feel European, and how long they think an EU citizen should have to have lived here before being entitled to welfare benefits all prove to be significantly and independently associated with which way people voted. Otherwise only the extent to which people trust government

4 All the variables discussed in the section on motivations were available for inclusion in the model except Moreno national identity (only available for respondents in England) and the item on whether voting is the only way that people can influence things (asked on a different version of the questionnaire from other variables). The initial stepwise analysis only selected for inclusion in the model items that had all appeared on the same two versions of the questionnaire and excluded those that had only appeared on one of those versions. In order to increase the sample size on which it was based the model was then re-run with only those items that appeared in the same two versions being eligible for inclusion on the model. It is this version for which full detail are given in the appendix to this chapter.

made an entry into our model, suggesting that people's attitudes towards government only played a small role in shaping the outcome of the EU referendum.

Dynamics

But leaving aside what motivated voters to make the choices they did, what impact did the debate about European membership have on attitudes towards the EU? In particular, is there any reason to believe that, in the end, Britain voted to leave because public opinion moved in a more sceptical direction in the weeks and months leading up to the ballot? To address this issue, we need to look at the answers to a broader question than whether people were for or against EU membership and one that has been asked on a regular basis over many years. We ask respondents:

> ***Do you think Britain's long-term policy should be…***
>
> ***... to leave the European Union,***
>
> ***to stay in the EU and try to reduce the EU's powers,***
>
> ***to leave things as they are,***
>
> ***to stay in the EU and try to increase the EU's powers,***
>
> ***or, to work for the formation of a single European government?***

The only minor change that had to be made to this question for our most recent, post-referendum survey was to introduce the question by saying, "Leaving aside the result of the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, what do you think Britain's policy should be…".

Table 7 Attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 1992-2016

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	10	11	11	14	19	17	14	13	17	14	15
Stay in EU but reduce its powers	30	27	25	23	39	29	36	43	38	38	35
Leave things as are	16	22	20	20	19	18	23	20	19	21	23
Stay in EU and increase its powers	28	22	28	28	8	16	9	11	10	10	12
Work for single European government	10	9	8	8	6	7	8	6	7	7	7
Unweighted base	*2855*	*1461*	*1165*	*1227*	*1180*	*1355*	*1035*	*1060*	*2293*	*1099*	*3435*

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2008	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	15	18	16	15	20	30	26	24	22	41
Stay in EU but reduce its powers	32	38	36	36	35	37	39	38	43	35
Leave things as are	27	23	24	27	24	16	19	18	19	16
Stay in EU and increase its powers	11	7	10	9	9	9	6	10	8	4
Work for single European government	6	5	4	4	3	2	3	4	3	2
Unweighted base	*2293*	*3199*	*4268*	*1077*	*1128*	*1103*	*2147*	*971*	*1105*	*1965*

Source: 1992: British Election Study

Britain emerged from the referendum far more sceptical about the EU than it had ever been previously

Table 7 reveals that Britain emerged from the referendum far more sceptical about the EU than it had ever been previously. By the time the referendum was over, as many as three in four voters (75%) felt that Britain should either leave the EU or that if it stayed the institution's powers should be reduced. This represented an increase of 11 points in the proportion feeling that way as compared with 12 months earlier, and a 9 point increase on the previous all-time high recorded by the BSA survey, of two-thirds (67%) in 2012[5]. More importantly, however, whereas previously most Eurosceptics said that Britain should stay in the EU while endeavouring to reduce its powers, by the time that the referendum was over the majority felt that we should leave – and as a result the proportion who took that

5 It should of course be borne in mind that as our most recent survey was conducted after the referendum, people's responses may have been influenced by the outcome of the ballot as well as the campaign beforehand, even though they were asked to leave that consideration behind. Even so, it is unlikely that the referendum campaign did anything but reinforce the already predominantly Eurosceptic mood among the electorate.

view (41%) was nearly double the proportion recorded in the previous year (22%). As one might anticipate, no less than 95% of this group voted to leave the EU, and unsurprisingly they constituted the vast bulk (87%) of all those in our sample who voted to leave.

The increase in support for leaving the EU, as measured by this question was far from uniform. Rather, as Table 8 exemplifies, it increased most among those groups, such as those with relatively few educational qualifications and those with a relatively authoritarian outlook, where support for leaving was already relatively high. The social and ideological division that we have seen underpinned how people voted in the EU referendum seems to have sharpened considerably during the referendum campaign.

Table 8 Support for leaving the EU, by highest educational qualification and position on the libertarian-authoritarian scale, 2015 and 2016

Britain's long-term policy should be to leave the EU	2015	2016	Change since 2015
Highest educational qualification	%	%	
Degree	13	20	+7
At least GCSE A-C	23	43	+20
GCSE D-G or less	28	58	+30
Libertarian—authoritarian scale			
Libertarian	8	21	+12
Neither	20	45	+25
Authoritarian	36	63	+28

Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

The campaign seems to have exacerbated the social and cultural division about the merits of EU membership that already existed in British society and which appears to be rooted in concerns about the social consequences of the UK's membership

So it appears that the referendum campaign had profound consequences. First, it seems to have moved public opinion as a whole in a more sceptical direction. Given the fact that in the event there was a small majority in favour of leaving the EU, it seems quite possible that this movement was crucial in determining the overall outcome of the referendum. Second, the campaign seems to have exacerbated the social and cultural division about the merits of EU membership that already existed in British society and which appears to be rooted in concerns about the social consequences of the UK's membership. As a result, the country emerged from the referendum not only split almost evenly down the middle but also seriously divided about the merits of the decision that was eventually made.

The partisan divide

We have already seen that how people voted in the EU referendum was related above all to whether people have a libertarian or an authoritarian outlook, together with their sense of identity and degree of concern about immigration. In contrast, there was little

or no relationship with whether someone holds views that put them on the left or on the right of the political spectrum. Yet at general elections the issues that tend to predominate are ones about equality and fairness and what the government should do about them, not questions about whether the country should become a little more or a little less liberal. This is reflected in the pattern of voting in elections. For example, in 2015 there was as much as a 22 point difference between those on the left and those on the right in the proportion who voted Conservative in the general election, whereas there was only a three-point difference between those who might be regarded as libertarian and as authoritarian.

The EU referendum therefore presented a challenge to nearly all of the parties as they attempted to persuade their supporters to vote one way or the other

The EU referendum therefore presented a challenge to nearly all of the parties as they attempted to persuade their supporters to vote one way or the other. In fact, the only party of any size that recommended that people should vote to leave was UKIP; withdrawing from the EU was, after all, the party's raison d'être, and it was remarkably successful in persuading its supporters to do so. In our survey, every single respondent who said they identified with or supported UKIP and who turned out to vote in the referendum stated that they voted to leave. Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens all recommended that people voted to remain in the EU, but in each case substantial minorities of their supporters, including not least one in three Labour identifiers, voted to leave[6]. Still, they were all more successful than the Prime Minister in persuading their supporters to vote to stay. The Conservative party itself remained officially neutral on which way to vote, despite the fact that the official recommendation of the Conservative government was to vote to remain in the EU. In the event rather more Conservative identifiers voted to leave the EU than to remain. Contrary to the experience of many referendums, this was not a ballot in which the recommendations or cues from the parties had a great deal of influence (Hobolt, 2009; Le Duc, 2003).

6 Caution needs to be applied to this statement in respect of Green Party supporters as fewer than 100 of them took part in BSA 2016.

Table 9 EU Referendum vote, by party identification

		EU Referendum vote		
		Leave	**Remain**	*Unweighted base*
Party Identification				
Conservative	%	54	46	*880*
Labour	%	33	67	*688*
Liberal Democrat	%	27	73	*139*
UKIP	%	100	-	*125*
Green	%	21	79	*54*
Other	%	42	58	*106*
None	%	64	36	*237*

+ Respondents who did not know or refused to say how they had voted in the referendum were excluded from the analysis of voting behaviour.

Given that Conservative supporters were the most divided of all in how they voted in the referendum, we might anticipate that the Conservative party would have found it relatively difficult to heal its wounds after the referendum. In practice, the opposite proved to be the case. In the months after the referendum the Conservative party largely united around the idea that the United Kingdom should not only leave the EU, but also that in so doing it should also leave the single market and the Customs Union (HM Government, 2017). Labour, in contrast was divided in what stance to take, with some MPs concerned to reconnect with the party's traditional working-class base that seems to have been inclined to vote to leave because of concerns about immigration, while others wanted to oppose the government's supposedly 'hard' interpretation of what Brexit should mean (O'Hara, 2017).

However, a closer look at the views of those Conservative supporters who voted to remain in the EU helps explain why the division in the party's ranks was perhaps not as serious as first seems. In Table 10, we present the proportions of people identifying with each political party who were 'keen' Remainers (that is, those who in response to our more nuanced question said that Britain's long-term policy should be to leave things as they are or to increase the EU's powers) and who were 'Reluctant' Remainers (that is, those who said they favoured leaving the EU or trying to reduce its powers). Of those Conservative identifiers who voted to remain, over half (53%) can be classified as 'reluctant Remainers' – in most cases saying in response to our more nuanced question about the EU that, while Britain should remain in the EU, it should seek to reduce the institution's powers. This means that, overall, no less than 78% of Conservative identifiers either voted to leave or can be regarded as 'reluctant Remainers'. In short, relatively few Conservative supporters showed much enthusiasm for the EU.

Of those Conservative identifiers who voted to remain, over half (53%) can be classified as 'reluctant Remainers'

Table 10 The character of the Remain vote, by party identification

		Keen	Reluctant	*Unweighted base*
Party Identification				
Conservative	%	47	53	*390*
Labour	%	62	38	*432*
Liberal Democrat	%	64	36	*97*
None	%	50	50	*83*

It is perhaps rather less surprising that Labour should have found it more difficult to identify a stance on Brexit with which it was comfortable

In contrast, less than two in five Labour Remain voters (38%) were 'reluctant Remainers'. As a result, a little under three in five of all Labour identifiers (59%) either voted to leave the EU or voted to remain in the EU while wanting to see it become less powerful. Meanwhile, over two in five (41%) not only wanted to remain in the EU but did so with a degree of enthusiasm. Looked at in this way, it is perhaps rather less surprising that Labour should have found it more difficult to identify a stance on Brexit with which it was comfortable.

Conclusion

Suggestions that the EU referendum represented a lightning rod for a general disenchantment with politics are largely wide off the mark

Suggestions that the EU referendum represented a lightning rod for a general disenchantment with politics are largely wide off the mark. True, those with less interest in politics may have, relatively speaking, been a little more likely than usual to make it to the polls, while those who trust government less were a little more likely to vote to leave. But for the most part the outcome of the referendum reflected the concern of more 'authoritarian', socially conservative voters in Britain – that is, primarily older voters and those with few, if any, educational qualifications – about some of the social consequences of EU membership, most notably in respect of immigration. In a society in which relatively few have ever felt a strong sense of European identity, the debate about EU membership seems to have brought that concern to the fore such that in the event a narrow majority voted to leave. In short, the EU referendum was a litmus test of the merits of the EU project, and perhaps indeed of globalisation more generally – a test that, on this occasion, the EU was deemed by a majority to have failed.

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Acknowledgements

The National Centre for Social Research is grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council (grant reference ES/N003969/1) for their financial support which enabled us to ask the questions on civil liberties reported in this chapter and to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Department for Work and Pensions for allowing us to analyse their questions about current concerns and attitudes to migrants respectively. The views expressed are those of the author alone.

Appendix

The bases for Table 1 can be found below.

Table A.1 Turnout in 2016 EU Referendum. 2015 UK General Election and 2011 AV Referendum, by interest in politics

	2011	2015	2016
Interest in Politics			
Great Deal	*253*	*482*	*417*
Quite a Lot	*531*	*1054*	*795*
Some	*661*	*1403*	*916*
Not very much	*464*	*852*	*530*
None at all	*275*	*369*	*244*

The bases for Table 2 can be found below.

Table A.2 Turnout in 2016 EU Referendum, 2015 UK General Election and 2011 AV Referendum, by age group

	2011	2015	2016
Age group			
18-34	*474*	*924*	*587*
35-64	*1119*	*2202*	*1462*
65+	*580*	*1190*	*846*

The bases for Tables 4 can be found below.

Table A.3 Percentage voting Remain, by age and highest educational qualification combined

			Age group
% Remain	**18-34**	**35-54**	**55+**
Highest educational qualification			
Degree	*136*	*138*	*83*
Higher below degree/A-level	*238*	*242*	*244*
GCSE or less	*192*	*278*	*663*

The bases for Table 8 can be found below.

Table A.4 Support for Leaving the EU, 2015 and 2016, by highest educational qualification and libertarian-authoritarian scale position, 2015 and 2016

Leave the EU	2015	2016
Highest educational qualification		
Degree	*271*	*470*
At least GCSE A-C	*514*	*889*
GCSE D-G or less	*290*	*552*
Libertarian—Authoritarian Scale		
Libertarian	*253*	*483*
Neither	*384*	*581*
Authoritarian	*305*	*469*

Table A.5. Logistic regression of Leave versus Remain vote+

	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value
Libertarian-authoritarian Scale			
Libertarian	**-1.44	.19	.00
Neither	**-0.58	.17	.00
(Authoritarian)			
Concern about immigration			
Concerned	**-1.08	.15	.00
(Not concerned)			
European identity			
Yes	**-1.43	.21	.00
No)			
EU citizen welfare wait			
2 years or less	**-0.77	.17	‘00
3-4 years	-0.06	.18	.74
(More than 4 years/never)			
Trust in government			
Trust	**-0.80	.21	.00
Tend to distrust	**-0.78	.22	.00
(Distrust greatly)			
Constant	-0.11	.11	.33
Naglelkere R-squared	= 37%		
Unweighted base: 1203			

**=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level*

+ Variables shown in the order in which they were entered via a forward stepwise procedure. Only those variables that were significantly associated with the dependent variable at the 5% level of significance were actually included.

Technical details

In 2016, the sample for the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey was split into three equally-sized portions. Each portion was asked a different version of the questionnaire (versions A, B and C). Depending on the number of versions in which it was included, questions were thus asked either of the full sample (2,942 respondents) or of a random third or two-thirds of the sample.

Sample design

The BSA survey is designed to yield a representative sample of adults aged 18 or over. Since 1993, 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.[1]

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 were not on the PAF.

The sampling method involved a multi-stage design, with three separate stages of selection.

Selection of sectors

At the first stage, postcode sectors were selected systematically from a list of all postal sectors in Britain. Before selection, any sectors with fewer than 500 addresses were identified and grouped together with an adjacent sector; in Scotland all sectors north of the Caledonian Canal were excluded (because of the prohibitive costs of interviewing there). Sectors were then stratified on the basis of: 37 sub-regions; population density, (population in private households/ area of the postal sector in hectares), with variable banding used in order to create three equal-sized strata per sub-region; and ranking by percentage of homes that were owner-occupied.

This resulted in the selection of 271 postcode sectors, with probability proportional to the number of addresses in each sector.

Selection of addresses

Twenty-six addresses were selected in each of the 271 sectors or groups of sectors. The issued sample was therefore 271 x 26 = 7046 addresses, selected by starting from a random point on the list of addresses for each sector, and choosing each address at a fixed interval. The fixed interval was calculated for each sector in order to generate the correct number of addresses.

The Multiple-Occupancy Indicator (MOI) available through PAF was used when selecting addresses in Scotland. The MOI shows the number of accommodation spaces sharing one address. Thus, if the MOI indicated more than one accommodation space at a given address, the chances of the given address being selected from the list of addresses would increase so that it matched the total number of accommodation spaces. The MOI is largely irrelevant in England and Wales, as separate dwelling units (DUs) generally appear as separate entries on the PAF. In Scotland, tenements with many flats tend to appear as one entry on the PAF. However, even in Scotland, the vast majority (99.8%) of MOIs in the sample had a value of one. The remainder had MOIs greater than one. The MOI affects the selection probability of the address, so it was necessary to incorporate an adjustment for this into the weighting procedures (described below).

Selection of individuals

Interviewers called at each address selected from the PAF and listed all those eligible for inclusion in the BSA sample – that is, all persons currently aged 18 or over and resident at the selected address. The interviewer then selected one respondent using a computer-generated random selection procedure. Where there were two or more DUs at the selected address, interviewers first had to select one DU using the same random procedure. They then followed the same procedure to select a person for interview within the selected DU.

Weighting

The weights for the BSA survey correct for the unequal selection of addresses, DUs and individuals, and for biases caused by differential non-response. The different stages of the weighting scheme are outlined in detail below.

Selection weights

Selection weights are required because not all the units covered in the survey had the same probability of selection. The weighting reflects the relative selection probabilities of the individual at the three main stages of selection: address, DU and individual. First, because addresses in Scotland were selected using the MOI, weights were needed to compensate for the greater probability of an address with an MOI of more than one being selected, compared with an address with an MOI of one. (This stage was omitted for the English and Welsh data.) Secondly, data were weighted to compensate for the fact that a DU at an address that contained a large number of DUs was less likely to be selected for inclusion in the survey than a DU at an address that contained fewer DUs. (We used this procedure because in most cases where the MOI is greater than one, the two stages will cancel each other out, resulting in more efficient weights.)

Thirdly, data were weighted to compensate for the lower selection probabilities of adults living in large households, compared with those in small households.

At each stage the selection weights were trimmed to avoid a small number of very high or very low weights in the sample; such weights would inflate standard errors, reducing the precision of the survey estimates and causing the weighted sample to be less efficient. Less than 1% of the selection weights were trimmed at each stage.

Non-response model

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 sample, which can bias the survey estimates. Where information is available about non-responding households, the response behaviour of the sample members can be modelled and the results used to generate a non-response weight. This non-response weight is intended to reduce bias in the sample resulting from differential response to the survey.

The data were modelled using logistic regression, with the dependent variable indicating whether or not the selected individual responded to the survey. Ineligible households[2] were not included in the non-response modelling. A number of area-level and interviewer observation variables were used to model response. Not all the variables examined were retained for the final model: variables not strongly related to a household's propensity to respond were dropped from the analysis.

The variables found to be related to response, once controlled for the rest of the predictors in the model, were: region, type of dwelling, whether there were entry barriers to the selected address, the relative condition of the immediate local area, the relative condition of the address, the percentage of owner-occupied properties in quintiles and population density. The model shows that response increases if there are no barriers to entry (for instance, if there are no locked gates around the address and no entry phone) and if the general condition of the address is better than other addresses in the area, rather than being about the same or worse. Response is also higher for flats than detached houses. Response increases if the relative condition of the immediate surrounding area is mainly good, and decreases as population density increases. Response is also generally higher for addresses in the North East of England. The full model is given in Table A.1.

Table A.1: The final non-response model

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Odds
Region			55.955	11	.000	
Inner London	(baseline)					
North East	.733	.191	14.683	1	.000	2.082
North West	.173	.158	1.200	1	.273	1.189
Yorkshire and The Humber	.043	.169	.064	1	.801	1.044
East Midlands	.006	.177	.001	1	.972	1.006
West Midlands	-.106	.168	.399	1	.528	.899
East of England	-.052	.166	.100	1	.752	.949
Outer London	-.222	.167	1.768	1	.184	.801
South East	.149	.161	.864	1	.353	1.161
South West	.328	.170	3.722	1	.054	1.388
Wales	.095	.187	.258	1	.612	1.100
Scotland	.012	.166	.005	1	.944	1.012
Type of dwelling			9.301	3	.026	
Detached House	(baseline)					
Semi-detached house	-.063	.075	.714	1	.398	.939
Terraced house (including end of terrace)	.058	.082	.496	1	.481	1.059
Flat or maisonette and other	.248	.113	4.800	1	.028	1.281
Barriers to address						
No barriers	(baseline)					
One or more	-.700	.106	43.811	1	.000	.496
Relative condition of the local area			24.223	2	.000	
Mainly good	(baseline)					
Mainly fair	-.276	.057	23.473	1	.000	.759
Mainly bad or very bad	-.323	.149	4.701	1	.030	.724
Relative condition of the address			40.256	2	.000	
Better	(baseline)					
About the same	-.624	.098	40.244	1	.000	.536
Worse	-.559	.137	16.708	1	.572	.437

Table A.1: The final non-response model (continued)

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Odds
Percentage owner-occupied in quintiles			9.892	4	.042	
1 lowest	(constant)					
2	.155	.089	3.071	1	.080	1.168
3	.067	.097	.484	1	.487	1.070
4	.184	.098	3.522	1	.061	1.202
5 highest	-.027	.102	.070	1	.791	.974
Population density[1]	-.072	.027	6.962	1	.008	.932
Constant	.660	.206	10.295	1	.001	1.935

The response is 1 = individual responding to the survey, 0 = non-response

Only variables that are significant at the 0.05 level are included in the model

The model R2 is 0.039(Cox and Snell)

B is the estimate coefficient with standard error S.E.

The Wald-test measures the impact of the categorical variable on the model with the appropriate number of degrees of freedom (df). If the test is significant (sig. < 0.05), then the categorical variable is considered to be 'significantly associated' with the response variable and therefore included in the model

The non-response weight was calculated as the inverse of the predicted response probabilities saved from the logistic regression model. The non-response weight was then combined with the selection weights to create the final non-response weight. The top 1% of the weight were trimmed before the weight was scaled to the achieved sample size (resulting in the weight being standardised around an average of one).

Calibration weighting

The final stage of weighting was to adjust the final non-response weight so that the weighted sample matched the population in terms of age, sex and region.

Only adults aged 18 or over are eligible to take part in the survey, therefore the data have been weighted to the British population aged 18+ based on 2015 Mid-Year Census data from the Office for National Statistics/General Register Office for Scotland.

The survey data were weighted to the marginal age/sex and region distributions using calibration weighting. As a result, the weighted data should exactly match the population across these three dimensions. This is shown in Table A.2.

1 Population density refers to the number of people per unit of area. This was achieved by calculating the ratio between the number of people in private households in each PSU divided by the area of each PSU in hectares.

Table A.2 Weighted and unweighted sample distribution, by region, age and sex

	Population	Unweighted respondents	Respondent weighted by selection weight only	Respondent weighted by un-calibrated non-response weight	Respondent weighted by final weight
Region	%	%	%	%	%
North East	4.2	5.7	5.5	4.2	4.2
North West	11.3	13.0	12.7	12.0	11.3
Yorks. and Humber	8.5	8.3	8.1	8.4	8.5
East Midlands	7.4	7.1	6.9	8.4	7.4
West Midlands	9.0	7.9	8.1	9.1	9.0
East of England	9.6	10.3	10.2	10.6	9.6
London	13.5	9.2	9.8	12.8	13.5
South East	14.1	13.6	13,7	13,2	14.1
South West	8.8	10.6	10.4	8.8	8.8
Wales	5.0	5.6	5.7	5.1	5.0
Scotland	8.7	8.6	8.7	8.9	8.7
Age & sex	%	%	%	%	%
M 18–24	5.8	2.3	3.1	3.1	5.8
M 25–34	8.6	6.4	7.0	7.4	8.6
M 35–44	8.1	6.6	6.9	7.3	8.1
M 45–54	8.8	7.7	8.1	8.2	8.8
M 55–59	3.8	3.5	3.7	3.7	3.8
M 60–64	3.3	4.3	4.4	4.2	3.3
M 65+	10.3	13.1	12.2	11.8	10.3
F 18–24	5.6	3.4	4.5	4.6	5.6
F 25–34	8.6	8.1	8.0	8.6	8.6
F 35–44	8.2	9.8	9.9	10.2	8.2
F 45–54	9.1	9.5	9.5	9.5	9.1
F 55–59	3.9	4.8	4.8	4.6	3.9
F 60–64	3.5	4.1	4.0	3.9	3.5
F 65+	12.4	16.4	13.7	13.1	12.4
Base	*49,921,573*	*2942*	*2942*	*2942*	*2942*

The calibration weight is the final non-response weight to be used in the analysis of the 2016 survey; this weight has been scaled to the responding sample size. The range of the weights is given in Table A.3.

Table A.3 Range of weights

	N	Minimum	Mean	Maximum
DU and person selection weight	2942	.56	1.00	2.25
Un-calibrated non-response and selection weight	2942	.32	1.00	3.87
Final calibrated non-response weight	2942	.30	1.00	5.84

Effective sample size

The effect of the sample design on the precision of survey estimates is indicated by the effective sample size (neff). The effective sample size measures the size of an (unweighted) simple random sample that would achieve the same precision (standard error) as the design being implemented. If the effective sample size is close to the actual sample size, then we have an efficient design with a good level of precision. The lower the effective sample size is, the lower the level of precision. The efficiency of a sample is given by the ratio of the effective sample size to the actual sample size. Samples that select one person per household tend to have lower efficiency than samples that select all household members. The final calibrated non-response weights have an effective sample size (neff) of 2,276 and efficiency of 77%.

Weighted bases

All the percentages presented in this report are based on weighted data. Only unweighted bases are presented in the tables. Details of weighted bases for standard demographics are shown in Table A.4.

Table A.4 Weighted bases for standard demographics, 2016

	Weighted base	Unweighted base
Sex		
Male	*1434*	*1291*
Female	*1508*	*1651*
Age		
18-24	*336*	*169*
25-34	*505*	*425*
35-44	*480*	*480*
45-54	*527*	*507*
55-59	*226*	*245*
60-64	*201*	*249*
65+	*660*	*859*
Ethnicity		
White	*2609*	*2689*
Black and Minority Ethnic	*328*	*247*
Religion		
No religion	*1551*	*1487*
Church of England/Anglican	*442*	*528*
Other Christian	*501*	*518*
Non-Christian	*185*	*137*
Roman Catholic	*252*	*260*
Class group (NSSEC)		
Managerial & professional occupations	*1133*	*1142*
Intermediate occupations	*379*	*403*
Employers in small org; own account workers	*257*	*274*
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	*214*	*224*
Semi-routine & routine occupations	*806*	*796*
Highest educational qualification		
Degree	*741*	*695*
Higher education below degree	*314*	*329*
A level or equivalent	*544*	*487*
O level or equivalent	*552*	*534*
CSE or equivalent	*207*	*218*
Foreign or other	*81*	*71*
No qualification	*492*	*595*
Marital status		
Married	*1465*	*1338*
Living as married	*347*	*280*
Separated or divorced after marrying	*280*	*426*
Widowed	*169*	*289*
Not married	*680*	*609*

Questionnaire versions

Each address in each sector (sampling point) was allocated to one of the portions of the sample: A, B or C. As mentioned earlier, a different version of the questionnaire was used with each of the three sample portions. If one serial number was version A, the next was version B and the third version C. There were 2349 issued addresses for two of the versions of the sample, and 2348 issued for the remaining version.

Fieldwork

Interviewing was mainly carried out between July and October 2016, with a small number of interviews taking place in November 2016.

Fieldwork was conducted by interviewers drawn from NatCen Social Research's regular panel and conducted using face-to-face computer-assisted interviewing.[3] Interviewers attended a one-day briefing conference to familiarise them with the selection procedures and questionnaires, with the exception of experienced interviewers who completed a self-briefing containing updates to the questionnaire and procedures.

The mean interview length was 71 minutes for version A of the questionnaire, 70 minutes for version B, 72 minutes for version C.[4] Interviewers achieved an overall response rate of between 46.0 and 46.5%. Details are shown in Table A.5.

Table A.5 Response rate on British Social Attitudes, 2016

	Number	Lower limit of response (%)	Upper limit of response (%)
Addresses issued	7046		
Out of scope	638		
Upper limit of eligible cases	6408	100	
Uncertain eligibility	70	1.1	
Lower limit of eligible cases	6338		100
Interview achieved	2945	46.0	46.5
With self-completion	2400	37.5	37.9
Interview not achieved	3393	52.9	53.5
Refused	2507	39.1	39.6
Non-contacted	468	7.3	7.4
Other non-response	418	6.5	6.6

Response is calculated as a range from a lower limit where all unknown eligibility cases (for example, address inaccessible, or unknown whether address is residential) are assumed to be eligible and therefore included in the unproductive outcomes, to an upper limit where all these cases are assumed to be ineligible and therefore excluded from the response calculation

'Refused' comprises refusals before selection of an individual at the address, refusals to the office, refusal by the selected person, 'proxy' refusals (on behalf of the selected respondent) and broken appointments after which the selected person could not be recontacted

'Non-contacted' comprises households where no one was contacted and those where the selected person could not be contacted

As in earlier rounds of the series, the respondent was asked to fill in a self-completion questionnaire which, whenever possible, was collected by the interviewer. Otherwise, the respondent was asked to post it to NatCen Social Research.

A total of 542 respondents (18% of those interviewed) did not return their self-completion questionnaire. Version A of the self-completion questionnaire was returned by 79% of respondents to the face-to-face interview, version B of the questionnaire was returned by 86% and version C by 80%. As in previous rounds, we judged that it was not necessary to apply additional weights to correct for non-response to the self-completion questionnaire.

Advance letter

Advance letters describing the purpose of the survey and the coverage of the questionnaire, were sent to sampled addresses before the interviewer made their first call.[5]

Analysis variables

A number of standard analyses have been used in the tables that appear in this report. The analysis groups requiring further definition are set out below. For further details see Stafford and Thomson (2006). Where relevant the name given to the relevant analysis variable is shown in square brackets – for example [HHincQ]

Region

The dataset is classified by 12 regions, formerly the Government Office Regions.

Standard Occupational 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. Additionally, all job details were collected for all spouses and partners in work.

Since the 2011 survey, we have coded occupation to the Standard Occupational Classification 2010 (SOC 2010) instead of the Standard Occupational Classification 2000 (SOC 2000). The main socio-economic grouping based on SOC 2010 is the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). However, to maintain time-series, some analysis has continued to use the older schemes based on SOC 90 – Registrar General's Social Class and Socio-Economic Group – though these are now derived from SOC 2000 (which is derived from SOC 2010).

National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC)

The combination of SOC 2010 and employment status for current or last job generates the following NS-SEC analytic classes:

- Employers in large organisations, higher managerial and professional
- Lower professional and managerial; higher technical and supervisory
- Intermediate occupations
- Small employers and own account workers
- Lower supervisory and technical occupations
- Semi-routine occupations
- Routine occupations

The remaining respondents are grouped as "never had a job" or "not classifiable". 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. In this case, in addition to the seven classes listed above, the remaining respondents not currently in paid work fall into one of the following categories: "not classifiable", "retired", "looking after the home", "unemployed" or "others not in paid occupations".

Registrar General's Social Class

As with NS-SEC, each respondent's social class is based on his or her current or last occupation. The combination of SOC 90 with employment status for current or last job generates the following six social classes:

I		Professional etc. occupations	
II		Managerial and technical occupations	'Non-manual'
III	(Non-manual)	Skilled occupations	
III	(Manual)	Skilled occupations	
IV		Partly skilled occupations	'Manual'
V		Unskilled occupations	

They are usually collapsed into four groups: I & II, III Non-manual, III Manual, and IV & V.

Socio-Economic Group

As with NS-SEC, each respondent's Socio-Economic Group (SEG) is based on his or her current or last occupation. SEG aims to bring together people with jobs of similar social and economic status, and is derived from a combination of employment status and occupation. The full SEG classification identifies 18 categories, but these are usually condensed into six groups:

- Professionals, employers and managers
- Intermediate non-manual workers
- Junior non-manual workers
- Skilled manual workers
- Semi-skilled manual workers
- Unskilled manual workers

As with NS-SEC, the remaining respondents are grouped as "never had a job" or "not classifiable".

Industry

All respondents whose occupation could be coded were allocated a Standard Industrial Classification 2007 (SIC 07). Two-digit class codes are used. As with social class, SIC may be generated on the basis of the respondent's current occupation only, or on his or her most recently classifiable occupation.

Party identification

Respondents can be classified as identifying with a particular political party on one of three counts: if they consider themselves supporters of that party, closer to it than to others, or more likely to support it in the event of a general election. The three groups are generally described respectively as 'partisans', 'sympathisers' and 'residual identifiers'. In combination, the three groups are referred to as 'identifiers'. Responses are derived from the following questions:

> ***Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party? [Yes/No]***
>
> ***[If "No"/"Don't know"]***
>
> ***Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one political party than to the others? [Yes/No]***
>
> ***[If "Yes" at either question or "No"/"Don't know" at 2nd question]***
>
> ***Which one?/If there were a general election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?***
>
> ***[Conservative; Labour; Liberal Democrat; Scottish National Party; Plaid Cymru; Green Party; UK Independence Party (UKIP)/Veritas; British National Party (BNP)/National Front; RESPECT/Scottish Socialist Party (SSP)/Socialist Party; Other party; Other answer; None; Refused to say]***

Income

Respondent's household income is classified by the standard BSA variable [HHInc]. 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/). Two derived variables give income deciles/quartiles: [HHIncD] and [HHIncQ]. Deciles and quartiles are calculated based on household incomes in Britain as a whole.

In 2016 BSA included some more detailed questions on respondent individual and household income. The dataset includes a derived variable using these data [eq_inc_quintiles] which is the net equivalised household income after housing costs in quintiles. More detailed income data can be made available to researchers on request.

Attitude scales

Since 1986, the BSA surveys have included two attitude scales which aim to measure where respondents stand on certain underlying value dimensions – left–right and libertarian–authoritarian.[6] Since 1987 (except in 1990), a similar scale on 'welfarism' has also been included. Some of the items in the welfarism scale were changed in 2000–2001. The current version of the scale is shown below.

A useful way of summarising the information from a number of questions of this sort is to construct an additive index (Spector, 1992; DeVellis, 2003). This approach rests on the assumption that there is an underlying – 'latent' – attitudinal dimension which characterises the answers to all the questions within each scale. If so, scores on the index are likely to be a more reliable indication of the underlying attitude than the answers to any one question.

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

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

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][7]

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]

Libertarian–authoritarian scale

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]

Welfarism scale

The welfare state encourages people to stop helping each other. [WelfHelp]

The government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes. [MoreWelf]

Around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one. [UnempJob]

Many people who get social security don't really deserve any help. [SocHelp]

Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another. [DoleFidl]

If welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet. [WelfFeet]

Cutting welfare benefits would damage too many people's lives. [DamLives]

The creation of the welfare state is one of Britain's proudest achievements. [ProudWlf]

The indices for the three 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. 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). The scores on the three indices have been placed on the dataset.[8]

The scales have been tested for reliability (as measured by Cronbach's alpha). The Cronbach's alpha (unstandardised items) for the scales in 2016 are 0.82 for the left–right scale, 0.82 for the libertarian–authoritarian scale and 0.77 for the welfarism scale. This level of reliability can be considered "good" for the left–right and libertarian–authoritarian scales and "respectable" for the welfarism scale (DeVellis, 2003: 95–96).

Other analysis variables

These are taken directly from the questionnaire and to that extent are self-explanatory. The principal ones are:

- Sex
- Age
- Household income
- Economic position
- Religion
- Highest educational qualification obtained
- Marital status
- Benefits received

Sampling errors

No sample precisely reflects the characteristics of the population it represents, because of both sampling and non-sampling errors. If a sample was designed as a random sample (if every adult had an equal and independent chance of inclusion in the sample), then we could calculate the sampling error of any percentage, *p*, using the formula:

$$\text{s.e. (p)} = \sqrt{\frac{p(100 - p)}{n}}$$

where *n* is the number of respondents on which the percentage is based. Once the sampling error had been calculated, it would be a straightforward exercise to calculate a confidence interval for the true population percentage. For example, a 95% confidence interval would be given by the formula:

$$p \pm 1.96 \times \text{s.e. (p)}$$

Clearly, for a simple random sample (srs), the sampling error depends only on the values of *p* and *n*. However, simple random sampling is almost never used in practice, because of its inefficiency in terms of time and cost.

As noted above, the BSA sample, like that drawn for most large-scale surveys, was clustered according to a stratified multi-stage design into 271 postcode sectors (or combinations of sectors). With a complex design like this, the sampling error of a percentage giving a particular response is not simply a function of the number of respondents in the sample and the size of the percentage; it also depends on how that percentage response is spread within and between sample points.

The complex design may be assessed relative to simple random sampling by calculating a range of design factors (DEFTs) associated with it, where:

$$\text{DEFT} = \sqrt{\frac{\text{Variance of estimator with complex design, sample size n}}{\text{Variance of estimator with srs design, sample size n}}}$$

and represents the multiplying factor to be applied to the simple random sampling error to produce its complex equivalent. A design factor of one means that the complex sample has achieved the same precision as a simple random sample of the same size. A design factor greater than one means the complex sample is less precise than its simple random sample equivalent. If the DEFT for a particular characteristic is known, a 95% confidence interval for a percentage may be calculated using the formula:

$$p \pm 1.96 \times \text{complex sampling error (p)}$$

$$= p \pm 1.96 \times \text{DEFT} \times \sqrt{\frac{p(100 - p)}{n}}$$

Table A.6 gives examples of the confidence intervals and DEFTs calculated for a range of different questions. Most background questions were asked of the whole sample, whereas many attitudinal questions were asked only of a third or two-thirds of the sample; some were asked on the interview questionnaire and some on the self-completion supplement.

Table A.6 Complex standard errors and confidence intervals of selected variables

	% (p)	Complex standard error of p	95% confidence interval		DEFT	*Base*
			Lower	Upper		
Classification variables						
Party identification (full sample)						
Conservative	33.1%	1.1%	31.0%	35.3%	1.241	*1003*
Labour	29.1%	1.0%	27.2%	31.2%	1.194	*849*
Liberal Democrat	5.4%	.5%	4.4%	6.6%	1.272	*160*
Scottish National Party	3.5%	.3%	3.0%	4.1%	.813	*108*
Plaid Cymru	.4%	.1%	.2%	.7%	1.031	*11*
UK Independence Party (UKIP)	4.3%	.4%	3.5%	5.3%	1.156	*142*
Green Party	2.6%	.3%	1.9%	3.3%	1.198	*70*
None	14.2%	.9%	12.6%	16.0%	1.341	*401*
Housing tenure (full sample)						
Owns	63.5%	1.4%	60.8%	66.2%	1.537	*1882*
Rents from local authority	9.8%	.9%	8.2%	11.7%	1.610	*316*
Rents privately/HA	25.1%	1.2%	22.9%	27.5%	1.467	*706*
Religion (full sample)						
No religion	52.8%	1.1%	50.7%	54.8%	1.145	*1487*
Church of England	15.0%	.8%	13.5%	16.8%	1.254	*528*
Roman Catholic	8.6%	.7%	7.4%	10.0%	1.284	*260*
Age of completing continuous full-time education (full sample)						
16 or under	41.4%	1.2%	39.1%	43.8%	1.314	*1392*
17 or 18	22.2%	.9%	20.5%	24.0%	1.147	*619*
19 or over	31.1%	1.2%	28.9%	33.4%	1.346	*850*
Does anyone have access to the internet from this address?						
Yes	90.8%	.6%	89.5%	91.9%	1.150	*2557*
No	9.2%	.6%	8.1%	10.5%	1.150	*385*
Can I just check, would you describe the place where you live as... (full sample)						
...a big city	13.1%	1.3%	10.8%	15.8%	2.035	*304*
the suburbs or outskirts of a big city	23.3%	1.7%	20.1%	26.8%	2.166	*648*
a small city or town,	44.6%	2.1%	40.5%	48.9%	2.310	*1372*
a country village	15.2%	1.3%	12.9%	17.8%	1.907	*495*
or, a farm or home in the country?	3.0%	.4%	2.2%	4.0%	1.424	*93*

Table A.6 Complex standard errors and confidence intervals of selected variables (continued)

	% (p)	Complex standard error of p	95% confidence interval		DEFT	*Base*
			Lower	Upper		
Attitudinal variables (face-to-face interview)						
Benefits for the unemployed are … (full sample)						
… too low	28.0%	1.1%	25.8%	30.3%	1.362	*836*
… too high	47.9%	1.2%	45.5%	50.3%	1.342	*1381*
How serious a problem is traffic congestion in towns, cities (full sample)						
A very serious problem	16.5%	1.0%	14.5%	18.6%	1.512	*469*
A serious problem	33.0%	1.1%	30.8%	35.2%	1.273	*962*
Not a very serious problem	34.1%	1.3%	31.5%	36.7%	1.487	*968*
Not a problem at all	16.2%	1.1%	14.2%	18.5%	1.586	*536*
How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics… (full sample)						
... a great deal	14.4%	.7%	13.1%	15.8%	1.081	*421*
quite a lot	27.4%	1.0%	25.5%	29.4%	1.219	*806*
some	32.0%	1.0%	30.0%	34.1%	1.203	*925*
not very much	17.5%	.8%	16.0%	19.1%	1.118	*542*
or, none at all?	8.7%	.8%	7.3%	10.3%	1.464	*248*
In your opinion is the NHS facing ... (third of sample)						
... no funding problem,	3.0%	.6%	2.0%	4.4%	1.109	*26*
… a minor funding problem,	12.8%	1.2%	10.6%	15.3%	1.108	*124*
… a major funding problem,	48.7%	2.0%	44.8%	52.7%	1.244	*467*
… a severe funding problem?	33.1%	1.8%	29.6%	36.9%	1.218	*338*
Attitudinal variables (self-completion)						
Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off (full sample)						
Agree	42.2%	1.3%	39.7%	44.7%	1.267	*999*
Neither agree nor disagree	27.5%	1.1%	25.4%	29.7%	1.196	*659*
Disagree	28.4%	1.1%	26.3%	30.6%	1.201	*692*
People should be able to travel by plane as much as they like (third of sample)						
Agree	63.9%	1.7%	60.5%	67.2%	.990	*492*
Neither agree nor disagree	20.4%	1.5%	17.5%	23.6%	1.069	*162*
Disagree	9.4%	1.2%	7.4%	12.0%	1.108	*73*
People should be able to travel by plane as much as they like (one quarter of sample)						
Complete confidence	3.0%	.4%	2.2%	4.0%	1.251	*64*
A great deal of confidence	25.3%	1.1%	23.2%	27.6%	1.270	*590*
Some confidence	52.2%	1.2%	49.8%	54.5%	1.147	*1266*
Very little confidence	10.8%	.7%	9.4%	12.3%	1.160	*257*
No confidence at all	2.7%	.4%	2.0%	3.5%	1.124	*58*

The table shows that most of the questions asked of all sample members have a confidence interval of around plus or minus two to four of the survey percentage. This means that we can be 95% certain that the true population percentage is within two to four per cent (in either direction) of the percentage we report.

Variables with much larger variation are, as might be expected, those closely related to the geographic location of the respondent (for example, whether they live in a big city, a small town or a village). Here, the variation may be as large as six or seven per cent either way around the percentage found on the survey. Consequently, the design effects calculated for these variables in a clustered sample will be greater than the design effects calculated for variables less strongly associated with area. Also, sampling errors for percentages based only on respondents to just one of the versions of the questionnaire, or on subgroups within the sample, are larger than they would have been had the questions been asked of everyone.

Analysis techniques

Regression

Regression analysis aims to summarise the relationship between a 'dependent' variable and one or more 'independent' variables. It shows how well we can estimate a respondent's score on the dependent variable from knowledge of their scores on the independent variables. It is often undertaken to support a claim that the phenomena measured by the independent variables *cause* the phenomenon measured by the dependent variable. However, the causal ordering, if any, between the variables cannot be verified or falsified by the technique. Causality can only be inferred through special experimental designs or through assumptions made by the analyst.

All regression analysis assumes that the relationship between the dependent and each of the independent variables takes a particular form. In *linear regression*, it is assumed that the relationship can be adequately summarised by a straight line. This means that a one percentage point increase in the value of an independent variable is assumed to have the same impact on the value of the dependent variable on average, irrespective of the previous values of those variables.

Strictly speaking the technique assumes that both the dependent and the independent variables are measured on an interval-level scale, although it may sometimes still be applied even where this is not the case. For example, one can use an ordinal variable (e.g. a Likert scale) as a *dependent* variable if one is willing to assume that there is an underlying interval-level scale and the difference between the observed ordinal scale and the underlying interval scale is due to random measurement error. Often the answers to a number of Likert-type questions are averaged to give a dependent variable that is more like a continuous variable. Categorical or nominal data can be used as *independent* variables by converting them into dummy or binary variables; these are variables where the only valid scores are 0 and 1, with 1 signifying membership of a particular category and 0 otherwise.

The assumptions of linear regression cause particular difficulties where the *dependent* variable is binary. The assumption that the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables is a straight line means that it can produce estimated values for the dependent variable of less than 0 or greater than 1. In this case it may be more appropriate to assume that the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables takes the form of an S-curve, where the impact on the dependent variable of a one-point increase in an independent variable becomes progressively less the closer the value of the dependent variable approaches 0 or 1. *Logistic regression* is an alternative form of regression which fits such an S-curve rather than a straight line. The technique can also be adapted to analyse multinomial non-interval-level dependent variables, that is, variables which classify respondents into more than two categories.

The two statistical scores most commonly reported from the results of regression analyses are:

A measure of variance explained: This summarises how well all the independent variables combined can account for the variation in respondents' scores in the dependent variable. The higher the measure, the more accurately we are able in general to estimate the correct value of each respondent's score on the dependent variable from knowledge of their scores on the independent variables.

A parameter estimate: This shows how much the dependent variable will change on average, given a one-unit change in the independent variable (while holding all other independent variables in the model constant). The parameter estimate has a positive sign if an increase in the value of the independent variable results in an increase in the value of the dependent variable. It has a negative sign if an increase in the value of the independent variable results in a decrease in the value of the dependent variable. If the parameter estimates are standardised, it is possible to compare the relative impact of different independent variables; those variables with the largest standardised estimates can be said to have the biggest impact on the value of the dependent variable.

Regression also tests for the statistical significance of parameter estimates. A parameter estimate is said to be significant at the 5% level if the range of the values encompassed by its 95% confidence interval (see also section on sampling errors) are either all positive or all negative. This means that there is less than a 5% chance that the association we have found between the dependent variable and the independent variable is simply the result of sampling error and does not reflect a relationship that actually exists in the general population.

Factor analysis

Factor analysis is a statistical technique which aims to identify whether there are one or more apparent sources of commonality to the answers given by respondents to a set of questions. It

ascertains the smallest number of *factors* (or dimensions) which can most economically summarise all of the variation found in the set of questions being analysed. Factors are established where respondents who gave a particular answer to one question in the set tended to give the same answer as each other to one or more of the other questions in the set. The technique is most useful when a relatively small number of factors are able to account for a relatively large proportion of the variance in all of the questions in the set.

The technique produces a *factor loading* for each question (or variable) on each factor. Where questions have a high loading on the same factor, then it will be the case that respondents who gave a particular answer to one of these questions tended to give a similar answer to each other at the other questions. The technique is most commonly used in attitudinal research to try to identify the underlying ideological dimensions which apparently structure attitudes towards the subject in question.

International Social Survey Programme

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) is run by a group of research organisations in different countries, each of which undertakes to field annually an agreed module of questions on a chosen topic area. Since 1985, an International Social Survey Programme module has been included in one of the BSA self-completion questionnaires. Each module is chosen for repetition at intervals to allow comparisons both between countries (membership is currently standing at 48) and over time. In 2016, the chosen subject was Role of Government, and the module was carried on the A and C versions of the self-completion questionnaire (SCObeyLw – GvOkSec).

Notes

1. Until 1991 all British Social Attitudes samples were drawn from the Electoral Register (ER). However, following concern that this sampling frame might be deficient in its coverage of certain population subgroups, a 'splicing' experiment was conducted in 1991. We are grateful to the Market Research Development Fund for contributing towards the costs of this experiment. Its purpose was to investigate whether a switch to PAF would disrupt the time-series – for instance, by lowering response rates or affecting the distribution of responses to particular questions. In the event, it was concluded that the change from ER to PAF was unlikely to affect time trends in any noticeable ways, and that no adjustment factors were necessary. Since significant differences in efficiency exist between PAF and ER, and because we considered it untenable to continue to use a frame that is known to be biased, we decided to adopt PAF as the sampling frame for future British Social Attitudes surveys. For details of the PAF/ER 'splicing' experiment, see Lynn and Taylor (1995).
2. This includes households not containing any adults aged 18 or over, vacant dwelling units, derelict dwelling units, non-resident addresses and other deadwood.
3. In 1993 it was decided to mount a split-sample experiment designed to test the applicability of Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) to the British Social Attitudes survey series. CAPI has been used increasingly over the past decade as an alternative to traditional interviewing techniques. As the name implies, CAPI involves the use of a laptop computer during the interview, with the interviewer entering responses directly into the computer. One of the advantages of CAPI is that it significantly reduces both the amount of time spent on data processing and the number of coding and editing errors. There was, however, concern that a different interviewing technique might alter the distribution of responses and so affect the year-on-year consistency of British Social Attitudes data.

   Following the experiment, it was decided to change over to CAPI completely in 1994 (the self-completion questionnaire still being administered in the conventional way). The results of the experiment are discussed in the British Social Attitudes 11th Report (Lynn and Purdon, 1994).
4. Interview times recorded as less than 20 minutes were excluded, as these timings were likely to be errors.
5. An experiment was conducted on the 1991 British Social Attitudes survey (Jowell *et al*., 1992) which showed that sending advance letters to sampled addresses before fieldwork begins has very little impact on response rates. However, interviewers do find that an advance letter helps them to introduce the survey on the doorstep, and a majority of respondents have said that they preferred some advance notice. For these reasons, advance letters have been used on the British Social Attitudes surveys since 1991.

6. Because of methodological experiments on scale development, the exact items detailed in this section have not been asked on all versions of the questionnaire each year.
7. In 1994 only, this item was replaced by: Ordinary people get their fair share of the nation's wealth *[Wealth1].*
8. In constructing the scale, a decision had to be taken on how to treat missing values ("Don't know" and "Not answered"). Respondents who had more than two missing values on the left–right scale and more than three missing values on the libertarian–authoritarian and welfarism scales were excluded from that scale. For respondents with fewer missing values, "Don't know" was recoded to the midpoint of the scale and "Not answered" was recoded to the scale mean for that respondent on their valid items.

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