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Key findings
How and why Britain’s attitudes and values are changing

How have Britain’s attitudes and values changed since the British Social Attitudes survey first began in 1983? This summary highlights some of the key themes in our 30th anniversary Report and teases out the different factors that underpin changing attitudes. It focuses on four areas in particular: identities; personal relationships; public spending; and politics and institutions. Where possible we also draw out what our findings mean in terms of current policy debates, and consider how attitudes might shift over the next few decades.

Live and let live

Compared with 30 years ago, Britain takes a far more laissez-faire view of other people’s relationships and lifestyles, but this does not mean differences of opinion have vanished.

In 1983 17% thought homosexuality was “not wrong at all”, falling to 11% by 1987 (a time of great concern about HIV AIDS). Now 47% take this view, while 22% think it is “always wrong” (compared with 50% in 1983).

Individuals and the state

Generally speaking, the last 30 years have not seen a shift towards a less collectivist Britain – the public’s views on taxation, spending and social protection are very similar to those seen in 1983. However, people’s attitudes towards social welfare for disadvantaged groups in society have hardened (though there are signs that this long-term trend may be starting to reverse).

The proportion believing it is the government’s responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed has fallen from 81% in 1985 to 59% now (up from 50% in 2006).

Losing faith in key institutions

Our findings show that a number of important British institutions have fallen in the public’s estimation over the last 30 years, including the press, banks and politicians. However, slightly more people are interested in politics than in the mid-1980s (although still a minority), and more feel that they can influence government.

Now only one in five (18%) trust governments to put the nation’s needs above those of a political party, down from 38% in 1986.
Introduction

Britain then – and now

Back in March 1983, when interviewing for the first British Social Attitudes survey began, Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Party was nearing the end of its first term in office. A few months later it enjoyed its second election victory, winning 44 per cent of the vote and all but wiping out Michael Foot’s Labour Party as an electoral force in the south of England. The Conservatives won despite the fact that over three million were unemployed during the early 1980s, an unemployment rate of over 10 per cent. The digital world was still in its infancy: Sinclair’s ZX Spectrum was the top-selling home computer while 1983 saw the launch of both the Compact Disc and the first commercially available handheld mobile phone, weighing almost 800 grams and costing over £2,000.[1] Rather than being a globalised world, the Berlin Wall still divided East from Western Europe, while Ronald Reagan’s tenure as President of the United States did not seem destined to reduce Cold War tensions.

There are some similarities between today’s Britain and the Britain we first surveyed back in 1983. The global financial crisis of 2008 and the recession that followed have seen unemployment increase once again, although not to the levels of the early 1980s. At the time of writing, unemployment stands at 7.8 per cent of the economically active population, or 2.51 million people (Office for National Statistics, 2013). But in many other respects – whether demographically, politically, economically or socially – Britain has clearly changed a great deal over the last 30 years. The UK population has not only grown (standing at over 63 million according to the 2011 Census, up from just over 56 million in 1983) but also become more diverse. Since 1991, the population with a non-white ethnic background has more than doubled, from three to seven million, and now accounts for 14 per cent of the UK population (Jivraj, 2012).

The structure of the job market has changed, with increases in the proportions of professional, managerial and non-routine ‘service’ occupations and a decline in routine administrative and non-routine manual jobs (Holmes and Mayhew, 2012). Women now form about 45 per cent of the workforce, up from 38 per cent in 1971. Our family lives have changed markedly too; cohabitation has increased considerably, as has the proportion of children born outside marriage. As in 1983, the Labour Party is in opposition, this time following three terms in office between 1997 and 2010, but today’s party is much altered from its 1980s incarnation, having moved closer to the political central ground. Finally, a digital revolution has meant that, in little more than a generation, worldwide communication has become an everyday and instant occurrence, with access to the internet now considered almost a fourth utility.

This report and its data

This report investigates whether there have been similarly widespread changes in public attitudes since the early 1980s. Have people changed their views about how much help government should give to pensioners or the unemployed? Are certain forms of sexual behaviour seen as more acceptable now than three decades ago? What has happened to public trust in government and other institutions? The report covers a wide range of topics, and here we highlight some of the key themes that emerge, teasing out the different factors that underpin changing attitudes. We focus on four subjects in particular: identities; personal relationships; public spending; and trust, politics and institutions. Where possible we also draw out what this means in terms of
current policy debates, and read the runes as to how attitudes might shift over the next few decades.

We can only do this by having access to robust and repeated measures of people’s attitudes towards key political, social and moral issues taken over many years. Ever since NatCen Social Research’s British Social Attitudes survey began in 1983 it has regularly asked a representative sample of people their views about a wide range of topics, creating a unique record of how social attitudes have evolved over the course of the last 30 years.

What might we find – and why?
Before we dig into the data, it is worth pausing to ask: what sort of changes in people’s attitudes might we anticipate? One important theory is that in a rapidly changing world, we have all become more individualist. Many argue that some of the changes we outlined earlier have transformed people’s lives (Baumann, 2000; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1999). Previously, it is argued, people lived in relatively stable societies, in which they formed strong bonds and affinities with those with whom they lived and worked, and in which there were clear lines of moral authority. Now, people have to navigate a fluid, diverse social environment in which they are free to choose their identity and moral code; individuals have to create their own lifestyles, rather than living out one inherited from their parents and reinforced by their social interactions with others. If this is true, it potentially has important implications both for how we behave and how we think about society. If individuals now create their own moral codes, they no longer need to look to the traditional social mores and conventions that once dictated acceptable behaviour. And if people are seen as having the freedom to choose, they may also be expected to take responsibility for the consequences of those choices and society may become less willing to provide collective insurance against the risks of individual misjudgement or misfortune. Social solidarity, expressed through institutions such as the welfare state, as well as a willingness to accept the duties of a common citizenship, may have given way to a more individualistic outlook.

If theories of individualism are correct, we would expect to find a steady weakening of people’s attachment to traditional social identities such as class, political party and religion. We might also expect to see a transformation in how Britain thinks about marriage, relationships and parenthood, with an increasing sense of ‘live and let live’. We might find a more questioning view about the role of the state in its citizens’ lives, and perhaps an increasing reluctance to let it step in to help those who have fallen on harder times.

But there are other important reasons why attitudes might have changed over the last three decades. In many areas we might expect to find that attitudes have shifted in response to particular events or to the changing political or economic context. How, for example, do attitudes to government spending in general, or spending on policy areas such as the NHS in particular, relate to actual spending levels and the policy issues of the day? To what extent are our views about politicians and government affected by political scandals? How do views about welfare recipients relate to the economy – do we become more sympathetic and want to see more spending in this area during times of austerity and economic hardship? Is there any evidence that political debates about policy have an impact on how Britain thinks and feels?
Questions such as these remind us that attitudes may not necessarily have moved in one direction. Opinion may have swayed to and fro in response to particular events, scandal and changes in government policy. But we should also remember that if opinion has moved in one direction, it may have done so without many individual people actually changing their mind about an issue. Rather, attitudes can change as a result of what is called ‘generational replacement’. This refers to the process by which society’s views gradually change as older generations, with distinctive views about particular topics, die out and are slowly replaced by younger generations who have different attitudes and values. As a result, the character of Britain’s attitudes and values slowly changes. When this underpins changing attitudes, there is every reason to believe that the change of outlook will prove permanent and possibly intensify.

There are many ways of defining ‘generations’. Recently, attention has focused particularly on ‘Generation Y’, born in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the more well-known baby boomer and pre-war generations (Ipsos Mori, 2012). These broad divisions can be illuminating but, because they impose a certain view of what counts as a generation, they can also mask important differences that exist within particular generations. Given our interest in a 30 year period, this is especially the case within the otherwise large baby boomer and pre-war generations. For that reason, in this report we categorise people by their decade of birth.

**Identities**

A key element of the argument that modern (or postmodern) societies such as Britain have experienced a process of individualisation is that people are now more weakly attached to traditional social identities such as religion or social class. They may well also lose their sense of affinity with traditional collective institutions of democracy, such as political parties. These identities can be regarded as the lynchpins of social attitudes. Religion, for instance, is often regarded as a key source of moral values, while people’s subjective sense of their social class is often thought to shape their outlook on economic issues. In particular, ‘feeling working class’ is often thought to provide a foundation for a collective sense of social solidarity, on the grounds that a relatively active state can help protect workers from the worst privations of a capitalist market. Finally, those who identify with a particular political party are often thought likely to be persuaded to adopt (or at least concede to) that party’s views, and are certainly more likely to feel engaged in the political process.

**Less religious attachment**

We start by examining whether people’s attachments to these three identities are indeed in decline, beginning with religion. Here there is little doubt that a substantial change has taken place, with a marked decline in the proportion who describe themselves as belonging to a particular religion. In 1983, around two in three people (68 per cent) considered themselves to belong to one religion or another; in 2012, only around half (52 per cent) do so. As our Personal relationships chapter sets out, this decline is in practice a decline in attachment to Anglicanism; in 1983 two in five people (40 per cent) said they were Anglican, and the Church of England could still reasonably lay claim to being England’s national church (and thus, arguably, to some extent its fount of moral authority). But now only 20 per cent do so. In contrast, the proportion saying they belong to a religion other than Christianity has tripled from two to six per cent. Britain’s religious landscape has not only become smaller but also more diverse.[2]
Middle or working class – or neither?

The picture is not the same, however, when it comes to social class. To assess this we ask people: “Do you ever think of yourself as belonging to any particular class?” In 2012, 50 per cent responded by saying they were either middle or working class. Those who did not respond in that way were prompted: “Most people say they belong either to the middle class or the working class. If you had to make a choice, would you call yourself middle class or working class?”

In fact, people are no more or less willing now to acknowledge a class identity without prompting than they were 30 years ago, and the proportion who refuse to choose a class identity, even after prompting, remains relatively small – just five per cent. Nor has the balance between those who describe themselves as middle class and working class changed as much as we might expect, given the substantial changes in the kinds of jobs people do over the last three decades. So, despite the fact that the proportion of people with a classifiable occupation that might ‘objectively’ be regarded as middle class increased from 47 to 59 per cent between 1983 and 2012, only around a third of people describe themselves as middle class (35 per cent now, compared with 34 per cent in 1983) while six in ten (60 per cent) call themselves working class.

Although Britain has become a majority white-collar society, subjectively it is still inclined to feel working class, albeit perhaps not as closely as it once did (Heath et al., 2009).

Declining party loyalty

Even if people are no less likely to identify with a social class now than they were in the 1980s, they are certainly much less likely to identify with either of the political parties traditionally associated with the middle (Conservative) or working (Labour) classes. Back in 1983, 72 per cent identified with one of these parties, while 87 per cent said they supported any political party, including the then Liberal/SDP Alliance. Now less than two-thirds (63 per cent) identify with one of the two traditional class parties, and around three-quarters (76 per cent) claim an adherence to any political party.

The decline in party identification becomes even clearer if we look at how strongly people identify with whichever political party they say they support. In 1987 (when we first asked this question) nearly half (46 per cent) said they were
Over the last 30 years, the hold that the country’s political parties have on the affections of the British public has weakened. A “very” or “fairly strong” supporter of a political party. Now the figure is under a third (31 per cent). Conversely, while in 1987 nearly half (48 per cent) said they were not a strong supporter of a party, or did not support any party at all, now over two-thirds (69 per cent) fall into this category. Over the last 30 years, the hold that the country’s political parties have on the affections of the British public has weakened at least as much as that of its religious institutions.

**Figure 0.2 Strength of party identification, 1987–2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Very/fairly strong</th>
<th>Not very strong</th>
<th>None</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>130%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data on which Figure 0.2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

**Reflections**

So far as identities are concerned, then, some of the trends of the last 30 years are in line with what we would expect were society becoming more individualised, as we see fewer people identifying with two previously important types of institution (religious institutions and political parties). As our Personal relationships and Politics chapters show, in both cases there is a clear generational element to these trends, with each new generation less religious or less likely to identify with a political party than the one before. As a result, attachment to these two types of institution is likely to continue to decline further in future.

On the other hand, it appears that what is often thought to be a particularly important social phenomenon in British life, social class, is undiminished as a source of subjective feeling. That suggests a need for caution before accepting some of the more sweeping claims relating to individualisation.

**Personal relationships**

According to much traditional religious teaching, sexual activity and having children should occur only within the institution of marriage. Getting married should represent a lifetime commitment between a man and a woman, and same-sex relationships are frowned upon. Many clerics are doubtful, even strongly opposed, to the abortion of an unborn foetus. In short, both sexual activity and the life to which it potentially gives rise are regarded as sacred gifts and consequently surrounded by a moral code that individuals should not transgress.

**The changing status of marriage**

Elements of this outlook were still evident in 1980s Britain. Although in 1983 only 28 per cent said it was “always” or “mostly” wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual relations outside marriage, the proportion who thought such
behaviour was “not wrong at all” stood at well below half (42 per cent). And in 1989 when we first asked whether “people who want children ought to get married”, a clear majority of 70 per cent agreed. Now it is only a small minority who raise an eyebrow about sexual relationships outside marriage. Just 12 per cent say this is “always” or “mostly” wrong, and an all-time high of 65 per cent see nothing wrong at all in such behaviour. Even when a couple want to have children, less than half (42 per cent) now think they ought to get married first.

Despite the transformation of attitudes towards many aspects of sex and marriage, it would be a mistake to assume that all forms of behaviour in personal relationships are now considered equally acceptable. ‘Cheating’ on one’s husband or wife, is, if anything, even more likely to be greeted with disapproval than it was 30 years ago. Now 63 per cent say that it is “always wrong” for a married person to have sexual relations with someone other than their partner, slightly more than the 58 per cent who thought this in 1984. And such behaviour is no more acceptable if undertaken by a man than by a woman. So, while we no longer look to traditional moral codes to inform all our views about sex and marriage it seems that, for many, sexual exclusivity within marriage is an ethical standard that should continue to be upheld.

Less traditional views about gender roles
Attitudes towards the role of men and women have changed considerably too. In the 1980s there was still considerable support for ‘traditional’ gender roles. In 1984, for instance, 43 per cent agreed with the view that “a man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family”, but now only 13 per cent take this view.[4] And while in 1989 42 per cent thought that “family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job” and two-thirds (64 per cent) that “a mother with a child under school age should stay at home rather than go out to work”, by 2012 the proportions agreeing with these views had fallen to 27 and 33 per cent respectively. However, as our Gender roles chapter shows, actual behaviour at home has not caught up with changing attitudes. Women still report undertaking a disproportionate amount of housework and caring activities, spending an average of 13 hours on housework and 23 hours caring for family members each week, compared with eight and 10 hours respectively for men.

Greater tolerance of same-sex relationships
Perhaps the most dramatic attitude shift of all relates to the way in which Britain thinks about same-sex relationships. In 1983, half the public (50 per cent) said that “sexual relations between two adults of the same sex” were “always wrong”, a figure that rose to nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) over the subsequent four years, in the wake of the discovery of AIDS and its much-publicised linkage with male homosexual activity in particular. Then, only one in five (17 per cent) thought homosexuality was “not wrong at all”. Now these proportions are more or less reversed; only around one in five (22 per cent) think that same-sex relations are “always wrong” while nearly half (47 per cent) say they are “not wrong at all”.

The disapproval that many people felt about same-sex relationships in the 1980s led some to believe that gay men and lesbians should be excluded from aspects of everyday life. In 1983 only 41 per cent thought it “acceptable for a homosexual person to be a teacher in a school”, while 53 per cent disagreed with this statement. And at a time when no serving MP had ever come out as gay or lesbian, only slightly more people felt it was acceptable for a gay man or
lesbian “to hold a responsible position in public life” than felt it was not (53 and 42 per cent respectively). Such attitudes seem a world away today. Nowadays, 83 per cent think it is acceptable for a gay man or lesbian to teach in a school, and nearly everyone (90 per cent) feels comfortable with their holding a position in public life.

Even so, controversy still surrounds the position of gay men and lesbians when it comes to the sensitive subjects of children and marriage. The public is more or less evenly divided between those who think that “homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt a baby under the same conditions as other couples” (48 per cent) and those who do not. And although over half (56 per cent) agree that “gay or lesbian couples should have the right to marry one another if they want to”, that majority is far from overwhelming. Still, even here public opinion has been transformed over the last 30 years: in 1983, 87 per cent opposed the idea of ‘gay adoption’ (and just five years ago, in 2007, only 47 per cent supported ‘equal marriage’). That such issues are now being publicly debated is also a sign of just how dramatic a change in attitudes has already occurred.

Life and death
If much of the public debate about same-sex relationships is relatively recent, the circumstances under which abortion should or should not be allowed has been a continuing subject of controversy during the last 30 years. Here too opinion has shifted, albeit less dramatically. In 1983 just 37 per cent endorsed what might be regarded as a ‘woman’s right to choose’ – if she had decided for herself that she did not want the child. The proportion rose to 46 per cent if both parents were of that view; to 47 per cent if they could not afford any more children; and to 87 per cent if the woman’s health would be seriously endangered by going ahead with the pregnancy.

What once were thus minority views (albeit in most cases only just) have now become majority ones. As many as 62 per cent now accept a woman’s right to choose for herself; 73 per cent agree that an abortion should be permitted if both parents agree they should not have the child; and 64 per cent support abortion if the couple decide they cannot afford any more children. However, most of this shift in attitudes occurred during the 1980s. Since then public opinion has shown little sign of shifting further, and there seems little reason to presume that Britain is heading towards some new moral consensus on this issue. Abortion is, however, overwhelmingly accepted in cases where the woman’s health would be seriously endangered by going ahead with the pregnancy, with nine in ten (91 per cent) taking this view now.

The view that life is a sacred gift means that religious institutions often oppose euthanasia as well as abortion. This is a topic where the traditional religious view has long lacked widespread public support. Even 30 years ago (in 1983) only 23 per cent of the public agreed that if a patient has “a painful incurable disease” a doctor should not be allowed “by law to end the patient’s life, if the patient requests it”. The proportion now stands even lower, at just 16 per cent. But, in contrast to both abortion and same-sex relationships, this is one topic on which the country’s legislators have so far proved reluctant to align the law with majority public opinion.

Reflections
Overall, the considerable changes we’ve seen to Britain’s moral outlook over the last 30 years support the case for individualisation. On many issues of sexuality, procreation and marriage, support for the position traditionally associated with
most major religions has declined. Individuals are in many respects deciding these issues for themselves. As our Personal relationships chapter shows however, the change cannot simply be accounted for by declining religious faith. Even those who still have a religious identity are now less likely than they once were to uphold a traditional moral standpoint. Individualisation has, it seems, been a process that has occurred among those still to be found (at least occasionally) in the pews or equivalent, as well as among those who do not profess any kind of religion at all.

Much of the change we have found in this area reflects the impact of generational differences in people’s views. This is clearest in relation to attitudes to premarital sex and homosexuality, with each subsequent generation being successively more liberal in outlook than the one before it. Consequently, as older generations have died out and been replaced by more liberal younger generations, society’s view as a whole has become more liberal. As a result, the strong likelihood is that Britain will continue to become more liberal on many of these issues over the next few decades. The caveat to this is that unforeseen events might push attitudes in the opposite direction, as happened to attitudes towards homosexuality in the immediate wake of the discovery of HIV AIDS.

Public spending

Attitudes to the welfare state are often thought to have been affected by individualisation. If, it is argued, we see people as free to choose for themselves, we might also expect them to take responsibility for the consequences of their choices. So it follows that people may be less willing to show solidarity with each other through a welfare state that shares the risks of poor health or economic misfortune, and more reluctant to see the state engage in substantial income or wealth redistribution. However, we might also expect to see attitudes in this area respond to other influences, including changes in the economic, political and policy climate.

Attitudes towards welfare and the role of the state are also often thought to be closely linked to a person’s class identity. As we noted earlier, unlike religious identities, subjective class identities have not changed over the past 30 years as much as theorists of individualisation often assume, with the majority of people still identifying themselves as working class. This might imply, in contrast to individualisation, a sustained level of support for the welfare state.

Cyclical attitudes to tax and spend
The data show that there have been quite dramatic changes in the public mood, but not consistently in one direction. In some instances, the trend in public opinion has proved to be cyclical. Nowhere is this more obviously true than in the case of attitudes towards taxation and spending.

Every British Social Attitudes survey since the first one in 1983 has asked respondents to say which one of three options they would want government to pick if it had to choose between them:

- 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
As the Government spending and welfare chapter shows, the first of these options has in fact never been particularly popular, with no more than nine per cent ever choosing it. Opinion has for the most part simply shifted between keeping taxes and spending as they are and increasing them. In 1983 as many as 54 per cent wished to keep taxes and spending as they were, while only 32 per cent wanted them to increase. The public was in a relatively conservative fiscal mood, in tune it seemed with the rhetoric of the then Conservative government led by Mrs Thatcher. As Figure 0.3 shows, that mood did not last; by 1991 two-thirds (65 per cent) wanted taxes and spending increased, and the figure remained as high as 63 per cent as recently as 2002. However, as the then Labour government oversaw a substantial increase in public spending so the public mood switched back again and, by the time that government lost power in 2010, and with the country facing a serious deficit in its public finances, just 31 per cent wanted taxes and spending to increase (the same level as in 1983). Over half (56 per cent) wanted to keep things as they were. Since then, of course, the coalition government has begun to implement substantial cuts in public expenditure (albeit with no commensurate reduction in taxation), but it is too early to say whether the latest finding – that 34 per cent support increased taxes and spending – means that the tide has now begun to turn.

Figure 0.3 Attitudes to tax and spend, 1983–2012

The data on which Figure 0.3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

On this issue, public opinion towards taxation and spending has reacted thermostatically to changes in fiscal trends rather than being shaped by some process of long-term social change or indeed any fixed, class-based view as to what the size of the state should be (Wlezien, 1995). When spending is cut back – perhaps with public services suffering as a result – so the public increasingly wants to see more money spent to alleviate the situation. But then when the spending tap has been turned on for a while, so the public’s appetite is sated, satisfaction with institutions such as the NHS increases, and the public mood swings back to the status quo.

Changing views about welfare

But not all attitudes in this area are cyclical. There are also some clear longer-term trends, including some in the direction that individualisation theorists would anticipate. Nowhere is this more obvious than in relation to attitudes to welfare benefits.
Unemployment benefits are viewed less favourably now than they were 30 years ago

One of the most obvious ways in which the state provides collective insurance against economic risk is through unemployment benefits. And, as our Government spending and welfare chapter shows, those benefits are certainly viewed less favourably now than they were 30 years ago. In 1983 nearly half the public (46 per cent) said that unemployment benefits were “too low” and caused “hardship”. That figure rose over the next decade, reaching a high of 55 per cent by 1993. Since then, support for this outlook has fallen steadily, and now stands at just 22 per cent. Meanwhile, even though in other respects people’s views about the responsibilities of government have not changed very much, the proportion who think it is government’s responsibility to “provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed” has fallen from a high of 83 per cent in 1989 to 59 per cent now.

Similar trends are found in people’s attitudes towards welfare more generally, with a stark contrast between people’s views prior to the mid-1990s and their attitudes since. In 1987 we asked people whether or not they agreed with the proposition “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous people would learn to stand on their own two feet”, a statement that would seem to encapsulate the idea that individuals should take responsibility for the consequences of their own choices. Then, just 33 per cent agreed with this view, and that figure was unchanged nearly 10 years later, in 1996. But two years after that it rose to 40 per cent, reaching an all-time high of 55 per cent by 2010. In our most recent survey the figure stands at 53 per cent.

Changes to people’s perceptions of benefit fraud appear to tell a similar story; now, 81 per cent agree that “large numbers of people these days falsely claim benefits”, up from 67 per cent in 1987. However, only a minority (37 per cent) go so far as to agree that “most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another”, a figure that has changed little since the 1980s. At the same time, support for the statement that the government should spend “more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes” has fallen from 55 per cent in 1987 to 34 per cent now (up from an all-time low of 27 per cent in 2009).

While the longer-term trend is clear, it is important to note that there has been a recent (if limited) shift towards a more sympathetic stance on welfare benefits and recipients, likely to be driven by austerity and the experience of cuts to social security. For instance, 51 per cent of people now take the view that benefits for unemployed people are “too high and discourage work”, down from 62 per cent in 2011. A similar, but more marked, cyclical upturn in sympathy happened during the recession of the 1990s. But it remains the case that attitudes to the unemployed and the role of government in providing support to them are, across a range of measures, far less supportive now than they were three decades ago – suggesting the public have indeed become less ‘collectivist’ in their attitudes towards this group.

Reflections
Do these trends represent the consequences of a process of individualisation? There are a number of reasons to doubt that they do. Firstly, as trends in attitudes to welfare and the NHS illustrate, there is nothing inevitable about the direction in which public attitudes shift; instead, they can ebb and flow in response to government spending priorities and policies. Secondly, as our Social class chapter sets out, people’s backgrounds continue to exert a strong influence on their views. Although – as was also the case in 1983 – neither people’s subjective nor their objective class identities are strongly linked to how they think about issues such as welfare, more specific economic interests (such
as trade union membership or being unemployed) remain key influences on attitudes and values in these areas. Finally, it is notable that there was relatively little change in attitudes towards welfare and redistribution before Labour came to power in 1997, even though the social changes that are thought to give rise to individualisation long pre-date that development. As our **Government spending and welfare** chapter shows, on many (albeit not all) of these questions the change of attitude has been most marked among Labour identifiers. It seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that what was primarily responsible for the change of mood was the experience of a New Labour government that did not, openly at least, espouse a more egalitarian society, and often seemed to adopt a relatively critical attitude towards welfare. In short, in this area at least, political developments may have been more important than social change (Curtice, 2010).

When it comes to thinking about how attitudes to welfare might change in the future, it is worth contrasting the trends we have just described with our earlier discussion about attitudes to personal relationships. There we saw clear differences between the generations in their views about ‘non-traditional’ relationships; a more liberal outlook has steadily become more common during the last three decades as older generations, with their more censorious views, have died out. By contrast, what is striking with regard to welfare is how much the attitudes of all groups shifted during the late 1990s, and the role that relatively short-term policy change and political debate appears to have played in shaping these changes. This opens up the possibility that perhaps in this area at least the pendulum could swing back again in response to different circumstances. After all, the country is now governed by a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition that is pursuing a programme of fiscal austerity; the high rewards received by some such as bankers have been widely criticised; and the Labour Party has sloughed off its New Labour mantle. As well as a modest rise in the proportion saying that the government should spend more on welfare, there have also been small increases in the proportions who feel that “ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation’s wealth”, and that there is “one law for the rich and one for the poor”. While it is clear that Britain appears less concerned with economic inequality than it was 30 years ago, our findings raise doubts about the claim that inexorable long-term social changes are bringing about an unrelenting movement away from support for welfare or a more equal society.

At the same time, the public remains firmly committed to the founding principle of the NHS: a health care system free at the point of use for all. However, support for increased spending on the NHS is currently lower than at other points in the last 30 years, apparently because the increased spending under Labour means that people are less likely to feel the need. So, if the past is any guide, we might expect support for higher taxation and spending to increase as spending remains at best flat in real terms for the NHS (with real cuts in many other areas of government spending). However, views about taxation and spending will also likely be influenced by the public’s attitudes towards the reasons for the current economic stagnation and fiscal deficit, and their views about the government’s policies in regard to these problems.

**Trust, politics and institutions**

What might we expect to happen to people’s sense of trust and obligation in a supposedly more individualised society? If people are choosing their own lifestyles (rather than being socialised into traditional patterns of thought and
behaviour), traditional common bonds of obligation – for instance, the notion that citizens have a “duty to vote” – might no longer have the force they once did. We have already seen that fewer people now identify with a particular political party; if people's sense of involvement and participation in the political process is promoted by attachment to a political party, we would also expect this decline to have an impact on participation and on people's views about government more generally. Perhaps we will also find an erosion of confidence in institutions outside the political arena.

Declining trust and political engagement?
There is no doubt that politicians have become increasingly exercised by the public's apparent lack of trust in the political process and a greater reluctance to go to the polls. In truth, Britain has never had that much trust in politicians and the political process, but trust has fallen further over the last 30 years. Back in 1986, only 38 per cent said that they trusted governments “to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party”. By 2000, this had more than halved to just 16 per cent. After rising somewhat, it returned to a similar low in the immediate wake of the MPs' expenses scandal of 2009 and, at 18 per cent, the latest figure is only a little better. While a degree of scepticism towards politicians might be thought healthy, those who govern Britain today have an uphill struggle to persuade the public that their hearts are in the right place.

So it is perhaps little wonder that there are ever-growing demands for greater transparency in the political process, ranging from how much MPs are paid to the sources of party political funding.

People have also become less likely to accept that they have a duty to vote. Back in 1987, that year's British Election Study found that 76 per cent believed that “it's everyone's duty to vote”. When we revisited the issue in 1991 only 68 per cent were of that view, falling to just 56 per cent by 2008. The figure has recovered somewhat in recent years and when we last asked the question in 2011, 62 per cent thought everyone had a duty to vote. But as our Politics chapter shows, each generation of new voters seems to be somewhat less likely than the previous generation to accept that it has a duty to vote, suggesting that over the longer term the proportion could well fall yet further still.

However, not all our trends point clearly towards declining political engagement. Although politics has always been something that only appealed to a minority, political interest is actually slightly higher now than it was in the mid-1980s. In 1986, 29 per cent said that they had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of interest in politics and the figure has remained at or around 30 per cent most years since then, and now stands at 36 per cent.[5] People are more likely now than in the 1980s to have signed a petition or contacted their MP, no doubt at least partly reflecting the increasing ease with which it is possible to do these things via social media. And, although a majority doubt their ability to influence what politicians do, they are no more likely to feel this now than they were in the 1980s – indeed, if anything, the opposite is the case. In 1986, for instance, 71 per cent agreed that “people like me have no say in what the government does”; now that figure is down to 59 per cent.

Political institutions
Despite this, there are signs of growing discontent with the way in which we are governed. Back in 1983 only 34 per cent per cent believed that “some change” was needed to the House of Lords. But by 1994 that proportion had already grown to 58 per cent, and it now stands at 63 per cent, even though in the...
interim most hereditary peers were removed from the chamber. In truth, as our 2011 survey showed, only 18 per cent favour having a House of Lords that is wholly or primarily appointed, as the chamber is now. Most think at least half the membership should be elected.

Equally, living in a more globalised and diverse world has done nothing over the long term to persuade us of the merits of our membership of the European Union (EU). True, Britain’s membership became increasingly popular during the 1980s, with the proportion who wanted Britain to stay in the EU rising from 53 per cent in 1983 to 77 per cent by 1991 (a point at which only 17 per cent wanted Britain to leave). However, that proved to be the high watermark of the European Union’s popularity in Britain. In 1993 we asked respondents a new question about Britain’s membership and, even then, more people (38 per cent) either wanted to leave the EU or to remain a member while reducing its powers than were keen to see European integration proceed even further (31 per cent). Now, however, Euroscepticism is firmly in the ascendancy, with a record 67 per cent wanting either to leave or for Britain to remain but the EU to become less powerful.

Meanwhile, as our Devolution chapter shows, although it is far from clear that Scottish support for independence has grown (despite the electoral success of the pro-independence Scottish National Party), there are signs of greater discontent south of the border about some of the apparent anomalies thrown up by the introduction of devolution in the late 1990s in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For example, the proportion of people in England who think that Scotland gets “more than its fair share” of public spending has more than doubled from just 21 per cent in 2000 to 44 per cent now. Support for only allowing English MPs to vote on English laws, while always relatively high, has become even firmer. In short, the advent of devolution elsewhere in the UK seems to have raised questions about how England too should be governed, even though over half (56 per cent) of people in England think that England's laws should continue to be made by the UK parliament.

The varying fortunes of other key British institutions
Politics and politicians are not alone in having seen their reputations harmed. Banks and bankers have suffered even more. Back in 1983, no less than 90 per cent thought that banks were “well run”; but in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, now just 19 per cent do so, probably the most dramatic change of attitude registered in 30 years of British Social Attitudes (see Table 0.1). The press too have been big losers. Now only 27 per cent think newspapers are well run compared with 53 per cent 30 years ago, a trend that might have been exacerbated by the phone hacking scandal that forced the closure of the News of the World in 2011, but which clearly began before then. Meanwhile, there have been more modest declines in the proportion who take a favourable view of both the police and the BBC (although our 2012 reading pre-dates the Jimmy Savile scandal that may well have done further harm to the BBC’s reputation).
Table 0.1 Perceptions of how well major institutions are run, 1983–2012

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<td>27</td>
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<td>The press</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-26</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Weighted base     | 1610 | 1315 | 1181 | 986  | 1022 | 950  |                  |
| Unweighted base   | 1650 | 1321 | 1212 | 970  | 1017 | 956  |                  |

Yet it would be a mistake to presume that we have witnessed a generalised loss of confidence in institutions. As we might have anticipated, this is not true of the NHS. More surprisingly perhaps, it is also not true of trade unions, perhaps because they are now less likely to be regarded as powerful institutions that are too ready to strike. Meanwhile, there is one other national institution whose reputation did appear to be on the slide for a while, but which now has made a substantial recovery. In 1983, as many as 65 per cent said it was “very important” for Britain to continue to have a monarchy. Little more than 10 years later that figure had slumped to 32 per cent and by 2006 was just 27 per cent. Numerous items of bad news for the royal family, including the break-up of the first marriage of the Prince of Wales and the subsequent death of his first wife, Diana, seemed to take their toll. Now, however, the figure has risen back up to 45 per cent, while only four per cent think keeping the monarch is “not important at all” and five per cent say “the monarchy should be abolished”. One of the country’s most traditional institutions seems to have recovered much of its lost public affection, demonstrating that the reputational decline of large public institutions is not an inevitable feature of modern Britain; indeed we might expect to see a further increase in support for the monarchy following the birth of baby Prince George Alexander in July 2013.

Reflections
As with public spending, we should be careful about presuming that any of the developments described in this section are simply the result of some inevitable process of individualisation. In fact, many are more likely to reflect the ways in which changing debates, controversies and events can influence the public mood. So, on Europe, for example, we have seen attitudes become more favourable and then less so again – perhaps in part reflecting Labour’s switch from being Eurosceptic to Europhile in the 1980s and then the Conservatives’ move in the opposite direction. Here, as with attitudes to welfare, political and policy debate appears to be entwined with public opinion. Equally, the decline in trust in politicians is likely at least partly to reflect particular events including the actions of politicians themselves – ranging from the allegations of sleaze in the 1990s to the MPs’ expenses scandal of 2009 – rather than from any more questioning outlook amongst the public or any more general loss of trust. There is certainly little evidence, despite much commentary to the contrary (for example, Puttnam, 2000) that people are markedly less willing to trust their fellow citizens. At 39 per cent, the proportion of people who say that “most people can be trusted” is little different now from the 43 per cent recorded when asked on a survey as long ago as 1981.6
Conclusions

So what do 30 years of the British Social Attitudes survey tell us about how and why modern Britain differs from the Britain we first surveyed in 1983? We conclude by summarising some of the key themes of our 30th Report.

Live and let live

Compared with 30 years ago, British people are far more likely to take a laissez-faire view of one another’s relationships and lifestyles. Far fewer people now feel that marriage must come before sex, let alone children, or indeed that someone’s sexual orientation is anybody’s business but their own. When we began the survey back in 1983, it was impossible to imagine a Conservative Prime Minister advocating gay marriage; now public opinion suggests that widespread acceptance of gay marriage and gay adoption is very much here to stay.

Generational trends make it likely that this shift towards a more ‘live and let live’ approach to other people’s personal lives will continue, although it is important to recognise that events can upset even seemingly long-term and deep-rooted shifts in opinion; one such example is the impact that the discovery of HIV AIDS had on attitudes to homosexuality in the late 1980s.

It is also true that, despite growing tolerance over time, a considerable minority of the public remain very uncomfortable with less ‘traditional’ relationships. Among the political parties, this poses a particular challenge for the Conservative Party in trying to balance their new social liberalism with the fact that their supporters are currently among the least liberal on these matters.

Losing faith in key institutions

The last 30 years have seen a number of important institutions fall from grace very publicly, and the impact of this is clear in our findings. The banking sector, the press and politicians are all now judged far more critically than they were in the early 1980s, and there is a clear sense that people have lost faith in some of Britain’s most important institutions. This certainly applies to politicians and the political process. Although Britain has never had that much trust in government or those who serve within it, now only one in five (18 per cent) trust governments to put the nation’s needs above those of a political party.

However, there is little evidence of a steady and general decline in trust. Public opinion, at least partly, reflects the behaviour of the people and institutions in question – whether they be politicians, journalists or bankers. So their future public standing lies to a large extent within their own hands. Indeed, the royal family provides an excellent example of how an embattled institution can rise in the public’s opinion: although the monarchy is still seen as less important now than it was in 1983, as many as 45 per cent now see its continuation as “very important”, up from a low of 27 per cent in 2006.

Our changing cultural attachments

The sense of attachment that people have to different British institutions has changed markedly over the last three decades. In the early 1980s most people readily identified with a religion and with a political party. Now, only half (52 per cent) define themselves as religious (the change almost entirely accounted for by a decline in identification with the Church of England) and, though three-quarters (76 per cent) still identify – if pushed – with a political party, only 31 per cent would describe their support as “very” or “fairly strong”. In both cases, the
decline is long-term and likely to continue as older generations, who are most likely to identify with a religion or a political party, gradually die out.

True, some social identities persist. In particular, Britain retains an intriguing attachment to a working class identity, with far more thinking of themselves in this way than would objectively be defined as working class nowadays, given the current profile of the job market. However, the pull that subjective or even objective class exerts on how a person thinks or feels about the world is weaker now than it was in the 1980s.

The tension between individual and state responsibility
The last three decades have seen a dramatic decline in support for welfare benefits aimed at disadvantaged groups, particularly the unemployed. Britain is more inclined than it was in the 1980s to feel that people should stand on their own two feet economically, and is less likely to favour increased spending on welfare benefits. A majority still think it is mainly up to government, rather than an individual and his or her family, to provide the unemployed with a decent standard of living, but the proportion who think this has fallen dramatically. Although there have been some signs recently of a shift towards a more sympathetic view of welfare benefits and their recipients, likely to be driven by austerity, it remains the case that Britain now has a far less collectivist view of welfare than was the case in the 1980s. This largely happened after New Labour came to power in 1997, suggesting the source of the change lay in the character of that government rather than in deeper rooted social change.

It remains to be seen what impact the coalition government’s welfare reform agenda will have on public attitudes, and whether the small recent upturn in sympathy we have seen marks the beginning of a trend. Looking ahead to the next election, it is clear that marked differences still exist between the views on welfare of those supporting different political parties, despite some convergence over the last thirty years. Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters remain markedly more likely than Conservative supporters to want to see higher spending on welfare, and are less likely to express concern about benefit levels being too high. So the challenge for the Liberal Democrats will be to reconcile their role within the coalition government with the fact that their supporters’ views lie some way to the left of those supporting their coalition partners. Meanwhile the challenge for Labour will be to decide whether it wishes to carve out its own distinctive position on welfare, and if so, how it can best tackle the imprint that New Labour appears to have left on how the public think about this area.

All this by no means implies that Britain is turning away from the state altogether. Only six per cent would like to see a reduction in taxes and public spending on health, education and social benefits, and the public remain strongly wedded to the founding principle of the NHS. Indeed, a near unanimous 97 per cent think it is the government’s responsibility to provide health care for the sick and a similar proportion think the same about government’s responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for the elderly.

Britain in 2043
These findings give us valuable clues about the way Britain might think and feel in another 30 years’ time. But, in truth, Britain’s changing social attitudes are in no way the product of inevitable social trends. Instead they are often the result of how the public’s identities, values and preferences interact with events, or with the words and deeds of those in positions of power and influence. How
that interaction will play out in the next 30 years will depend both on the choices made by this group and on longer term social and demographic change.

We look forward to findings from the British Social Attitudes survey over the next 30 years, giving the public a voice by providing essential independent and robust evidence about their experiences, attitudes and values.

Notes
2. The difference between the proportions of the population identified as belonging to a religion by the 2011 Census and British Social Attitudes can be partly explained by question wording: the Census asks respondents “What is your religion?” – implying that the respondent has one – while the British Social Attitudes survey asks “Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?” The difference may also be due to the response options offered; with the Census listing the major world religions, and British Social Attitudes listing specific denominations; respondents answering the former would be most likely to see this as a question concerned with ‘cultural classification’ rather than religion (Voas and Bruce, 2004). Finally, the context of the questions is significant, with the Census question following one on ethnicity, arguably causing ‘contamination’ of responses (ibid.).
3. The objective figures represent the proportions in one of the Registrar General’s socio-economic groups 1–6.
4. When this question was originally developed in 1984, it asked about “a husband” and “a wife” rather than “a man” and “a woman”. This was replaced by a variant of the question using the latter terminology in 1994.
5. This finding is sharply at variance with that reported by the Hansard Society’s annual Audit of Political Engagement in 2012 and 2013, which found that there had been a marked decline in interest in politics. We would note that the change in the level of reported interest in that survey coincided with a change in the contractor undertaking it and thus perhaps might be a consequence of a change in how the survey was conducted (Hansard Society, 2013).
6. This 1981 figure comes from the World Values Survey as reported in Hall (1999).

References


Appendix
The data on which Figure 0.1 is based are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A.1 Trends in religious affiliation, 1983–2012</th>
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<td>Religion</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Weighted base</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
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<tr>
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The data on which Figure 0.2 is based are shown below.

### Table A.2 Strength of party identification, 1987–2012

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<td>Not very strong</td>
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Weighted base: 2766 2930 2836 2836 3145 3426 3435 2766 4484 3294 2983
Unweighted base: 2847 3029 2918 2945 3145 3426 3435 2847 4483 3294 2985

The data on which Figure 0.3 is based are shown below.

### Table A.3 Attitudes to tax and spend, 1983–2012

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Unweighted base: 1761 1675 1804 3100 2847 3029 2797 2918 2945 3469

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Unweighted base: 3633 3620 1355 3146 3143 2292 3287 3435 3272 2146

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</table>

Weighted base: 2167 3228 3082 2184 1134 3297 3311 3248
Unweighted base: 2166 3240 3094 2229 1139 3297 3311 3248
Table and figure conventions

1. Data in the tables are from the 2012 British Social Attitudes survey unless otherwise indicated.

2. Tables are percentaged as indicated by the percentage signs.

3. In tables, ‘*’ indicates less than 0.5 per cent but greater than zero, and ‘–’ indicates zero.

4. When findings based on the responses of fewer than 100 respondents are reported in the text, reference is made to the small base size. These findings are excluded from line charts, but included in tables.

5. Percentages equal to or greater than 0.5 have been rounded up (e.g. 0.5 per cent = one per cent; 36.5 per cent = 37 per cent).

6. In many tables the proportions of respondents answering “Don’t know” or not giving an answer are not shown. This, together with the effects of rounding and weighting, means that percentages will not always add to 100 per cent.

7. The self-completion questionnaire was not completed by all respondents to the main questionnaire (see Technical details). Percentage responses to the self-completion questionnaire are based on all those who completed it.

8. The bases shown in the tables (the number of respondents who answered the question) are printed in small italics. Both the weighted and unweighted bases are given.

9. In time series line charts, survey readings are indicated by data markers. While the line between data markers indicates an overall pattern, where there is no data marker the position of the line cannot be taken as an accurate reading for that year.
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The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) continued to support the participation of Britain in the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), a collaboration whereby surveys in over 40 countries administer an identical module of questions in order to facilitate comparative research. Some of the results are described in our Gender roles chapter.

We are also grateful to Professor Richard Topf of London Metropolitan University for all his work in creating and maintaining access to an easy to use website that provides a fully searchable database of all the questions that have ever been carried on a British Social Attitudes survey, together with details of the pattern of responses to every question. This site provides an invaluable resource for those who want to know more than can be found in this report. It is located at www.britsocat.com.

The British Social Attitudes survey is a team effort. The report editors could not do their job without the invaluable editorial support provided by the two British Social Attitudes senior researchers, Lucy Lee and Eleanor Taylor who also develop and manage the survey, along with Jerome Finnegan. The survey is heavily dependent too on staff who organise and monitor fieldwork and compile and distribute the survey’s extensive documentation, for which we would pay particular thanks to Charlie Collins and Sarah Alcock and their colleagues in NatCen’s administrative office in Brentwood. Thanks are also due to the fieldwork controllers, area managers and field interviewers who are responsible for all the interviewing, and without whose efforts the survey would not happen at all. We are also grateful to Sue Corbett in our computing department who expertly translates our questions into a computer assisted questionnaire, and to Roger Stafford who has the unenviable task of editing, checking and documenting the data. Many thanks are also due to Soapbox who worked with us on producing the report and to our proofreaders, Alice Reeves and Cathy O’Donnell.

Finally, we must praise all the people who anonymously gave up their time to take part in one of our surveys over the last 30 years, not least those who participated in 2012. They are the cornerstone of this enterprise. We hope that some of them might read about themselves and the story they tell of modern Britain with interest.
Personal relationships
Changing attitudes towards sex, marriage and parenthood

Over the past three decades, the nature and consequences of particular types of personal relationship have attracted a huge amount of debate and controversy – with frequent attempts by political parties to change policy or influence behaviour in this area. But what does the public think about sex, marriage and parenthood within the context of different types of relationships? How have their views changed over time and are everyone’s views moving in the same direction?

Live and let live
The last three decades have seen dramatic changes in how Britain thinks about issues such as premarital sex and homosexuality.

In 1983, one in two (50%) thought homosexuality was “always wrong”, rising to 64% by 1987. Now 22% take this view, while nearly half (47%) think it is not wrong at all.

Much of this change over time has been driven by each successive generation having more liberal views than its predecessors. In 2012, 46% of those born in the 1940s thought homosexuality was always or mostly wrong, compared with 21% of those born in the 1960s, and 18% of those born in the 1980s.

Marriage and parenthood
There have also been shifts in a more liberal direction in people's views on parenthood, as well as on other issues such as abortion. But this increased liberalisation does not mean differences of opinion have vanished.

The proportion who think people who want children ought to get married has fallen (from 70% in 1989 to 42% in 2012). But this view remains the most common one – more agree than disagree (42% compared with 34%).

There are still marked variations between the views of different generations and between those with particular religious or political affiliations. Conservative Party supporters are among the most likely to think that people who want children ought to be married; 63% taking this view in 2012.
**Introduction**

The intimate subject of how people live their private lives – who they love, whether they marry, when they have children – attracts a huge amount of debate and controversy, most often about the social consequences of such personal decisions. Not surprisingly then, the last 30 years have seen numerous attempts by political parties to engage in debates about personal matters. Examples include Margaret Thatcher’s government’s introduction of Section 28 in 1987, in a reaction against local authorities “intentionally promoting” homosexuality, as well as the launch of the ill-fated ‘Back to Basics’ campaign in 1993 by her successor, John Major, which subsequently floundered in a sea of political sex scandals. Conservative claims to be the true party of the family caused difficulties for New Labour who, in 2001, felt forced to state that it too saw marriage as the best framework for bringing up children.[1] And while David Cameron has sought to rebrand the Conservative Party as socially liberal on issues such as gay rights, he continues to emphasize the importance of family; most recently, he and the Conservative Party have found themselves in disarray over the subject of gay marriage.

The British public’s thinking about these issues, its sense of moral right and wrong, has been strongly shaped by a Christian tradition, especially since the rise of Victorian morality in the second half of the nineteenth century. Marriage, as the officially sanctioned institution within which a man and woman can live together, be intimate and have children, has played a key role in governing how people are expected to live. Behaviour falling outside these boundaries – be it homosexuality, sex outside marriage, divorce, cohabitation or illegitimacy – was at best frowned upon, and at worst the subject of official or unofficial sanctions, depending on the historical period in question. In reality, history gives a less black and white account of British morality. Much has been written about the gap between Victorian values and real Victorian behaviour, and the notion that in the past the English were all respectably married is also far from the truth. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, for example, a surprisingly high proportion of English brides were pregnant on their wedding day (Waller, 2009).

This chapter looks at British attitudes towards personal relationships and behaviour and how these have changed over the past three decades. It focuses on three key areas – marriage, homosexuality and abortion – to consider how much attitudes have changed, and among whom the change has been most pronounced. It explores the reasons behind these changes and, where possible, suggests how attitudes might shift in the future. It also considers how far people’s views about personal relationships vary according to their political sympathies and whether this is changing over time, to help shed light on current political debates.

**Explaining change**

Before we begin it is worth setting out a number of features of the last three decades which may have had a significant impact on the public’s views.

“The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there”

Later on we will explore the ways in which British society today objectively looks very different to how it was in 1983 when the British Social Attitudes survey began. It would be astonishing if this was not linked to a change in how the
British public thinks. In the literature, such a phenomenon is described as a ‘period effect’ and can encompass a wide array of factors that might shape the way people think about their world. Three types of factor are worthy of particular note. The first type relates to events and their consequences – for instance, as we will see later, the way in which the discovery of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s seems to have had an impact on attitudes towards homosexuality during that period. The second are to do with the political context of the time – who is in power, the nature of their support, and the key policy debates of the moment; in our chapter on Government spending and welfare, for example, we discuss the way in which policy debates about benefit reform during the 1990s had a profound and lasting impact on public attitudes in general, and the views of Labour party supporters in particular. And the third type of factor concerns social trends in behaviour; as we discuss later on, cohabitation rates in the 1980s were a fraction of their current levels, so someone forming their views about marriage and cohabitation now does so against a very different backdrop to the one that existed three decades ago.

But the general social, political and demographic context of the time is not the only reason why the public’s views might shift. We also need to consider three other features. These differ from period effects in the sense that, theoretically, it is possible for them to have a dramatic long-term impact on societal views without any single person changing their mind about a particular issue. This is because all three involve changes in the prevalence of particular groups with distinctive views – thus as the proportion of people in these groups changes over time, so too do social attitudes. The three we focus on in this chapter concern generational change, the role of religion and the rise of the graduate.

**The generation game**

We will see later in the chapter that young people tend to have more liberal and tolerant views than their elders. This reflects the importance of the generation that a person is born into, the argument being that their formative experiences as they are growing up will indelibly shape their attitudes and values across a wide range of issues, and these attitudes will subsequently not shift very much as they get older. There are different possible explanations as to how this process might work and the nature of the impact it might have on people’s values. One approach emphasises the ‘political era’ during which a particular generation comes of age, arguing that the distinctive political and economic atmosphere will have a lasting impact on those who were developing their political consciousness at that time (Mannheim, 1928). An alternative view is derived from the theory of ‘postmaterialism’ (Inglehart, 1977), arguing that different generations are shaped by ‘formative affluence’ – that is, the level of economic affluence and stability they experienced in their formative years. Alternatively, it may be that the sorts of period effects we have already described have an impact on everyone through a process of what has been called ‘contagion’, but have a particularly strong effect on younger generations (Jagodzinski and Dobbelaeere, 1994).

If it is the case that each subsequent generation is more liberal than its predecessor, we should find that attitudes across society as a whole gradually change as older, less tolerant, generations die out and are replaced by generations with more liberal views. But in assessing whether or not this is the case we need to bear in mind that, on some issues, people’s views may simply change as they get older, as depicted in the well-known quote attributed to Churchill: “If you’re not a Liberal at twenty you have no heart, if you’re not
a Conservative at forty you have no brain." If this is the case, the fact that a particular generation has a different view on an issue to an older one may simply reflect the lifecycle stage that that generation has reached and this will continue to shift as they get older.

The ideal way of untangling lifecycle and generational differences is to use data from a panel survey in which the same people are interviewed repeatedly over time. However, although the British Social Attitudes survey interviews a fresh sample of people every year, its longevity means that we can use it to trace the attitudes of particular cohorts of people and assess the extent to which their attitudes change or remain stable over time (for more information about cohort analysis please see the Technical details chapter).

There are countless ways of defining 'generations', with recent attention focusing particularly on ‘Generation Y’, born in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the more well-known baby boomer and pre-war generations (Ipsos Mori, 2012). This focus can be illuminating but can also mask important differences that exist within particular generations, particularly within the otherwise large baby boomer and pre-war generations. For that reason, we have chosen to categorise people by their decade of birth.

**Declining religious attachment**

In the introduction to this chapter we outlined the important role that the Church has played in shaping people’s attitudes towards the choices they make in their relationships (or whether indeed such choices are possible) – whether to cohabit, to have children outside marriage or to have a sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex. In each section we will consider the influence that religion still has on people’s views and how this has changed over time.

Changing patterns of religiosity, as measured by a question we have included in the survey since 1983 about religious belonging, are shown in Table 1.1. The key headline is obvious; religious belonging in Britain has declined since 1983, with a steady increase in the proportion of people who do not regard themselves as belonging to any religion, up from 31 per cent in 1983 to 48 per cent in 2012. This increase is almost entirely mirrored by a decline in the proportion of people who describe themselves as belonging to the Church of England, down from 40 per cent in 1983 to 20 per cent now. The proportion of people who describe themselves as Catholic or as belonging to another Christian religion has changed little over the period, while the proportion who belong to non-Christian religions has grown, from two per cent in 1983 to six per cent now.
Table 1.1 Religious affiliation, 1983–2012

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<tr>
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<th>85 %</th>
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Weighted base = 1719 1645 1769 2766 2930 2698 2836 2945 3469 3633 3620 1355 3146
Unweighted base = 1761 1675 1804 3100 2847 3029 2797 2918 2945 3469 3633 3620 1355 3146

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Weighted base = 3143 3426 3287 3435 4432 3199 4268 4290 4124 4486 3421 3297 3311 3248
Unweighted base = 3143 3426 3287 3435 4432 3199 4268 4290 4124 4486 3421 3297 3311 3248

These trends are closely linked to the generational differences we have just described. Figure 1.1 illustrates this by showing the proportion in each generation who say they do not identify with any religion, and how this has changed over time. It shows that each generation tends to be slightly less religious than the one that preceded it, and that levels of religiosity do not vary very much over the lifetime of a generation. So, while less than three in ten of those born in the 1930s did not identify with any religion throughout their lifetime (26 per cent in 1983; 27 per cent in 2012), this was the case for around six in ten of those born in the 1960s (58 per cent in 1983; 56 per cent now). And, although we do not have complete data for later generations, there are clear signs that these trends are set to continue.
The data on which Figure 1.1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter. Data are only presented for those generation cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year. We would anticipate these trends to be linked with increasingly liberal attitudes towards personal relationships and sexual behaviour over time, with less emphasis on ‘traditional’ behaviour. Later on we will look at the extent to which this is true.

The growth of the graduate

The last 30 years have seen huge changes in levels of education in Britain, with the most pronounced change being the rise in the proportion of young people going into higher education. These changes are clearly reflected in the survey findings. Back in 1985, when we first started asking detailed questions about education, only seven per cent of participants were graduates and nearly half, 45 per cent, had no qualifications at all. By 2012, the number with degrees had tripled (to 21 per cent), while the number with no qualifications fell to 19 per cent.

For the purposes of this chapter, these changes matter because of the relationship that exists between graduate-level education and liberal values across a range of areas. There are various factors that might account for this, including the impact of education on an individual’s cognitive development and/or the absorption of liberal values as part of the socialisation experience of being a student (Surridge, 2010). Consequently, we might expect to see increasingly liberal views about the sorts of issues being considered in this chapter as higher education has expanded. [2]

The changing educational profile of Britain is closely linked to age, with younger generations containing more graduates than older ones, and older generations containing more people without any qualifications than younger ones.

There are various ways in which we can try and tease out the relative importance of generation, religion and education, and we explore these later. But here we flag a couple of patterns to which we will pay particular attention. The first relates to whether we find notable and constant differences between the attitudes of the different groups we are interested in, with these changing little over the last 30 years. In these circumstances, a change in the number of people in one of these groups (for example, a generation dying out, or a decline in the proportion of Anglicans) will be a strong candidate for explaining changes in attitudes. The second relates to whether or not any of the groups of particular interest have themselves changed their views over time as, if they have, it means any trends...
we have identified cannot be accounted for by the changing composition or prevalence of those particular groups alone.

**Marriage matters?**

Discussion of the social significance of marriage rarely leaves the headlines. This is particularly true when the topic concerns children, as shown by the long-running debates about whether or not parents’ choice to cohabit rather than marry has a negative impact on their children’s social and developmental outcomes (Goodman and Greaves, 2010). Most recently, the passage of the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Bill through the House of Commons and subsequently through the House of Lords in 2013 attracted ferocious debates among both Conservative MPs and the party faithful more generally. Many opponents couched their opposition to the Bill by reference to the ‘sanctity’ of heterosexual marriage, the union between a man and woman that has long been the social, legal and religious norm – and for many the ideal – when it comes to sex and parenthood.

Despite these debates, the last 30 years have seen huge changes in Britain’s marital behaviour, with an increasing proportion of people either delaying getting married or not marrying at all. Between 1983 and 2010 the marriage rate in England and Wales (which is the number of marriages among every 1000 unmarried men and women aged 16 and over) more than halved, from 52 to 22 (among men) and 42 to 20 (among women) (Office for National Statistics, 2012a). This partly reflects an increasing tendency for couples to cohabit, either as a precursor to, or instead of, marriage. When the British Social Attitudes survey began in 1983, the majority of couples did not live together before tying the knot; this applied to only a minority, around three in ten. Now, it is those who get married without living together first who are unusual. In 2004–2007 around eight in ten first-time married couples lived together first (Beaujouan and Ni Bhrolchain, 2011). As a result, cohabitation rates have increased considerably; between 1996 and 2012 the number of cohabiting heterosexual couples increased from 1.5 to 2.9 million, and the number of dependent children living in these households doubled, from 0.9 to 1.8 million (Office for National Statistics, 2012b).

It would be surprising if such major societal shifts were not accompanied by fundamental changes in the way that we think about marriage and its role. In this section we explore this by focusing on two issues: the acceptability of sex outside marriage, and views about whether marriage and parenthood should go hand in hand. We begin with attitudes to premarital sex. To assess this we ask the following question:

*If a man and woman have sexual relations before marriage, what would your general opinion be?*

In 1983, 28 per cent thought such premarital sex was “always” or “mostly wrong”; since then, the figure has now more than halved, to 11 per cent. In the meantime, the proportion who think sex before marriage is “not wrong at all” has increased markedly, from 42 to 65 per cent (a further 10 per cent think it is “rarely wrong”).

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**28% thought premarital sex was wrong in 1983. This is now 11 per cent**
We also ask participants their views about the acceptability of extramarital sex, defined as “a married person having sexual relations with someone other than his or her partner”. Here there has been very little change over the last 30 years; with the vast majority, consistently eight in ten or more (84 per cent in 2012), seeing this kind of behaviour as always or mostly wrong. So, while sex outside marriage is acceptable to the majority of the British public, there is a continued commitment to marital fidelity – that people who are married should be faithful to their partner.

Traditionally one of marriage’s key functions has been parenthood. Earlier we saw that the proportion of children being born outside marriage has increased sharply since the early 1980s and, to some extent, this behaviour change is reflected in trends in attitudes. One of the ways in which we assess this is by asking people whether they agree or disagree with the following statement:

**People who want children ought to get married**

As Table 1.3 shows, when we first asked the question in 1989, seven in ten (70 per cent) people agreed with this view (with 25 per cent agreeing strongly) while less than two in ten (17 per cent) disagreed. Over the last few decades opinions have shifted considerably; now 42 per cent agree (nine per cent strongly) while around a third (34 per cent) disagree. Notably, the proportion of people who opt for the middle ground of neither agree nor disagree has increased too, from one in ten in 1989 to more than two in ten now.
Table 1.3 People who want children ought to get married, 1989–2012

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<td>33</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tr>
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Weighted base 1274 1000 2991 1984 930 953
Unweighted base 1307 984 2980 1960 921 950

This change marks a shift in a more liberal direction, but it is clear that opinion is more evenly divided than was the case for premarital sex. Indeed, the most prevalent view remains that marriage should precede parenthood. This more nuanced view about marriage once children enter the equation has been noted before (Duncan and Phillips, 2008) and is evident in responses to other questions included on the survey. For instance, between 1994 and 2006 we asked people to respond to the statement “one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together”. In 1994, just over a third (35 per cent) agreed with this view, while 46 per cent disagreed; by 2006 there had been a slight shift, with agreement going up to 39 per cent and disagreement down to 40 per cent; nevertheless, opinion remained divided on the issue.

So far we have seen that, although marriage continues to be seen as a prerequisite for sex only by a small minority, more doubts remain about moving away from the traditional family when it comes to bringing up children. We turn now to consider what best accounts for these changes over time, trying where possible to identify the relative importance of generational differences, religion and education.

We start by looking at generational differences. In the case of premarital sex, if we simply look at attitudes by generation, there is now less clear-cut variation by age than in the past, even though in earlier years younger people were notably more liberal than their elders. The closing of what was once a huge generation gap is illustrated in Figure 1.2. It shows that in 1983 there were considerable generation gaps in people’s views about premarital sex, with differences of over 10 percentage points between the views of those born in each of the five decades between 1900 and 1950. This contrasts clearly with the generations born in the 1950s and 1960s, who had very similar views to one another. This tendency for each new generation to have similar views to its predecessor has continued since then, as illustrated by the fact that the lines for the generations born after 1950 are very close to one another.

Figure 1.2 also allows us to follow a particular generation and look at how their views have changed. We can focus, for example, on those who were born in the 1950s and compare their views in 1983 (when they were in their late 20s and early 30s) with their subsequent views in 2012 (when they were aged between 53 and 62). This allows us to see whether a generation has become more liberal as it has aged – which in this case would be indicated by a downward line in the graph (as happened for instance for the 1930s and 1940s generations between the late 1990s and 2003).
These trends mean that the gulf that existed in 1983 between the views of different generations has shrunk dramatically. In 1983, just six per cent of the generation born in the 1950s thought premarital sex was always or mostly wrong, compared with 59 per cent of the group born between 1900 and 1909, a huge gap of 53 percentage points. Now the gap between our oldest generation (born in the 1930s) and the youngest (born in the 1980s) stands at just nine percentage points (with 22 and 13 per cent respectively thinking that premarital sex is wrong). It is these sharp generational differences that account for the large shift in public opinion we have seen over the last 30 years, as older, less liberal, generations have died out and been gradually replaced by younger, more liberal, ones.

Figure 1.2 Proportion saying premarital sex is wrong, by generation cohort, 1983–2012

The data on which Figure 1.2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter. Data are only presented for those generation cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year.

A different pattern emerges when we look at attitudes to having children outside marriage. Here distinct generational differences have persisted over time; indeed, they are just as marked in 2012 as they were in 1983. Take, for instance, the results for each generation in 2012 in Figure 1.3. They show that 28 per cent of the 1980s generation think people should get married before having children, rising to 31 per cent among the 1970s generation, 34 per cent of the 1960s generation and so on, until we hit highs of 62 and 84 per cent respectively among those born in the 1940s and 1930s. Although looking at earlier years it is clear that most generations have become slightly more liberal on this issue over time (indicated by a downward slope on the graph), the gap between the views of old and young is now actually wider than it has ever been. Note too that, as with attitudes to premarital sex, the three youngest generations are far closer together in their views than previous generations are to one another. These findings suggest that we will continue to see attitudes in this area become more liberal over time, as older generations die out, perhaps slowing at the point when the 1960s generation start to become the elder statesmen and women among Britain’s generations (that is, from the 2040s onwards).
Earlier, we set out why we would expect to find a link between religious faith and people’s attitudes to personal relationships. This indeed proves to be the case for attitudes to marriage (Table 1.4). When it comes to attitudes to premarital sex we find non-Christians at one end of the spectrum (although the small sample sizes involved mean these figures should be treated with caution). This group stands out as the most disapproving of premarital sex, with just over half in 2012 thinking it is always or mostly wrong. Those affiliating to other religions are more tolerant; around one in ten Anglicans and Catholics think that sex before marriage is wrong, a view shared with one in five of those belonging to other Christian religions. The most tolerant of all are the non-religious; out of the 500 odd people we interviewed who defined themselves in that category, two per cent (10 people) said they thought that premarital sex was wrong.

All religious groups, with the exception of non-Christians, have become more accepting of premarital sex over the last 30 years. Among Anglicans, for instance, the proportion thinking premarital sex is wrong is now a third of what it was in 1983 (10 and 31 per cent respectively). Among non-Christians opinions are now less tolerant than they were, bearing in mind the caveats mentioned earlier with regard to small sample sizes.

Table 1.4 Premarital sex, by religion, 1983–2012[3]

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of England/Anglican</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Christian</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>+24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When it comes to the acceptability of parenthood outside marriage there is far more similarity of view between those from different religious faiths (Table 1.5). The key difference here is between those who are religious and those who are not. For instance, over half of Anglicans (54 per cent) agree with the view that people should get married before having children, compared with just 30 per cent of the non-religious.

This link between attitudes and religion offers at least a partial explanation for the generational changes we saw earlier, as older generations are far more likely than younger ones to be religious. However, Britain’s increasing liberalism about premarital sex and parenthood outside marriage cannot be solely put down to the fact that religious adherence has fallen over time, as this does not account for the fact that most religious groups have themselves become more accepting over the last 30 years.

Education is no longer strongly linked to a person’s views about premarital sex; although in the 1980s graduates were more liberal than other groups on this matter, the views of all groups defined by educational qualification have become steadily more liberal over time. However, the picture is less clear-cut when it comes to attitudes to parenthood and marriage. Here the most liberal views of all are held by those whose highest qualification is a school-based one (that is, A levels or GCSEs, or their equivalent). Among those for whom A levels are their highest qualification, 35 per cent think people should get married before having children, compared with 41 per cent of graduates (the next most tolerant group) and 55 per cent of those without any qualifications (the least tolerant). On this issue then, the growth in the number of graduates does not help us account for increasingly liberal views about sex and marriage.

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<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education below degree</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level or equivalent</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE/O level or equivalent</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE or equivalent</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualifications</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, views about marriage have become more liberal over time. When it comes to sex outside marriage, there is a considerable unanimity of opinion, with only religion and, to some extent, generation still being clearly linked to differences in views now. In contrast, there remain marked differences between the views of different groups on marriage and parenthood, with age, religion and education remaining clear markers of a person’s views on the subject. The shifts we have seen over time are mainly accounted for by generational change; although declining religious faith is in itself linked to generational differences, increasing secularisation is an insufficient explanation of the changes we have found. Education, although partly linked to a person’s views on marriage and parenthood, is not an important factor in explaining the huge changes we have seen over time. Although it is hard to find clear evidence of the way in which
period effects have influenced people’s attitudes, the close correlation between marriage behaviour and attitudes suggests that, rather than having a simple causal relationship, the two are influenced by one another; so attitudes will help shape behaviour, and behaviour (or exposure to behaviour) will in turn shape attitudes.

Of course attitudes to personal relationships may well be influenced by other factors beyond those we have considered here. Our Social class chapter examines attitudes to premarital sex in the context of its investigation into the changing role of social class in shaping people’s attitudes. Multivariate analysis there shows that age, ethnicity and church attendance (in 1984 and 2012) and gender (in 2012) are all highly significant predictors of a person’s views about premarital sex, even when a range of other measures are taken into account. The effect of age on attitudes appears to have weakened over time, while the effect of church attendance has strengthened. These trends support the findings we have described above, which show how the views of different religious groups have diverged over time, while the attitudes of different generations have become less distinct.

We finally examine the extent to which party affiliation is linked to people’s views, to see what light this sheds on current political debates about marriage and the family (Table 1.6). To do this we use a series of questions that, together, measure the extent to which people readily identify or not with a particular party, their ‘party identification’ (see our Politics chapter for more details). While there are no such differences associated with attitudes to premarital sex, there are clear differences between the views of supporters of the main political parties when it comes to marriage and parenthood. Conservative Party supporters are the most likely to think people who want to have children should get married; over six in ten think this, far higher than the rates found among Liberal Democrats and Labour supporters (three in ten and four in ten respectively). The most liberal of all are those who do not support any party, no doubt reflecting their younger than average age profile.

Table 1.6 People who want children ought to get married, by party identification, 1989–2012[6]

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>- 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>- 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>- 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>- 32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conservative supporters also stand out as having changed the least in their views, although the make-up of those supporting a particular party will of course have changed over the years. While the proportion who think that people should get married before having children has fallen by 15 percentage points between 1989 and 2012, this compares with a drop of 23 percentage points among Labour supporters. As a result, Conservative Party supporters have diverged from supporters of other political parties in their views on this matter over time. Indeed, they are now nearly three times more likely than those
who do not support any party to think that parents should be married. David Cameron’s decision to balance his social liberalism on issues such as gay rights with a continued emphasis on the importance of marriage is very much in line with the views of the Conservative Party faithful; it does however beg the question as to where new party support might come from, particularly given the trends towards increased liberalism on family issues that are likely to continue into the near future.

**Homosexuality**

In 2013 public attitudes towards homosexuality hit the headlines once again, as a result of the debates surrounding the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Bill, providing a good illustration of the tension between David Cameron’s desire to promote socially liberal conservatism on issues such as gay rights and a socially authoritarian, and highly vocal, section of his party (Hayton, 2010). These debates are not confined to the UK; earlier in 2013, a reported 150,000 people marched in Paris to protest against a similar law being enacted there.

It is worth reminding ourselves of how much Britain has changed in relation to homosexuality. Before the Sexual Offences Act of 1967, male homosexuality had been illegal. One hundred years earlier it had been a capital offence. But, despite its decriminalisation in 1967 (for men aged 21 and over), stigma and prejudice against gay men and lesbians remained widespread over the subsequent decades and prevented many from openly expressing their sexuality. This is not the place for an exhaustive history, but it is worth flagging some events and debates of particular relevance to the 30 year period covered by the British Social Attitudes survey. In the 1980s, two events in particular stand out; the arrival of HIV/AIDS and the introduction of Section 28. The first round of the British Social Attitudes survey took place in 1983, a point at which there was intense media scrutiny of what was then a new and frightening disease; acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). In 1982, Terrence Higgins became one of the first UK fatalities and the years that followed saw frequent (and often incorrect) scares about how the HIV virus could be transmitted (Wellings, 1988) as well a frequent distinction being made between those who were ‘innocent’ victims (for example, contracting the HIV virus through blood transfusions) and those, like gay men or intravenous drug-users, who were seen to have ‘chosen’ to place themselves at risk through their behaviour (Beharrell, 1993).

Moving forward a few years to the 1987 Conservative Party conference brings us to another landmark debate of the 1980s. In her speech to the party faithful, Margaret Thatcher remarked “Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay”.[7] These concerns heralded the introduction of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, which stated that local government “shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality” or “promote the teaching in state schools of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship”.

The 1990s saw breakthroughs in the medical treatment of AIDS and HIV. The first gay pride events took place in Manchester (1990), Brighton (1992) and London (Europride, 1992), and an increasing number of public figures came out as gay or announced that they were HIV positive. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 reduced the age of consent for homosexual sex from 21
to 18. After years of wrangling between the House of Commons and House of Lords, the age of consent was eventually lowered to 16 in 2001. Section 28 was eventually repealed in England and Wales as part of the Local Government Act 2003 (its Scottish equivalent having been repealed a few years earlier in 2000). The following year the Civil Partnership Act 2004 gave same-sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as married heterosexual couples in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales (the first civil partnership took place the following year). In 2013, the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Bill was introduced to Parliament and at the time of writing is being considered by the House of Lords; in the same year the Scottish Parliament introduced its own Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill. As a result of these, and other legislative changes, lesbian and gay rights in Britain have strengthened considerably, and are seen as being among the best in Europe.[8]

What might these changes mean for public attitudes? Certainly, we might expect to find that attitudes have become much more tolerant over time, in line with legislative change and an increasing willingness among public figures to be open about being gay. But we might also expect this path to be a bumpy one, perhaps reflecting the debates about homosexuality that accompanied discussions about AIDS in the 1980s. This indeed proves to be the case. Back in 1983, we asked people what they thought of “sexual relations between adults of the same sex”. Their responses, and those obtained in subsequent years, are presented in Table 1.7. In 1983, half – one in every two people – took the most critical view possible, that such behaviour was “always wrong”. An additional one in ten thought it was “mostly wrong” and less than two in ten thought it “not wrong at all”. The view that homosexuality was wrong grew over the decade – by 1987, nearly two-thirds thought it was always wrong, no doubt at least partly reflecting some of the debates surrounding HIV AIDS. Since then, attitudes have become far more tolerant – the proportion thinking homosexuality is always wrong is now a third of that in 1987, while the 11 per cent who took the most relaxed view possible back then (that homosexuality was not wrong at all) has more than quadrupled to 47 per cent.

In 1983 one in every two people took the most critical view possible, that same-sex relations were “always wrong”
Table 1.7 Views on homosexuality, 1983–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex</th>
<th>83</th>
<th>84</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>98</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always wrong</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly wrong</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes wrong</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely wrong</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not wrong at all</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weighted base**
1719 1645 1769 1391 1469 1353 1493 1180 1079

**Unweighted base**
1761 1675 1804 1437 1513 1397 1484 1172 1075

Figure 1.4 compares trends in attitudes to homosexuality with attitudes to premarital sex. Three points emerge. Firstly, and very obviously, societal attitudes to homosexuality were (and remain) markedly less liberal than attitudes to premarital sex. Secondly, although opinion on premarital sex became progressively more liberal throughout the 1980s, this was a decade during which attitudes to homosexuality hardened, for the reasons highlighted earlier. And thirdly, views about premarital sex seem to have stabilised since 2007 while attitudes to homosexuality are continuing to become more liberal.

**Figure 1.4 Views on premarital sex and homosexuality, 1983–2012**

The data on which Figure 1.4 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.
We turn now to look at how opinion varies between different groups, focusing particularly on how attitudes among different groups have changed over time and what impact this has had on any gap between groups with particularly marked views. We start by looking at the views of different generations. These are shown in Figure 1.5 which illustrates clearly that each successive generation has more liberal views than the one before. In 2012, for instance, the 1980s generation are the least likely to think that homosexuality is always or mostly wrong; those born in the 1930s are the most likely to do so. This gradient from one generation to the next, combined with the exit of older, less liberal, generations and the arrival of newer, more liberal ones, largely accounts for the large shift in overall public opinion that has taken place – a decline of 34 points over three decades in the proportion who think homosexuality is always or mostly wrong. This shift will continue so long as these clear generational gradients exist, but should begin to slow down at the point when the 1960s generation becomes the oldest, as this generation and those that follow it have very similar views.

But generational change is not the whole story as, with the exception of the 1960s generation, each generation themselves became less tolerant between 1987 and 1993, for reasons that have been outlined already. The unique path of the 1960s generation is intriguing, suggesting that they were perhaps more resistant than older generations to the impact that debates around HIV AIDS (among other things) appear to have had on attitudes. However, if we focus on overall change between 1983 and 2012, it is clear that all generations have become notably more liberal over time. Among those born in the 1930s, for example, 61 per cent thought homosexuality was wrong in 1983, compared with 54 per cent among that generation now. The 1950s and 1960s generations in particular have become markedly more liberal on this issue over time.

Figure 1.5 Proportion saying homosexuality is wrong, by generation cohort, 1983–2012

Not surprisingly, religious belief is closely linked to attitudes to homosexuality. Those who aren’t religious are the least likely to see it as always or mostly wrong, only 16 per cent do so. This compares to disapproval rates of over a third among Anglicans (40 per cent) and Catholics (35 per cent). The highest disapproval of all is found among non-Christians, six in ten (61 per cent) of whom see homosexuality as always or mostly wrong (although these figures need to be treated with caution due to the small sample sizes involved).
Although tolerance of homosexuality has grown among all religious groups, it has grown most among those who are not religious. As a result, the gap between the religious and non-religious on this issue is now far wider than in the past. In 1983, Anglicans were 1.2 times more likely than the non-religious to think homosexuality was wrong; now they are 2.6 times more likely. This stronger relationship between religiosity and attitudes to homosexuality is confirmed by multivariate analysis described in the social class chapter elsewhere in this report. As was the case with attitudes to premarital sex, these trends show that changing attitudes to homosexuality cannot be accounted for by the decline of religious faith within Britain alone; the fact that many religious people are more liberal now than they once were suggests that other forces are more important.

Education is also closely related to a person’s attitudes towards homosexuality, with the most marked distinction being between those with and without qualifications. Graduates are the most tolerant of all; in 2012 one in five (19 per cent) thought homosexuality was always or mostly wrong, half the proportion (39 per cent) who took that view in 1985. The least tolerant are those without any qualifications; nearly half (47 per cent) in 2012 thought homosexuality was wrong, down from just over three-quarters (78 per cent) in 1985.

So far we have seen a clear liberal shift in attitudes to homosexuality, both across the public as a whole and among all the specific groups we have looked at. In the case of generation, religion and education these shifts have actually increased the gap between the most and least tolerant groups. As was the case with attitudes to marriage the key driver behind much of this change is generational, with each generation being successively more liberal than its predecessor. However, events also clearly matter, as shown by the impact that the arrival of AIDS in the 1980s appears to have had on people’s attitudes, in the form of a hardening of mood likely to reflect the debates of the time.

Given some of the debates that have taken place among Conservative Party MPs and supporters about the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Bill, we might anticipate finding considerable differences between the views of their supporters and those of other parties. In fact, as Table 1.8 shows, party identification is not as strongly linked to people’s views on homosexuality as some of the other characteristics we have considered. In fact, the difference between the proportion of Conservative and Labour Party supporters who think that homosexuality is wrong is not statistically significant; the main divide is between the supporters of these two main parties, on the one hand, and Liberal Democrats or those who do not support any party on the other, who are less likely to think homosexuality is wrong.

In line with what we have seen earlier, supporters of all parties have become more tolerant over time. Among the main political parties, the biggest change has taken place among Labour supporters; in 1983, 67 per cent thought homosexuality was always or mostly wrong, compared with 29 per cent now, a drop of 38 percentage points (a shift that largely took place between 1993 and 2003). Among Conservatives the overall decline has been somewhat lower, but it is worth flagging the dramatic change that took place among their supporters between 2003 and 2012, with the proportion thinking homosexuality is wrong falling from a half to just over a third. It is not clear how much of this we can attribute to the social liberalism of David Cameron, who was elected leader of the Conservative Party in the autumn of 2005. Might his views have persuaded party supporters to adopt a more liberal stance, or
even attracted those with a more liberal view to the party? Both are possible, but it is important to note that much of the increase in liberalism among Conservative supporters pre-dated Cameron’s election as party leader, with the proportion thinking homosexuality is always or mostly wrong falling from 51 to 44 per cent between 2003 and 2005.

Table 1.8 Views on homosexuality, by party identification, 1983–2012

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Earlier we saw that Conservative supporters were distinctively less liberal than other groups on the issue of parenthood and marriage. Perhaps not surprisingly then, they are also less enthusiastic than other groups about the idea of opening up marriage to same-sex couples. We asked people in 2012 whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “Gay or lesbian couples should have the right to marry one another if they want to”. Overall, 24 per cent agree strongly with this proposition while 33 per cent agree. Twenty-four per cent either disagree or disagree strongly. Conservatives were the least likely to agree strongly, only 17 per cent doing so, compared with 27 per cent of Labour party supporters and 39 per cent of Liberal Democrats.

Abortion

Abortion has been legal in Britain since the Abortion Act 1967, the result of a private member’s bill brought by David Steel MP. It followed decades of campaigning by groups who were concerned about the ill health and loss of life that resulted from unsafe and illegal abortions. The 1967 Act allowed abortion under a number of specified circumstances in cases where the pregnancy had not exceeded its 28th week. The circumstances included the risk of the pregnancy to the woman’s life, to her own physical or mental health, or that of her existing children. Abortion was also allowed if there was a significant risk that the child would be born with serious physical or mental disability.

The 1967 Act still governs abortions in England, Scotland and Wales. Changes were introduced in 1990 through the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act. In particular, the time limits in the original Act were reduced from 28 to 24 weeks, to reflect advances in medical science. The Act also clarified the circumstances under which abortion could be obtained at a later stage (abortions after 24 weeks were allowed if there is grave risk to the life of the woman, evidence of severe foetal abnormality or risk of grave physical and mental injury to the woman). In 2010, there were 17.5 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 resident in Britain, more than double the rate of 8.0 recorded in 1970. [10]
Abortion remains a hugely controversial subject and, since 1967, members of Parliament have introduced a number of private member's bills to change the abortion law. Four resulted in substantive debate but all failed. In 2008, MPs voted on cutting the limit for the first time since 1990. MPs were given a free vote on the issue, with calls being made for a reduction to 12, 16, 20 or 22 weeks; MPs voted to retain the current legal limit of 24 weeks. In 2012, the Conservative Health Minister Jeremy Hunt reignited the debate by suggesting that he favoured a reduction in the legal time limit from 24 to 12 weeks; other ministers were quick to deny there were any plans to review the current legal limit although senior figures within the party, including David Cameron, suggested that they would favour a reduction in the legal limit.

The British Social Attitudes survey has asked a number of questions about abortion over the past 30 years. Here, we focus on two that represent the extremes at either end of the debate. Both focus on the acceptability or otherwise of abortion under particular circumstances, without broaching the issue of weekly limits. The first puts forward a situation that is clearly covered by the current Abortion Act – that a woman whose health is seriously endangered by her pregnancy be allowed to have an abortion. The second puts forward a more stretching scenario, one which is not in itself currently covered by the Abortion Act:

Do you think the law should allow an abortion when …

… the woman's health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?
… the woman decides on her own she does not wish to have the child?

Responses to these questions are presented in Figure 1.6. They show almost unanimous support for a woman's right to have an abortion if her own health would be seriously endangered by going ahead with the pregnancy. Nine in ten people (90 per cent) agree with this view in 2012, barely changed from the 87 per cent who agreed in 1983. However, levels of support for abortion in the circumstances set out in the second question are lower, with just over six in ten (62 per cent) supporting and a third (34 per cent) opposing. However, this marks a considerable change since 1983; at that time 37 per cent thought the law should allow this while just over half (55 per cent) thought it should not. In other words, just over half of the public in 1983 opposed abortion being available if a woman does not want a child, while nearly two-thirds support this now.

Figure 1.6 Views on whether an abortion should be allowed in different circumstances, 1983–2012

The data on which Figure 1.6 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter
We now turn to look at how the attitudes of particular groups have changed, focusing on views about the acceptability of abortion in those cases when the woman does not want the child. We start by looking at whether there are any generational differences on this issue (Figure 1.7). Compared with the earlier generational analyses, the picture here is less clear-cut. However, there are some generational differences in 2012, with more recent generations being more supportive of a woman’s right to choose under these circumstances, and older generations, especially those born in the 1940s and 1930s being somewhat less supportive (with 49 and 56 per cent respectively supporting abortion, compared with 61 per cent of those born in the 1990s). But the differences are not huge, and the gaps between the most and least supportive groups have not changed much since 1983. It is also clear in the graph that most generations are more supportive now than they were in 1983; among the 1960s generation, for instance, support for abortion under those particular circumstances rose from 45 to 69 per cent. However, while support for abortion rose between 1983 and 1987 (and in some cases 1994) among all generations, it subsequently fell between 1994 and 2004 among older generations but continued to rise among those born during and after the 1950s. This distinction is intriguing and perhaps reflects the impact of the debates that foreshadowed the 1967 Abortion Act (something likely to have had a particular impact on the 1950s generation) as well the subsequent availability of legal abortion (for the 1960s generation onwards). These findings suggest that the changes in attitudes we have seen since 1983 cannot primarily be explained by generational change.

Figure 1.7 Proportion saying an abortion should be allowed when the woman does not wish to have the child, by generation cohort, 1983–2012

Not surprisingly, religious faith continues to be closely associated with attitudes to abortion. Catholics are the least accepting, with only 39 per cent supporting a woman’s right to terminate a pregnancy if she wishes to, compared with 56 per cent of Anglicans. The non-religious are the most supportive of all (73 per cent). But acceptance of abortion has increased among all religious groups since 1983; among Anglicans, for instance, 34 per cent supported abortion in these circumstances in 1983, rising to 54 per cent by 1994 and standing at 56 per cent now. So increasing secularism cannot explain Britain’s liberalisation on the subject of abortion.
Education is not as closely associated as other factors with attitudes to abortion. In general, the lowest level of support is found among those with no qualifications; beyond that the level of qualification makes little difference. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of graduates support abortion, compared with just over a half (53 per cent) of those with no qualifications. This broad pattern was also true in 1983; what is remarkable is that, since then, support for abortion among those with qualifications at GSCE level or below have barely changed, making them one of the few groups to have moved little in their views on this subject. For instance, among those with no qualifications at all, 49 per cent supported abortion in 1983, compared with 53 per cent now.

Overall, attitudes to abortion have become more supportive over the last three decades, although it is true to say that there was already widespread support in 1983 for abortion in cases where the continued pregnancy would endanger the woman’s life. This is apparent among different generations, each of whom is now more supportive than they were in 1983. Increased support is also apparent among different religious groups, although religion remains linked to divergent views on the subject. On this issue then, changing attitudes cannot be explained by generation, religion or education; other factors underpin increasing liberalism on this matter.

Traditionally political votes on abortion are not subject to the party whip, allowing MPs to vote according to their own conscience. Our findings show that there are few party divisions on abortion, save a clear distinction between Liberal Democrat supporters and everyone else. In 2012, for instance, 82 per cent of Liberal Democrats support a woman’s right to choose to have an abortion if she does not wish to have the child, compared with around six in ten Conservative and Labour Party supporters (57 and 61 per cent respectively) and 65 per cent of those who do not support any party.

Conclusions

In many respects, the public’s attitudes to personal relationships in 2012 look dramatically different to those that existed 30 years ago. Perhaps nowhere is this more obvious than in relation to attitudes towards homosexuality. Then, nearly two in three people though homosexuality was always or mostly wrong, a figure that was to rise over the following decade, at least partly as a result of the debates surrounding the arrival of HIV AIDS. Since then, however, the proportion of people who take this view has halved, and the most prevalent opinion is now that homosexuality is not wrong at all. In this context it is possible to imagine a Conservative Prime Minister advocating gay marriage, something that would have been unimaginable in the 1980s. These shifts towards a more tolerant view about how people live their personal lives are not confined to attitudes to homosexuality, applying as well to Britain’s views about sex and parenthood outside marriage, and abortion.

These huge shifts largely reflect the impact of generational differences in people’s views (the exception being attitudes to abortion). This is clearest in relation to attitudes to premarital sex and homosexuality; in both cases each generation, defined by its decade of birth, is successively more liberal than the one before it, a relationship which has not changed as these generations age. Consequently, as older generations die out and are replaced by more liberal subsequent generations, society’s view as a whole becomes more liberal. There
are likely to be many reasons for these generational differences; religious faith will undoubtedly play a part, as may increasing access to higher education, but so too does the context within which different generations come of age and form their own opinions about how to lead their lives, being influenced as they do so by an array of factors ranging from the policy context, social trends, popular culture and current events. The fact that those belonging to different religious groups have themselves tended to become more liberal over time certainly suggests that their declining numbers cannot alone account for an increasingly liberal Britain.

Of course, these trends do not mean that differences of opinion have been eliminated. The most common view about parenthood and marriage, held by four in ten, is that the two should ideally coincide. And, despite increasingly liberal views about homosexuality, a substantial minority, almost three in ten, continue to see it as always or mostly wrong. These views are not randomly distributed throughout the population either. In addition to marked generational gaps, differences still remain (and in some cases are growing) between the views of different religious groups. In particular, the distinctive views of non-Christians (who on many topics have among the least liberal views) points towards possible future tensions.

There are also clear differences by party support, with Conservative supporters remaining markedly more ‘traditional’ than anyone else in their views about parenthood and marriage, and Liberal Democrat supporters standing out as having the most liberal views about homosexuality and abortion. In most cases there is little difference between the views of Labour and Conservative supporters, and it is also notable that, with the exception of abortion, the (growing) proportion of people who do not support any party tend to have views that put them at the more liberal end of the spectrum. The differences between Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters are not surprising, but demonstrate well some of the tensions that underpin the current Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition, as well as signposting the difficulties that the Conservative Party will need to face if it continues its push towards social liberalism.

Predicting the future direction of society’s attitudes is a risky business. The impact of HIV AIDS on attitudes towards homosexuality provides a very good example of the way in which unforeseen events can have a dramatic impact on how people think about a particular issue. But, with these appropriate caveats in place, the patterns we have described here do point fairly clearly towards the liberalisation we have already seen continuing over the next few decades, at least when it comes to subjects like homosexuality, parenthood and marriage. But the pace of this change will begin to slow down, reflecting the fact that the gaps between the views of more recent generations is narrower than the gulfs that existed between some of their predecessors.

Notes
2. It is possible that the expansion of higher education will affect the relationship between degree-level education and social values, especially if the main mechanism by which education affects attitudes is socialisation (rather than cognitive development). So as a wider cross-section of young people attend university, the distinctive nature of their values is diluted.
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5. In summary, there has been a considerable rise since 1983 in the proportion who identify with no political party whatsoever, up from eight per cent in 1983 to 21 per cent now. The proportion of Conservative identifiers has shrunk (from 39 to 27 per cent) and the proportion of Labour identifiers has remained broadly constant (33 and 36 per cent in 1983 and 2012 respectively). In 1983, 15 per cent of people identified with the Liberal/SDP Alliance, compared with six per cent in 2012 identifying with the Liberal Democrats. Further details can be found in the Politics chapter.

6. Bases for Table 1.6 are as follows:

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8. See, for example, the ILGA Europe review of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and intersex people in Europe, available at: www.ilga-europe.org/home/news/for_media/media_releases/not_la_vie_en_rose_the_most_comprehensive_overview_of_the_lgbti_people_rights_and_lives_in_europe_2013.
9. Bases for Table 1.8 are as follows:

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References


Local Government Act 1988, Section 28, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office


Waller, M. (2009), *The English marriage; tales of love, money and adultery*, London: John Murray


## Appendix

The data for Figure 1.1 are shown below.

### Table A.1 Proportion of people with no religion, by generation cohort, 1983–2012

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NatCen Social Research
The data for Figure 1.2 are shown below.

### Table A.2 Proportion saying premarital sex is wrong, by generation cohort, 1983–2012

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<td>1920s</td>
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</table>
The data for Figure 1.3 are shown below.

### Table A.3 People who want children ought to get married, by generation cohort, 1987–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1987</th>
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<th>2000</th>
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<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
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<td>447</td>
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The data for Figure 1.4 are shown below.

### Table A.4 Views on premarital sex and homosexuality, 1983–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% saying homosexuality is always/mostly wrong</th>
<th>% saying premarital sex is always/mostly wrong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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The data for Figure 1.5 are shown below.

### Table A.5 Proportion saying homosexuality is wrong, by generation cohort, 1983–2012

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<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
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<td>1970s</td>
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<td>1960s</td>
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<td>1940s</td>
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<td>1920s</td>
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<td>1910s</td>
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<td>1920s</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The data for Figure 1.6 are shown below.

### Table A.6 Views on whether an abortion should be allowed in different circumstances, 1983–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% saying abortion should be allowed if the woman’s health endangered</th>
<th>% saying abortion should be allowed if the woman does not wish to have child</th>
<th>Weighted base</th>
<th>Unweighted base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
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The data for Figure 1.7 are shown below.

Table A.7 Proportion saying an abortion should be allowed when the woman does not wish to have the child, by generation cohort, 1983–2012

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<td>Weighted base</td>
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<td>1970s</td>
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<td>884</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohort</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>109</td>
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Government spending and welfare
Changing attitudes towards the role of the state

It is often argued that changes in Britain over the last 30 years have led to the public becoming more individualistic, resulting in a decline in ‘collectivist’ attitudes – with the public becoming less supportive of the role of government in social protection. On the other hand, attitudes to government responsibilities, spending and welfare could logically be expected to behave in a cyclical way – responding to changes in economic circumstances for example. How can we explain the changes in attitudes that have taken place over the last 30 years, in the light of these theories and, more recently, in relation to an ongoing programme of welfare reform?

Government responsibilities

Generally speaking, the last 30 years have not seen a shift to a less collectivist Britain – the public’s views on taxation and social protection are very similar to those seen in 1983. However there have been shifts in attitudes towards social welfare for disadvantaged groups in society.

Consistently high proportions say it should be the government’s responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for the old (96%), and to provide health care for the sick (87%). But there has been a decrease in the proportion believing it is the government’s responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed, with 59% saying this down from 81% in 1985. Much of this change occurred during Labour’s time in power.

Welfare: a change of direction?

In 2012 there is some sign of the trend towards negative views of the unemployed starting to reverse.

The most recent British Social Attitudes survey finds a public more likely to support extra spending on benefits, with 34% saying this compared with 28% in 2011.

There are also signs of a more sympathetic view of benefit claimants, with more people than in 2011 agreeing that cutting benefits would damage too many people’s lives (47% up from 42% in 2011), and fewer people saying that benefits are too high and discourage work (51% down from 62% in 2011).
Introduction

In this chapter, we consider public attitudes to the role of government in the economy, the provision of public services and social security, and analyse how these have changed over time. In particular, we address the question of whether the British public has become less ‘collectivist’ over the past three decades, in terms of the extent of its support for key publicly-funded services and the provision of welfare benefits to different groups in the population.

Throughout this report we set out the many and varied ways in which Britain has changed over the last 30 years. One much discussed consequence of these changes has been that many people have more scope now to make their own choices about how they wish to live than would have been the case 30 years ago. But what impact might these changes have had on public attitudes towards the role of government? If individualism gives people more freedom to choose for themselves, perhaps they may be less willing to show solidarity with those whose experiences differ markedly to their own? As a result, we might find declining support for a welfare state that shares the risks of poor health or economic misfortune, or engages in substantial income or wealth redistribution.

Alternatively, there might be other important influences on public attitudes towards the government's role in the economy and its provision of public services. These might behave in a cyclical, rather than a secular, manner. In particular, attitudes to government provision could be expected to be influenced by economic circumstances that shape the extent to which individuals view government provision as necessary and its recipients as deserving. Equally, reform of the welfare state has become a central and divisive issue in contemporary British politics. Attitudes are likely to be influenced by government policy debates and the extent to which people regard policy as sufficient in delivering an ‘ideal’ level of social protection. In other words, we might expect to find that attitudes are mediated by the public's current and recent experiences of different levels of provision, and the debates that surround this. In this chapter we seek to identify how best to account for changing attitudes to the role of government over the past three decades.

We also consider more recent changes in attitudes and how these might be understood in the context of the recent experience of recession and an ongoing programme of government welfare reform. As part of its fiscal consolidation measures, the coalition government has introduced a number of reforms to social security entitlements and levels of benefit payments, many of which have been subject to fierce political debate. From April 2013, a cap of £26,000 a year has been placed on the total value of benefits that can be claimed by families, affecting some 40,000 households. Child Benefit has been withdrawn from higher income earners and its rate frozen. The government has broken with the historic practice of uprating core working age benefits by Consumer Price Inflation and restricted the level instead to one per cent in 2013/2014, while the main elements of working tax credits and childcare support have been held constant in cash terms. Tenants in social housing with spare bedrooms now receive lower rates of Housing Benefit, while the national system of Council Tax Benefit has been replaced with localised assistance. Disability Living Allowance for working age claimants has been replaced by a new Personal Independence Payment and claimants of Employment Support Allowance are being assessed for their work capabilities, with those deemed ready for work transferred to Job Seeker's Allowance. In addition, a major new system of integrated benefits and credits – the Universal Credit – is being slowly introduced.
Although each of these reforms has proved politically contentious, the coalition government claims that it has broad public support for its measures to reduce social security expenditure, particularly for working age claimants. Opinion polls consistently show that large majorities of the public believe that many social security benefits are claimed by people who do not deserve them. Unlike support for the National Health Service, popular attachment to the welfare state appears to have weakened considerably over the last 30 years. In much popular discourse, the welfare state – once a towering achievement of the post-war Beveridge generation – has become a byword for social breakdown, irresponsibility and mistrust within communities.

Will this erosion of popular support for welfare spending survive the cuts to benefit entitlements? In previous recessions, public attitudes have tended to become more sympathetic to benefit recipients as the impact of joblessness and income loss becomes more widespread. Yet last year’s British Social Attitudes report found little evidence of that happening this time round, despite the depth and longevity of the economic crisis. The hardening in public attitudes towards welfare spending, although far from uniform, showed little sign of abating (Clery, 2012). The coalition government has been emboldened by this popular mood to continue implementing its welfare reform agenda and even to heighten the political rhetoric accompanying it.

The second aim of this chapter is therefore to examine whether this apparent permafrost of hardened public attitudes has started to thaw as benefit cuts and other welfare reforms begin to bite. We begin by examining attitudes to overall levels of taxation and public spending, the role of government in providing public services and social security, and attitudes to whether government should reduce inequality in the income distribution. We then examine public attitudes to particular benefits and groups of benefit claimants, before probing the question of whether these attitudes have started to change, and if so, among which groups in society. In addition, we relate these findings to recent academic literature on the evolution of welfare states in the European Union.

What should the role of government be?

We begin by considering the public’s views on levels of government taxation and spending and what it thinks the government’s responsibilities in specific areas of social protection and the economy should be. If the British public is less collectivist than it has been in the past, we might expect to see a long-term decline in support for government taxation and spending, and a restriction in the activities regarded as governmental responsibilities.

Government taxation and spending

First, we examine responses to a long-standing question about the role of government, framed in terms of the extent of taxation and spending. Since 1983, we have asked respondents to choose one of three courses of action for the government:

- 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
While we might expect a public which has become less collectivist to be less supportive of government taxation and spending than it has been in the past, Figure 2.1 in fact reveals that responses to this question in 2012 are very similar to when the British Social Attitudes survey was first conducted in 1983. In both years roughly a third of the public express support for increased taxes and higher public spending (32 and 34 per cent respectively); a little over half want the levels of tax and spend kept where they are (53 and 54 per cent respectively); and only a small minority (nine and six per cent respectively) want both taxes and public spending cut.

However, there have been some notable shifts in attitudes during the past three decades. While support for increased taxes and spending rose in the 1980s and 1990s, the growth in expenditure during the period of the New Labour government, especially during its second and third terms of office (2001–2010) appeared to satisfy the desire of at least a third of the public to invest more in public services. This trend was interpreted in previous British Social Attitudes reports as a reaction to increased public spending during Labour’s period in power (Curtice, 2010). In contrast, the public’s appetite for a radical scaling back of taxes and spending has been consistently low since the early 1980s. There is very little public support for significant cuts to key public services and social protection in return for lower taxes. While the majority of the public appear supportive of maintaining or increasing levels of government taxation and spending, it appears that fluctuations in this support are cyclical and tend to occur in response to adjustments in government activity.

**Figure 2.1 Attitudes to tax and spend, 1983–2012**

The data on which Figure 2.1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

**Government responsibilities and priorities for spending**

As well as being influenced by levels of taxation and spending, the public’s view of the extent to which government should tax and spend may be underpinned by people’s perceptions of what the government's role should be in public life. To examine views on this matter and whether they have changed over time, we turn to a set of questions asked a number of times on the British Social Attitudes survey since 1985. Specifically, respondents are asked:
On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government's responsibility to...

... reduce income differences between the rich and the poor
... provide a job for everyone who wants one
... provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed
... provide decent housing for those who can't afford it
... provide health care for the sick
... provide a decent standard of living for the old
... keep prices under control

[Definitely should be, probably should be, probably should not be, definitely should not be]

The data, presented in Table 2.1, indicate that public perceptions of government responsibility in relation to different areas have not evolved in a consistent way over the past three decades, suggesting that there has not been a universal shift in views regarding the nature and extent of the government's responsibilities.

We see long-standing and near universal public support for the proposition that it is the government's responsibility to provide health care for the sick and a decent standard of living for older people – with almost all respondents, across the lifetime of the survey, thinking these should be government responsibilities. These attitudes underpin consistently high levels of public commitment to the National Health Service (see the Health chapter) and the basic State Pension (Clery, 2012 and Table 2.1). However, views on other areas of government responsibility have varied over time.

The public feels strongly that the government should be responsible for keeping prices under control. A higher proportion, almost nine in ten, view this as a government responsibility compared with those who believe that it should be the responsibility of government to provide employment for everyone who wants to work (slightly less than two-thirds express this view). Support for both propositions has fluctuated over time, both falling to a low point in 2006 and subsequently increasing, in 2012, to levels last seen in the 1990s. While the proportion thinking the government should be responsible for reducing differences in income between the rich and the poor is identical to that recorded in 1985, almost seven in ten, agreement with this stance has also fluctuated over time, though not in a consistent direction. However, when it comes to the provision of social security to particular groups in the population, support for government responsibility has declined. This is particularly marked in relation to the unemployed. In the 1980s, a large majority of people (more than eight in ten) believed it was the job of government to provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed. By 1996, support for this view had fallen to less than three-quarters and, by 2006, to just half. This proportion increased somewhat to 59 per cent in 2012 – and we shall explore whether this is indicative of broader trends later in this chapter – but it is still markedly lower than that recorded three decades ago. At the same time, we see a less marked decline in support for the proposition that government has a responsibility to provide decent housing for people who cannot afford it, from nine in ten in 1990 to slightly more than eight in ten now. These trends suggest that the public is less collectivist in relation to the needs of certain disadvantaged groups than it has been in the past – although this shift in views does not have appear to have affected attitudes to wider government responsibilities.
Table 2.1 Views on government responsibilities, 1985–2012

<table>
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<th>% saying it should be the government’s responsibility to ...</th>
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<th>89</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>06</th>
<th>12</th>
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<tr>
<td>... reduce income differences between the rich and the poor</td>
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<td>72</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>... provide a job for everyone who wants one</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... provide decent housing for those who can’t afford it</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>... provide health care for the sick</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... provide a decent standard of living for the old</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... keep prices under control</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>80</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 1502 1315 1163 993 2015 1928 932 950
Unweighted base 1530 1321 1197 989 2008 1911 930 956

n/a = not asked

We might expect to see these trends reflected in public priorities for extra government spending. Since its inception, the British Social Attitudes survey has asked respondents to identify their first and second choices for extra government spending. In Table 2.2 we see that, over the last three decades, a majority of people consistently choose health spending as one of their top two priorities within the overall envelope of public spending (71 per cent in 2012) – reflecting the near universal support for the government’s role in providing health care for the sick, noted earlier. Education is the second most popular choice, selected by just over six in ten in 2012, with other functions attracting much lower levels of support. While spending on education and health has been a public policy priority since the 1980s, there have been interesting fluctuations in the priority given to other, less popular, areas of government spending. An effect of the financial crisis has been to increase public support for extra spending on help for industry, which is now higher than it was in the late 1980s, albeit at only 15 per cent, while support for extra government spending on police and prisons has fallen by almost half since the start of the economic crisis in 2008 (from 19 per cent to 10 per cent).

Notably, only a very small proportion of the public – one in twenty – now support increased spending on social security benefits, a reduction from 13 per cent in the early 1990s. This figure has not increased in recent years, despite the recession and prolonged economic stagnation, reflecting the falling numbers who believe that the provision of a decent standard of living for the unemployed is a government responsibility (Table 2.1). Similarly, we see that support for extra government spending on housing has declined since 1983, when 20 per cent identified this as one of their top two priorities; this has fallen to 15 per cent in 2012. This decline may be linked to the reduction in support for the government providing decent housing for those who cannot afford it (Table 2.1).
Thus far we have seen that, overall, the British public does not appear to have become less collectivist over time in its support for government activities and spending. Levels of support for government taxation and spending are very similar to those witnessed three decades ago, with fluctuations in the intervening period clearly being linked to trends in government activity in this area. Attitudes towards government responsibility are also broadly similar to those recorded three decades ago. However, we see markedly reduced support for the government’s role in providing support for certain disadvantaged groups, particularly the unemployed, and this is reflected in lower priority being given to extra spending in related areas. Given this change, we now turn to explore further attitudes to the government’s role in providing welfare.

### The income gap and redistribution

In the previous section we found that a majority of people, more than two-thirds, believe it should be the government’s responsibility to reduce income differences between the rich and the poor, with levels of support remaining similar to those measured three decades ago. Yet support for the government’s role in providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed and, to a lesser extent, decent housing for those who cannot afford it, has declined over time – even though these activities could have the effect of marginally narrowing the income gap. To explore this apparent contradiction further, we first consider levels of concern about income inequality and support for the government’s redistributive role. We explore how views on these matters inform each other and influence attitudes towards the government’s role in providing welfare.

#### Concern about income inequality and support for redistribution

Since the mid-1980s, we have asked the public whether they think “the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes” is too large, about right or too small. To measure support for the government having a redistributive role, we have additionally asked people to identify how far they agree with the following statement:
The government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off

In Figure 2.2 we see that since 1983 there has been a high level of concern about income inequality and that this has recently risen. In 2010, three-quarters of the public agreed with the idea that the income gap was too large – slightly higher than the proportion who stated this view when the question was first asked in 1983, although there has been some fluctuation in support in the intervening period. By 2012, this figure had risen to more than eight in ten, with just 14 per cent agreeing that the gap is "about right". This rise may reflect well-publicised cases of bankers' bonuses and big increases in chief executive remuneration packages in recent years, as well as the so-called ‘Shareholder Spring’ of 2012, during which institutional investors at Barclays, Aviva and other big firms rejected CEO pay deals. Moreover, there is some evidence that the proportion of people holding the view that the income gap is too large changes in a cyclical way, increasing during and after periods of recession, where the public are more likely to have their own incomes squeezed and to witness the impact of earnings loss and widespread unemployment. Certainly this appeared to be the case in the aftermath of the early 1990s recession, where agreement with this view rose to a high of 87 per cent.

While more than eight in ten people think the income gap is currently too large, and as we saw in Table 2.1 nearly seven in ten believe the government has a responsibility to reduce income differences, only a little over four in ten agree that the government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off. In a previous analysis of British Social Attitudes data, Rowlingson et al. (2010) suggested there is a negative reaction to the "r word" itself, which may underpin this substantially lower level of support.

While this proportion is higher than in the mid-2000s, it remains lower than the 48 per cent recorded in the depth of the last recession in 1991 (though similar to the proportion who expressed this view in 1986, when the question was first asked). However, for the first time since 1995, we see a significantly higher proportion supporting rather than opposing government redistribution (41 per cent compared with 30 per cent). This suggests that the British public has not become less collectivist over time in its support for the government having a redistributive role, perhaps because, as suggested above, support for such a strategy primarily fluctuates in a cyclical way, increasing in times of economic hardship.

Figure 2.2 Attitudes towards income inequality and redistribution, 1983–2012

The data on which Figure 2.2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter
We have seen that there is a widespread and enduring view that the income gap is too large, and considerable support for the proposition that the government should reduce income differences. We might anticipate that these views would translate into support for the government’s role in providing social security. However, we have already noted a long-term decline in support for the government’s role in providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed and a decent standard of housing for those who cannot afford it – two activities that could be viewed as key aims of the welfare state. In the remainder of this chapter, we consider how public attitudes to the government’s role as a provider of welfare are changing over time – and whether these reflect either the enduring concern about income inequality and support for its reduction, or the declining support for the government’s role in supporting the most disadvantaged sections of society. Further, we consider the direction of recent changes in attitudes and what this might mean for the government’s welfare reform programme.

### Welfare benefits

Since its inception, the British Social Attitudes survey has asked a range of questions to measure the public’s support for spending on welfare and people’s views of welfare recipients. By examining these areas in turn, we can reflect again on whether or not the public has become less collectivist in its attitudes towards welfare over the past three decades.

#### Spending on benefits

We first consider public attitudes to welfare spending. As shown in Table 2.2, the public is less likely now to identify spending on “social security benefits” as one of its top two priorities for extra government spending, with 12 per cent selecting this option in 1983 compared with just five per cent now. To measure support for welfare spending, we have also regularly included a question on British Social Attitudes asking the public whether they agree or disagree that:

> The government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes

It is immediately apparent from Figure 2.3 that support for additional spending on welfare benefits for the poor is considerably lower now than it was when the question was first asked in 1987; at that point, more than half supported extra spending on welfare benefits, compared with just five per cent now. Much of this decline occurred in the 1990s, from almost six in ten (58 per cent) in 1991 advocating this, compared with less than three in ten (28 per cent) in 2011. In 2012, however, we see another change of direction, with 34 per cent of people supporting extra spending (an increase of six percentage points). While this overall trend reflects a hardening of attitudes through the 2000s and even through the 2008 recession, data for 2012 may indicate a break in the long-term trend, although it should be noted that similar shifts in opinion in recent years have proved temporary. In either case, what is clear is that the public are much less collectivist now in terms of their support for extra welfare spending than they were three decades ago.
Government spending and welfare

Figure 2.3 Views on government spending on benefits, 1987–2012

The data on which Figure 2.3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

In addition to measuring generic support for welfare spending, we have regularly asked respondents to identify their first and second priorities for extra spending on welfare; the data obtained in 2012 and at a number of points over the lifetime of the survey are presented in Table 2.3.

In line with previous years, retirement pensions continue to be the highest priority for extra spending on benefits, selected by more than seven in ten, followed by benefits for disabled people (selected by around six in ten). Both of these have historically been high public priorities compared with benefits for other groups, although support for retirement pensions is now somewhat higher than it was in 1983 and for much of the subsequent decade. Child benefits rose up the hierarchy of priorities from the mid-1980s onwards; however, in 2012, only slightly more than one third chose to prioritise them, a reduction of seven percentage points since 2010. This might reflect public attention to the issue of means-testing of Child Benefit. Alternatively, it could reflect media stories about benefit payments to large families and public support for cutting these benefits.

It is among those benefit types which have traditionally been lower priorities for extra spending that we observe the most substantial long-term changes. While one third of the public in 1983 prioritised benefits for the unemployed for extra spending, only slightly more than one in ten do so now – reflecting the earlier finding that providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed is less likely to be viewed as a government responsibility than it has been in the past. However, the prolonged economic crisis does appear to have increased the level of support for extra spending on benefits for the unemployed in the short-term, by five percentage points since 2007. A similar trend can be observed in the recession of the early 1990s, where of the proportion of people prioritising extra spending on unemployment benefits increased by ten percentage points between 1991 and 1993. This suggests that, while support for increased spending on unemployment benefits is in long-term decline, this decline can be abated in difficult economic circumstances. This reflects the finding of a recent analysis of British Social Attitudes data which concluded that, while attitudes to welfare are generally less clearly linked to economic circumstances than they have been in the past, this does remain the case for attitudes to the unemployed (Clery et al., 2013).
It is also interesting to note that support for extra spending on benefits for single parents remains low, at 14 per cent, a decline from the 21 per cent who prioritised this area for extra spending in 1983. This may reflect decreased support for the government’s role in providing support for disadvantaged groups such as the unemployed and those who cannot afford decent housing noted earlier – assuming that the public view single parents in this light.

Table 2.3 First and second priorities for extra spending on welfare, 1983–2012

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Retirement pensions</th>
<th>Child benefits</th>
<th>Benefits for the unemployed</th>
<th>Benefits for disabled people</th>
<th>Benefits for single parents</th>
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Weighted base | 1719 1645 1769 3066 2766 2930 2698 2836 2945 1187
Unweighted base | 1761 1675 1804 3100 2947 3029 2797 2918 2945 1167

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<th>Benefits for disabled people</th>
<th>Benefits for single parents</th>
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</table>

Weighted base | 1199 3620 3426 3287 3276 3210 3082 3297 3248
Unweighted base | 1234 3620 3426 3287 3272 3193 3094 3297 3248

Percentages sum the responses to two questions, so will add to more than 100 per cent

To probe this question further, we next turn to examine a series of long-standing questions about benefit recipients.

**Views of welfare recipients**

Since 1987 we have asked whether people agree or disagree with each of the following statements about welfare recipients in general and people in receipt of unemployment benefits specifically:

- **Cutting benefits would damage too many people’s lives**
- **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**
- **Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another**
- **Large numbers of people these days falsely claim benefits**
As Table 2.4 shows, around a third agree that welfare recipients “don’t really deserve any help”, similar to the proportion who agreed with this when the question was first asked in 1987 – although there have been some fluctuations over time, most markedly with agreement declining during the period of the early 1990s recession. On the other hand, nearly half agree that cutting benefits would “damage too many people’s lives”. While this figure is lower than the six in ten who subscribed to this view when the question was first asked in 2000, it nevertheless has risen by five percentage points between 2011 and 2012.

When it comes to recipients of unemployment benefits in particular, more than a third agree that most people in this group are “fiddling one way or another”, with little evidence of change over time. Similarly, more than eight in 10 people agree with the proposition that, “large numbers of people these days falsely claim benefits”. While this is substantially higher than the proportion in the late 1980s who thought this (around two-thirds in 1987), this figure hasn’t changed to a large degree since the late 1990s.

Despite stability in these views, levels of adherence to the belief that “most unemployed people could find a job if they wanted one” have changed substantially over the past three decades. Around a third of the public expressed this view in the early 1990s; this had increased to more than two-thirds by the mid-2000s. There is some evidence to suggest that support for this view declines in times of recession (agreement stood at a low point after the early 1990s recession), and it is in this context that we might view the decline in agreement since the financial crisis struck – from 68 per cent in 2008 to 54 per cent in 2012. Nevertheless, it is clear that the public views recipients of unemployment benefit as less deserving of welfare support than was the case three decades ago. Interestingly, this perception does not appear to have influenced views on the deservingness of welfare recipients as a whole. In addition, it appears that substantial levels of distrust of benefit claimants can apparently go hand in hand with an increased recognition that work is harder to find in an economic downturn.

These trends may explain why support for extra spending on unemployment benefits and agreement that the government is responsible for providing a good standard of living for the unemployed have declined in the long-term, while support for other areas of welfare provision and spending have experienced little change. In other words, the public may view the unemployed as less deserving than they have in the past, but this perception is limited to this particular type of welfare recipient.
Table 2.4 Attitudes towards people receiving welfare benefits, 1987–2012

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<td>% agree cutting benefits would damage too many people’s lives</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>% agree many people who get social security don’t really deserve any help</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>% agree around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>% agree most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another</td>
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<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>% agree large numbers of people these days falsely claim benefits</td>
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Weighted base

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n/a = not asked

To explore this further, we ask respondents to choose which of the following two statements comes closest to their view:

Benefits for unemployed people are too low and cause hardship,

or,

benefits for unemployed people are too high and discourage them from finding jobs

The responses obtained, presented in Figure 2.4, indicate a long-term shift towards the view that benefits are too high and discourage work (35 per cent in 1983, compared with 51 per cent in 2012). The increase in the belief that benefits are too high began in the late 1990s when Labour came into power,
and continued until 2008. Previous analyses of British Social Attitudes data have interpreted this trend as evidence that the views of the public, and of Labour Party supporters in particular, have moved in line with the tougher stance adopted by the Labour Party from the mid-1990s towards out-of-work benefits for working age claimants (Curtice, 2010; Clery, 2012). However, we cannot be certain whether the views of Labour Party supporters changed in response to the changing policy direction of their party, or vice versa. It should also be borne in mind that the composition of the group identifying themselves as Labour Party supporters would not have been static throughout this period.

Attitudes towards unemployment benefits perceptibly shifted in 2012, however, as the proportion saying that benefits for the unemployed are “too high and discourage work” fell by 11 percentage points to 51 per cent. This reflects the increase in support for extra spending on the unemployed, and suggests that we may be seeing the start of a decline in negative attitudes towards this group of benefit recipients, likely to be driven by current experiences of economic hardship. Nevertheless, the fact remains that attitudes to the unemployed and the role of government in providing support to them, across a range of measures, are much less sympathetic now than they were three decades ago – suggesting, again, that the public have become less ‘collectivist’ in relation to this group.

**Figure 2.4 Attitudes towards level of unemployment benefits, 1983–2012**

Although public attitudes to the unemployed are less collectivist than three decades ago, there are visible signs of change since 2011, with attitudes towards spending on unemployment benefits and the deservingness of recipients becoming less negative. To understand this specific pattern of change, we now consider whether it has occurred across the public as a whole or is confined to specific sections of society, and the likely explanations for this.

**Who has changed their mind?**

Although we have not witnessed overall long-term changes in concern about the income gap or in public support for redistribution, the stability in views at a societal level may conceal patterns of change within different sections of society. We therefore begin this section by considering whether different groups within society adopt different stances to these issues than they did three
decades ago. Previous analyses of British Social Attitudes data, focusing on trends in the views of different generations and subgroups of the population, have linked the hardening of attitudes to some benefits and benefit claimants with disproportionate changes among two specific groups: Labour supporters and young people (Clery, 2012; Clery et al., 2013; MORI, 2012). In this section we explore differences between these groups and the wider population as well as the influence of socio-economic group on people’s views towards spending and welfare (see the Social class chapter for an in-depth discussion of the relationship between class and attitudes).

The income gap and redistribution
Table 2.5 presents the proportions of different groups, defined by age, occupational class and party affiliation, who agree that the income gap is “too large”, and indicates how their views have changed between 1987 and 2012.[1] Clearly, the views of different groups have changed in varied ways over the past three decades, with the opinions of those who are oldest and who support the Conservative Party having changed the most, while there is no clear pattern of association with socio-economic group. Concern about the income gap has increased among those in the oldest age group by 13 percentage points, while among the youngest age group this has declined by five percentage points. Agreement with the view that the income gap is too large has increased by nine percentage points among Conservative Party supporters, while remaining stable for supporters of the two other main parties. As a result, the difference between the views of Conservative and Labour Party supporters has reduced since the 1980s, from 21 percentage points to 12 percentage points in 2012. As the two characteristics associated with the greatest degree of attitude change (being older and being a Conservative Party supporter), are known to be correlated, it is not possible to conclude which is driving the narrowing of views on inequality with the rest of the population. It is also worth noting that, between 2007 and 2012, movement in attitudes for different groups were rather similar – across all age, occupational and party affiliation groups (with the exception of blue-collar workers and Liberal Democrat supporters) there was a rise in those saying that the income gap is too large. This suggests that the key period of divergence in views between different occupational groups, party identifiers and age groups occurred somewhat earlier.
Table 2.5 The income gap is “too large”, by demographic group, 1987–2012

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<td>78</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>82</td>
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Even more interesting patterns emerge when we examine changes in views on redistribution. Table 2.6 demonstrates a similar pattern of attitudinal change for different age groups as that noted in relation to income inequality above. While in the 1980s the youngest age group was the most likely to support redistribution, it is within this group that we see the biggest decrease in support for redistribution over time (a fall of nine percentage points, while the two oldest age group’s views have remained stable). As a result, in 2012, we see little difference by age in levels of support for government redistribution.

Those in the lowest occupational group have become less likely to support redistribution, despite traditionally exhibiting higher support than other groups. While other occupational groups’ views have remained fairly stable, the proportion among this group agreeing that the government should redistribute income has fallen from 54 per cent in 1987, to 46 per cent in 2012.

Finally, support for redistribution has remained stable among those affiliating with the Liberal Democrats, and increased just by four per cent among those supporting the Conservative Party. However support among Labour Party supporters has declined by 17 percentage points in the same period. Marked differences between Conservative Party supporters and supporters of the other two main parties do remain – although these are somewhat less pronounced than they were in 1987.

As with views on the income gap, the views of different age groups on redistribution have changed in a consistent way since 2007, indicating that divergence in their views occurred earlier than this. However, in the case of redistribution, this is not true for groups defined by occupation or party identification. It is interesting to note a particularly sharp rise (of 15 percentage points, compared with nine or less for each other group) in support for redistribution among those defined as working class over the period of the
financial crisis and recession since 2007. It may be that the views of this group have changed most in this period as they were the most likely to be affected by these events. Support for redistribution has also increased most among Labour and Liberal Democrat Party supporters since 2007 (by 15 and 13 percentage points respectively, compared with a rise of seven percentage points among Conservative Party supporters). This is at odds with the long-term trend noted above, and indicates that the convergence of views witnessed over the past three decades may have begun to reverse.

Table 2.6 Views on income redistribution, by demographic group, 1987–2012

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While there has been little change at the societal level, we can therefore conclude that attitudes to income inequality and redistribution have moved in varied directions and at different rates for various subgroups within the population over the past three decades. The views of those who were once the least likely to identify income inequality as an issue or to endorse redistribution have changed the most, becoming far more ‘collectivist’ in nature, while the opposite can be seen to be true for those who once adopted the alternative viewpoint. As a result, the public appears more united in its attitudes to these issues than it did three decades ago although, at a societal level, we have seen that it has not appeared to have moved in a more or less collectivist direction. Nevertheless, more recent change suggests that these long-term trends may be starting to reverse – with the public again becoming less united in its views.
Welfare
We next examine whether attitudes to welfare have changed in similar ways among different sections of the population over time, focusing on those two measures where we have seen most change over the past three decades – namely the declining view that the government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, and the growing perception that unemployment benefits are too high and discourage work.

So far we have seen that the views of the youngest age group, lowest occupational group and Labour Party have become less ‘collectivist’ regarding redistribution. In Table 2.7 we see the changing attitudes of these groups in relation to welfare. Support for increased welfare spending has declined relatively evenly among groups defined by age and occupational class; however, the support of those identifying with the Labour Party has declined more dramatically than of the support of those identifying with the Conservative Party – by 29 percentage points, compared with 18 percentage points for Conservative Party supporters. When we examine the increasingly prevalent view that unemployment benefits are “too high and discourage work” (Table 2.8), we see that support for this standpoint has increased most among the youngest age group and among supporters of the Labour Party (two characteristics which are known to be correlated). The view that unemployment benefits are too high has increased by 31 percentage points among the youngest age group, compared with 17 percentage points among the oldest age group. Among Labour Party supporters this view has increased by 27 percentage points, (compared with a slightly lower 24 percentage points among Conservative supporters, and 22 percentage points among Liberal Democrat supporters). This, together with findings from Table 2.7, reflects findings from other analyses of British Social Attitudes data which show that the development of less collectivist public attitudes towards welfare have been most pronounced among Labour Party supporters, following the policy direction adopted by the party since the mid-1990s – though, as noted previously, we cannot be certain about causality in this instance. Nevertheless, unlike attitudes to income inequality and government redistribution, the view that unemployment benefits are too high has risen in popularity among all subgroups since 1987.

However, when we focus on very recent change, between 2011 and 2012, we see that these patterns are not replicated. While the overall increase of six percentage points in support for more government spending on welfare benefits since 2011 is broadly reflected across all sections of the population, it is interesting to note that it is particularly marked in the highest occupational groups, and less marked in the lowest. This is intriguing, given that lowest occupational groups would have been more likely to require welfare benefits in a period of economic hardship. In contrast, the decline of 11 percentage points between 2011 and 2012 in the proportion agreeing with the view that benefits for unemployed people “are too high and discourage work” occurred relatively evenly across all sections of society, though was considerably less pronounced among the oldest age group, those aged 65 or more. These findings suggest that the long-term trends in subgroups’ attitudes are not necessarily set to continue.
Table 2.7 Support for more government spending on welfare benefits for the poor, by demographic group, 1987–2012[4]

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Table 2.8 Unemployment benefits are too high and discourage work, by demographic group, 1987–2012[5]

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While the British public as a whole does not appear to have become less collectivist over the past three decades, with the exception of its attitudes towards the unemployed, views have changed in quite varied ways in different sections of society. The upshot of these changes is that, while the British people are not more collectivist than they were three decades ago, they do appear more united in their views – with the attitudes of different age groups, party supporters and social classes appearing to converge on most matters. However, when we focus on more recent periods, alternative trends are evident, suggesting that this convergence occurred in an earlier period. Indeed, in recent years, we can again see views beginning to diverge.

Clearly though, the public has become less collectivist towards the unemployed and, while this change is particularly pronounced among Labour Party supporters and the youngest age group (18 to 34 year olds), it is nevertheless one displayed by all sections of society. In our final section, we seek to examine this change in the context of the existing literature on attitudes to welfare.

What drives attitudes to the welfare state?

What explains these differences in support for different benefits and services? Petersen et al. (2012) use an evolutionary psychological hypothesis to suggest that attitudes are shaped by cognitive processes that trigger anger at perceived opportunist and parasitic behaviours. Their analysis of surveys in Denmark and the USA indicates that subjects’ perceptions of recipients’ effort to find work drives welfare opinions. Van Oorschot (2006) examines European public perceptions of the relative ‘deservingness’ of four needy groups, using the 1999/2000 European Values Study survey. A consistent pattern is found across the population, with elderly people being seen as the most deserving, closely followed by sick and disabled people; unemployed people are seen as less deserving still, and immigrants as least deserving of all.

These findings broadly support the attitudinal data presented in this chapter. The public operates a ‘hierarchy of desert’, in which pensioners are seen as most deserving of their social security

Some academic studies suggest that welfare systems create institutions that not only affect individuals’ personal interests, but also have norm-shaping functions. Jæger (2009), for example, analysed International Social Survey Programme data across 15 countries and found variance in support for redistribution depending on the ‘welfare regime’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990). On average support for greater redistribution is significantly higher in conservative regimes than in social democratic ones, where it is in turn higher than in liberal regimes. But the variation in attitudes also changes by regime, implying a two-dimensional effect. This might also explain why the British public is strongly attached to collective provision that has institutional form, in particular the National Health Service.

Van Oorschot et al. (2012) use the 2008 wave of the European Social Survey to analyse attitudes towards the outcomes and consequences of social policy, which have thus far been neglected in the literature. In Europe, people are more
likely to view the welfare state as having positive social consequences than to associate it with negative economic and moral ones. However, public opinion in the UK, as well as in Slovakia and Hungary, is skewed in the other direction, with relatively large majorities seeing negative economic and moral consequences and smaller proportions viewing positive social consequences.

Reeskens and Van Oorschot (2013) find that negative and positive perceptions are not in a zero-sum relationship: people may, and many do, combine negative and positive perceptions at the same time. In fact, in more developed welfare states the public perceives both the negative and the positive consequences more strongly. The authors conclude that citizens seem to have a more nuanced view on the consequences of the welfare state than policy makers. Our analysis of British Social Attitudes supports this more complex interpretation of popular views on social security: it is not all good or bad.

Some studies have recently attempted to address this perceived dissonance between different expressed attitudes, by pointing out that perceived risks often crowd out people’s values. This is a vein of argument which naturally leads to a discussion of the portrayal of welfare recipients in the media.

Citing Bartels (2008), who draws attention to the fact that many Americans support tax policies that run completely counter to their own values on distribution and justice, Kulin and Svallfors (2011) examine what they see as a paradox in people’s expressed attitudes to welfare, which often run counter to their values (attitudes being focused on a specific object or situation, and values being abstract, idealised and general). They argue that personal values can play an important role in attitude formation, but the extent to which they do so must be understood by considering the moderating effect of contextual factors, and in particular the ways in which self-interest in times of perceived risk can cut across such values. This is grounded in previous work on the link between attitudes towards welfare spending and risks (such as Cusack et al. 2005).

Likewise, Petersen et al. (2010) analyse how values interact with perceptions to shape people’s attitudes to welfare, in order to suggest ways in which contextual information can crowd out value judgements on welfare. Perceptions of risk derived from the media or elsewhere trigger a “deservingness heuristic”, which spontaneously guides attitude formation whenever informational cues to the ‘deservingness’ of welfare recipients are available, effectively crowding out values from the judgement process.

In order to test this hypothesis, they carried out a pair of studies asking participants about their support for a specific welfare policy, after providing them with one of four short descriptions of a specific welfare recipient. The descriptions varied according to the perceived deservingness of the recipient. Just as Van Oorschot (2006) found, there were quite large differences in the participants’ support for welfare provision depending on the specific welfare recipient they were considering, and how ‘deserving’ they were perceived to be. These differences were replicated across the sample, regardless of the participant’s level of political sophistication (which undermines the ‘classic’ heuristic model which posits that such heuristics are evoked as a fallback mechanism when people are unable to link their values to a specific political context).
The fact that individuals are highly sensitive to cues that portray benefit recipients in an ‘undeserving’ light, and the finding that such cues can actively crowd out values from attitude formation, has major implications for how the mass media and political elites should frame public support for welfare policies.

Conclusions

The past three decades have not seen a universal shift in attitudes towards the government and its role in social protection and the economy. Levels of support for government taxation and spending activities in many areas are comparable to those recorded 30 years ago. Where there is clear evidence that the public has become less collectivist is in its views on government welfare provision for the unemployed. While attitudes towards welfare provision for this group behave to some extent in a cyclical way, becoming more supportive during and after periods of recession (a pattern which may explain an increase in such support since 2011), the dominant trend has been one of declining support for government spending and provision in this area.

While British society as a whole has not become less collectivist, the attitudes and perceptions of different groups have changed in very distinctive ways. So, while attitudes to income inequality and redistribution have remained fairly stable, the views of those groups who were traditionally the most likely to perceive income equality as a problem or to support redistribution (younger people and Labour supporters) have become less collectivist; at the same time, the views of older people and Conservative Party supporters, who were traditionally the least likely to adopt these views, have become more collectivist. As a result the British people are less divided on these issues than they were in the 1980s. Over the same period, while attitudes to welfare for the unemployed have become less collectivist at the societal level, this shift has been most pronounced among young people and Labour Party supporters.

There is some evidence that we may be approaching a turning point, however. The 2012 data indicate that austerity and the experience of cuts to social security may be changing public attitudes towards a more sympathetic view of benefit claimants; in particular we see significantly more support for welfare spending in general, and for spending on unemployment benefits in particular, than we did in 2011. For that reason, the 2013 survey will be particularly interesting, given the extent of the welfare changes taking place in 2013/2014. Concern about the income gap between rich and poor, and support for redistribution, have also risen since the financial crisis. Whether these shifts mark the beginning of a long-term trend or simply a temporary blip in public attitudes as has been witnessed in the past, to be reversed when economic conditions improve, is likely to have significant political implications.
Notes
1. 1987 was chosen as the starting point for our analysis in order to use a comparable measure of social class with all subsequent years.
2. The bases for Table 2.5 are as follows:

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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate (blue-collar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party affiliation</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
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</table>

| 2007 | 2012 |
|--------------------------------------------------|
| Weighted base | Unweighted base | Weighted base | Unweighted base |
| Age |
| 18–34 | 563 | 450 | 935 | 635 |
| 35–54 | 751 | 757 | 1147 | 1108 |
| 55–64 | 318 | 340 | 486 | 532 |
| 65+ | 455 | 552 | 674 | 967 |
| Occupational class |
| Professional/managerial | 820 | 831 | 1311 | 1280 |
| Intermediate (white-collar) | 336 | 348 | 440 | 489 |
| Independent | 181 | 183 | 283 | 274 |
| Intermediate (blue-collar) | 279 | 263 | 400 | 400 |
| Working class | 390 | 407 | 640 | 667 |
| Party affiliation |
| Conservative | 513 | 551 | 830 | 866 |
| Labour | 717 | 718 | 1102 | 1090 |
| Liberal Democrat | 185 | 197 | 195 | 200 |
| All | 2090 | 2102 | 3248 | 3248 |
3. The bases for Table 2.6 are as follows:

### Agreement the government should redistribute income from the rich to the poor, by demographic group, 1987–2012

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4. The bases for Table 2.7 are as follows:

**Support for more government spending on welfare benefits for the poor, by demographic group, 1987–2012**

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5. The bases for Table 2.8 are as follows:

### Unemployment benefits are too high and discourage work, by demographic group, 1987–2012

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<td>505</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate (blue-collar)</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>1052</td>
<td>1058</td>
<td>1062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>3082</td>
<td>3094</td>
<td>3311</td>
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</table>
References


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 views expressed are those of the authors alone.
Appendix

The data on which Figure 2.1 is based are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A.1 Taxation and spending, 1983–2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase taxes/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep taxes/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce taxes/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data on which Figure 2.2 is based are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A.2 Attitudes towards income inequality and redistribution, 1983–2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saying the income gap is too large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreeing the government should redistribute income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| % saying the income gap is too large | 82  | 80  | 82  | 78  | 73  | n/a | 76  | 76  | 75  | 75  | 78  | 75  | n/a | 82  |
| agreeing the government should redistribute income | 39  | 38  | 39  | 42  | 32  | 32  | 34  | 32  | 38  | 37  | 36  | 37  | 41  | n/a |
| Weighted base | 2991 2821 2929 3634 2610 3539 3744 3576 3963 2951 2810 2841 3248 |
| Unweighted base | 2980 2795 2900 3621 2609 3559 3748 3578 3990 2942 2791 2845 3248 |

n/a = not asked
The data on which Figure 2.3 is based are shown below.

### Table A.3 Attitudes towards spending on welfare benefits, 1987–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>91</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>94</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>98</th>
<th>99</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% agree government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1243</td>
<td>2529</td>
<td>2428</td>
<td>2595</td>
<td>2957</td>
<td>3145</td>
<td>3103</td>
<td>2546</td>
<td>2478</td>
<td>2991</td>
<td>2821</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1281</td>
<td>2604</td>
<td>2481</td>
<td>2567</td>
<td>2929</td>
<td>3135</td>
<td>3085</td>
<td>2531</td>
<td>2450</td>
<td>2980</td>
<td>2795</td>
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The data on which Figure 2.4 is based are shown below.

### Table A.4 Attitudes towards unemployment benefit level and spending on benefits, 1983–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>83</th>
<th>84</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>86</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>90</th>
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<th>96</th>
<th>97</th>
<th>98</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits for unemployed people are ...</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... too low and cause hardship</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... too high and discourage work</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Neither</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
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<td>1769</td>
<td>3066</td>
<td>2766</td>
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<td>3469</td>
<td>1199</td>
<td>3620</td>
<td>1355</td>
<td>3146</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1719</td>
<td>1675</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>3100</td>
<td>2847</td>
<td>3029</td>
<td>2797</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits for unemployed people are ...</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... too low and cause hardship</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>... too high and discourage work</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3248</td>
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Politics
A disengaged Britain? Political interest and participation over 30 years

There is common concern that the British public is increasingly becoming disengaged with politics. Only a small majority now turns out to vote, and fewer than ever before identify with a political party. This chapter examines trends in attitudes towards politics over the past 30 years, exploring differences among the electorate, and considers what this might mean for the future health of British democracy.

Declining engagement?
Overall we see a downward trend in engagement: compared with 30 years ago fewer people identify with a political party, and fewer feel that the political system works for them. However, slightly more people are interested in politics than in the mid-1980s (although still a minority), and more feel they can influence government.

The changing electorate
Younger people are less likely to identify with a political party, less likely to believe it a civic duty to vote, are less interested in politics and less likely to have undertaken conventional political activities than younger people in the past. The more highly educated remain more engaged with politics.

A majority feel the political system is not working for them. In 2011 75% agreed that parties are only interested in votes, up from 64% in 1987.

However, the percentage who feel they have no say in what government does has fallen from 71% in 1986 to 59% now.

Two-thirds of those in their 20s or early 30s identify with a particular political party, compared with 85% of the same age group back in 1983.

Although the gap between the highly educated and less well educated in terms of their interest in politics is narrowing, it does persist: 52% of those with a degree or higher education are interested in politics, compared with 24% of those with no qualification.
Introduction

In the last general election in 2010, a majority of people in the United Kingdom – 65 per cent – turned out to vote (UK Political Info). And in 2012, seven in ten (72 per cent) Britons say they identify with a particular political party. Thus, it seems that the majority of the British public today is engaging with our democratic system. So why is there so much discussion about the declining health of Britain’s representative democracy? We use 30 years of data from British Social Attitudes to address this question. We ask whether there is evidence of a decline in public engagement with how Britain is governed and, if so, why that might be. And we consider what the trends over the past 30 years can tell us about the likely future of Britain’s democratic system.

It has been argued that a decline in class, as well as partisan identities, and a shift away from collective feelings of being part of a society to taking a more individualist approach, have all been linked to a reduced participation in conventional democratic routes (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000, Clarke et al., 2004). (In fact our latest British Social Attitudes findings in the Social class chapter do not support this theory of decline in class identity, but do support the decoupling of class identity and political partisanship.) More recent attempts by government to engage the public in electoral reform seem to attract minority interest. When British Social Attitudes asked the public about the proposed electoral reforms designed to increase participation and accountability, we found lukewarm support (Curtice and Seyd, 2012). This lack of interest was reflected in the very low turnout of 15 per cent for the 2012 police crime and commissioner elections in England (The Electoral Commission, 2013). The only potential reform of majority attraction to the British public appears to be more direct forms of democracy (such as referenda and the ability to recall errant MPs).

In addition to these wider societal changes, during the last two or three decades, there have been a number of high profile political scandals and perceived major errors on the part of governments. We know these have affected the British public’s confidence with politicians, and government more generally. With the ‘cash for questions’ scandal in the 1990s, followed by the MPs’ expenses scandal in 2009[1], high profile U-turns following the 2010 election on student fees and the NHS, it is perhaps no surprise that the British public has recently been labelled “disgruntled, disillusioned and disengaged” in relation to political life in this country (Fox et al., 2012: 9).

With three decades’ worth of information about public attitudes to politics, government and politicians, British Social Attitudes has a wealth of data to allow us to address the question of how far the public’s engagement with politics has actually changed, reflecting changes in society and a history of political problems and scandals. We track people’s engagement with politics across a range of dimensions: identification with political parties, interest in and understanding of politics, feelings of civic duty, political trust, and engagement with conventional and alternative routes of democratic participation. We ask whether a decline in turnout at general election time reflects a reduced interest in politics and in influencing the way in which the country is run, or whether other things are at play. In particular, we look at the views and participation of the young electorate and ask what British Social Attitudes can tell us about the future of our democracy – in the 2015 general election and beyond.
Is there need for growing concern?

With a majority of the public participating in general elections, and most people feeling that they identify with one of the political parties involved, why are there discussions about an increasingly disengaged electorate? Across three key measures, we find a decline over the past 30 years in public participation with the conventional democratic process.

Voting

Voting is crucial to the health of democracy. Low turnout raises the question as to whether the outcomes of elections reflect the views of the British public as a whole. Although the majority of the British public turned out to vote at the last general election, it was by no means everybody: a third of eligible voters did not do so. Clearly, there is a section of society who chose not to exercise its right to vote on that day. Fewer people have voted in the last three general elections than they ever have in the past: the worry is that we are now on a downward trajectory (Figure 3.1). Official records for general elections between 1922 and 1997 show turnout never fell below 70 per cent (and reached a high of 84 per cent in 1950). In 1983, the year in which British Social Attitudes started, 73 per cent of the population turned out to vote, returning Margaret Thatcher with a sizeable majority. In contrast, when the Labour Party was re-elected in 2001, the proportion who voted was only 59 per cent. Although turnout was higher again in 2010, it was still lower than traditional levels. We know there are many reasons why people might turn out to vote, including the perceived difference between parties and how closely run the race is (Curtice, 2010). However, the closely fought election of 2010, while an improvement on turnout earlier this century, still did not attract participation levels as high as general elections in the 1990s and earlier. This is coupled with the fact that voting in local elections has always been comparatively low and that, too, has dropped over time. After a peak in 1990, local election turnout dropped dramatically to a low in 2000, though since then shows some small signs of recovery (Rallings et al., 2005).

Party identification

Identifying with a political party is known to increase significantly the likelihood of voting for that party at election time (Clarke et al., 2004). Traditionally party identification was rooted in social class (Butler and Stokes, 1969). At the same time the Labour and Conservative parties took distinct positions on issues, mirroring their class-based support. As class self-identifications have changed and parties have reached out to non-core voters, we see a decline in partisanship and the power this once held when voting (Clarke et al., 2004).

The proportion of people who identify with a particular political party has also declined over time. Over the past 30 years, we have asked people about this using a series of questions.[2] Figure 3.1 shows an overall decline in people saying they identified with a political party from around nine in ten people (87 per cent) in 1983 to under eight in ten (76 per cent) now. In 2012, one in five people (21 per cent) say they do not identify with any political party.
Figure 3.1 Voting in general elections and party identification, 1983–2012

In this figure no party identification ("None") only includes those who explicitly deny that they identify with a party. It excludes those saying "don’t know", or giving some other answer other than naming a party. Liberal Democrat 1983–1987 includes those who answered Liberal or Social Democratic Party. Source: UK turnout figures from UK Political Info

The data on which Figure 3.1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

Coupled with this, there has been a drop in the proportion of people who claim to have a strong affiliation with a particular party (Table 3.1). When those who identify with a party were asked whether their attachment is "very strong, fairly strong, or not very strong", in 1987 almost half (46 per cent) of the British public said they had a "very strong" or "fairly strong" identification. By 2010, only around a third (36 per cent) of the public said this. So, not only do fewer people feel they identify with any political party, but among those who do, fewer are expressing a strong engagement.

Table 3.1 Trends in strength of party identification, election years between 1987 and 2010, and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly strong</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very strong</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>+7</td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>+14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base: 2847, 3620, 3287, 2847, 3294, 2985
Unweighted Base: 2766, 3620, 3287, 2766, 3294, 2983

A civic duty to vote?

A decline over time in the proportion of people feeling attached to any one political party does not necessarily mean that there has been a decline in people feeling that they have a civic duty to vote, an issue which may be more strongly related to feelings around the rights and freedoms associated with being a British citizen than allegiance to a political party. However, British Social Attitudes shows that there has been a decline in numbers thinking that they have a duty to vote (Figure 3.2). Since 1987 (asked most recently in 2011), we have asked which of the following statements came closest to someone’s views about general elections:
In a general election …

It’s not really worth voting
People should vote only if they care who wins
It’s everyone’s duty to vote

There has been a long-term decline in the proportion saying “it’s everyone’s duty to vote”, from 76 per cent in 1987 to 62 per cent in 2011. That said, there has been an upturn since 2008 in the proportions saying this: perhaps the decline has halted, and is possibly reversing. Certainly, others have shown that a sense of duty to vote is one of the strongest predictors of why people cast their vote (Clarke et al., 2004), and a higher turnout in 2010 has coincided with a small increase in the proportions saying that voting is a civic duty.

Figure 3.2 Duty to vote, 1987–2011

Is there less interest in having a say in how the country is run?

We see that over the past three decades participation in conventional politics has declined. Does this mean that the British public is actually less interested in politics per se than it used to be? Or perhaps that people are now less interested in engaging with central government politics, but rather express their views on how the country should be run in different ways?

Interest in politics

Firstly, we see that, no, people are not less interested than before. Table 3.2 shows people’s responses to the following question, asked by British Social Attitudes since 1986:

How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics

... a great deal, quite a lot, some, not very much, or, none at all?
In fact, the majority of the British public has never reported being very interested in politics. In 1986, three in ten people (29 per cent) said they were interested “a great deal” or “quite a lot”, and the pattern was very similar through the 1990s and 2000s. Recently, there are signs of slightly more people being interested in politics than before (although still only a minority): in 2012, 36 per cent of people say they are interested.[3] While this has fluctuated over time (data not shown), our latest reading is seven percentage points up on our 1986 results. So, the fact that fewer people have been voting in recent general elections does not appear to be simply a function of reduced levels of interest in politics.

### Table 3.2 Interest in politics, 1986, 1996, 2003 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great deal/quite a lot</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much/none at all</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
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<td>4432</td>
<td>1099</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1548</td>
<td>3620</td>
<td>4432</td>
<td>1103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That said there certainly is an association between someone being interested in politics and whether they vote in a general election (Clarke et al., 2004) and the recent increase in turnout occurred mainly among the interested (Curtice, 2010). In the 2010 British Social Attitudes survey 86 per cent of those with a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of interest in politics reported voting in the May general election, compared with only 53 per cent of those with “not very much” interest or “none at all”.[4]

### Other ways of engaging in the political process

Turning to the next question, of whether people are engaging in different ways in the political process, we look at the public’s responses to the following question (last asked in 2011), covering both conventional and unconventional forms of engagement:

> And have you ever done any of the things on this card about a government action which you thought was unjust and harmful?

- **Contact my MP or MSP**
- **Speak to an influential person**
- **Contact a government department**
- **Contact radio, TV or a newspaper**
- **Sign a petition**
- **Raise the issue in an organisation I already belong to**
- **Go on a protest or demonstration**
- **Form a group of like-minded people**
- **None of these**

Table 3.3 shows that non-electoral participation has largely increased over the past 30 years. People are more likely now to report, for example, signing a petition (37 per cent) and contacting their MP (16 per cent) than they were in 1983 (when the figures were 29 per cent and 10 per cent respectively), though...
this is lower than our reading from the early 1990s and 2000s. And while the proportions remain small, we have also seen increases in the reporting of other activities such as going on a protest or contacting the media. In part, some of this is likely due to the increasing ease of signing petitions and contacting officials through online channels, widening the public’s opportunities for engaging with political debates. Given that over the past few years e-petitions have become increasingly available, and recognised as a channel for putting public pressure on the government, we might expect this activity to significantly increase over the coming years.

Table 3.3 Undertaken political activity, 1983, 1991, 2002 and 2011

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Signed a petition</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted your MP</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gone on a protest or demonstration</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a government department</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken to an influential person</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised an issue in an organisation you belong to</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted radio, TV or newspaper</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formed a group of like-minded people</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 533 1422 2285 2198
Unweighted base 549 1445 2287 2215

Respondents could choose more than one answer and so columns do not add to 100 per cent

Do fewer people think that they can make a difference?

Given the British public appears no less interested in politics – and in fact is potentially more interested – and more people are turning to less conventional forms of political participation than in the 1980s, another question we look at is whether falls in electoral turnout and belief in voting as a civic duty can be linked to disillusionment with the current democratic process. Do fewer people trust governments, or politicians more specifically? Are they less likely to think the current political system is able and willing to meet its citizens’ needs – sometimes referred to as ‘system efficacy’ (Almond and Verba, 1965)? And are people perhaps less likely to feel that they themselves have leverage over what the government does – or, in other words, what are their feelings about their personal ‘political efficacy’? While there has been increasing public distrust in government, it does not appear to have led to disillusionment in the ability for the public to influence the democratic process. In fact, there is some evidence of an increase in personal efficacy.
Political trust
Since 1986, British Social Attitudes has been asking people:

_How much do you trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party?_

Figure 3.3 shows public levels of trust in governments declining between 1986 and 2012, similar to the decline in turnouts, partisanship (allegiance to a particular political party) and in the proportion of the population feeling that it is their civic duty to vote. In 2012, three times as many people say that they “almost never” trust governments as did in 1986 (32 per cent in 2012, up from 11 per cent in 1986). At the same time the proportion who “just about always” or “most of the time” trust government has almost halved (18 per cent in 2012, down from 38 per cent in 1986). Although the overall trend is that levels of trust have reduced, it is not linear: traditionally trust recovers in the wake of general elections (these years are shown in the figure), but is shown to be short-lived (Bromley and Curtice, 2002). There are also indications of the impact of ‘sleaze’ allegations surrounding the 1992–1997 Conservative government, and the spike in distrust in 2009 when the MPs’ expenses scandal hit and a high of 40 per cent of the public said they “almost never” trusted government. Again, there is some indication of improved levels of trust in very recent years, an issue to which we return in our conclusions. Given the link between trust in government and likelihood of turning out to vote this is an important finding.[6]

![Figure 3.3 Trust in government, 1986–2012](image)

We found a similar pattern in relation to the question:

_And how much do you trust politicians of any party in Britain to tell the truth when they are in a tight corner?_

In fact, trust in politicians to tell the truth when in a tight corner has never been particularly high in Britain, and is consistently below levels of trust in government as a whole. British Social Attitudes first asked this question in 1994 when 49 per cent “almost never” trusted politicians; in 2009, when the expenses scandal broke, we saw the highest ever reading in distrust, with 60 per cent of the public “almost never” trusting politicians to tell the truth. Since then there has been some recovery, with the latest reading at 54 per cent, and an increase in the proportion saying they trust politicians “only some of the time” to 40 per cent.
**System efficacy**

There are three widely-used questions which help to provide an answer to the question of whether people think the political system can work for the citizens it serves. In essence, there has been little change in the views of the British public on this issue, at least since the mid-1990s. We ask respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree that:

*Parties are only interested in people’s votes, not in their opinions*

*Generally speaking, those we elect as MPs lose touch with people pretty quickly*

*It doesn’t really matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same*

Table 3.4 shows the proportion of people who “agree” or “agree strongly” to each of these three statements. As each statement expresses doubts about the political system’s responsiveness to voters’ needs, the higher the proportion the lower the level of political system efficacy. Throughout the period, high proportions express low feelings of political efficacy: that their vote and involvement in the political process is not going to make much difference. However, historically, such feelings have not changed much. There was a shift – in a negative direction – from 1994, with the lower levels of efficacy remaining since then.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>% agree</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties only interested in votes</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPs lose touch quickly</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t matter which party is in power</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>+17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1375</td>
<td>1140</td>
<td>2285</td>
<td>2198</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1410</td>
<td>1137</td>
<td>2287</td>
<td>2215</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n/a = not asked

"Doesn’t matter which party is in power" change measured is 1994–2011

**Political efficacy**

Our final question in this section was whether people now are more or less likely to feel they have any say over how governments run the country. British Social Attitudes asks how much people agree or disagree that:

*People like me have no say in what the government does*

*Voting is the only way people like me can have any say about how the government runs things*

*Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on*

The first statement is about whether people think that they can influence government decisions. The second statement measures whether people think...
they have any say beyond their right to vote. And the last one taps into whether the running of the country is seen as something elusive, beyond the reach of the ordinary person. On all three measures, the last 30 years has actually seen a perceived improvement in how far the public can influence the running of government and a greater understanding of the parliamentary system (Table 3.5).

In 1986, seven in ten people (71 per cent) agreed that they had no say in what government does, but this proportion is now six in ten (59 per cent), almost the lowest reading across the time period and a marked improvement on the late 1980s. The proportion who agree that voting is the only way to have a say is down eight percentage points from 73 per cent in 1994 to 60 per cent now. On the third statement, with rising education levels, we might expect the population as a whole to feel more able to understand politics and government now than when British Social Attitudes began in 1983. Overall, this is the case, with a decline of 12 percentage points between 1986 and 2012 in the proportion saying that government is too complicated to follow (from 69 per cent down to 57 per cent). While it is encouraging that feelings of personal political efficacy have improved on earlier readings, there is still a way to go to empower certain groups to feel that they can influence government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People like me have no say in what government does</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics is too complicated to understand</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting is the only way to have any say</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1548</td>
<td>1140</td>
<td>4432</td>
<td>1099</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1548</td>
<td>1137</td>
<td>4432</td>
<td>1103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n/a = not asked
**‘Voting is the only way to have any say’ change measured is 1994–2011**

So, there has been an overall decline in the extent to which the British public trusts governments to act in the interests of the country. But, with very little change in attitudes to system efficacy and improvements in terms of personal political efficacy, we look to other explanations as to why there has been a gradual decline in engagement with conventional politics, and what that might mean for the future. We look to who votes – and thinks it is important to vote – in general elections, and consider how the views and behaviour of the young electorate (those who will be participating in elections in the medium to long-term) might shape engagement with democracy in the future.

**The younger electorate: what’s the future?**

The fact that fewer people appear to be engaging with conventional politics – measured in terms of voting behaviour, party political identification and thinking that voting is a civic duty – may be related to changes in the make-up of the British population or, more specifically, to differences across the generations. In Table 3.6 we see that, in nearly every aspect of political engagement reported,
年轻选民在选举参与度上落后于老一辈选民。年轻选民不太可能认为投票是公民责任（45%相比平均62%的人口比例，以及65岁及以上的人群比例的73%），而且在2010年的上一次大选中，他们中的45%报告了投票（与69%的总体比例和88%的65岁及以上年龄组相比），尽管我们应该对我们的年轻组中样本量小保持谨慎。在18-24岁年龄段，六人中有三人（61%）表示认同政党，低于平均72%的总体比例，以及15%的人群比例。六人中有三人在55到64岁年龄段，32%对政治感兴趣——这类似于55岁及以下年龄组，尽管我们对这个年龄段的样本量也应谨慎。让我们现在来研究我们之前讨论过的各种问题。特别是在年轻和老一辈选民在政党认同、公民责任、对政治的兴趣以及政治活动方面是否存在差异。特别是，我们解开问题，即年龄组间的差异是否会导致公共政治参与的长期变化。（见《技术细节》章对这种分析类型的进一步解释。）

**政治参与，按年龄划分**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>年龄</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-35</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
<th>65+</th>
<th>全部</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>识别政党</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>认为是每个人的责任（2011年）</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>对政治有极大/相当大兴趣</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>说在2010年大选中投票（2010年）</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

如果相对较低的兴趣对年轻选民来说仅仅是一个因素，那么随着他们年龄的增长，他们可能会变得越来越富有。如果我们正在观察的是一种代际变化，那么年轻一代比他们的父母和祖父母更少参与，我们可能就不那么担心了。当然，2001年和2005年选举的选民数量下降，已经引起了一些担忧。如果投票责任在某人达到投票年龄后不久就被获得，那么他们似乎更可能从拥有选举权的那一刻起就投票，并且在整个生活中投票（Butt and Curtice, 2010）；他们不会获得“投票习惯”（see, for example, Plutzer, 2002, Gerber et al., 2003）。因此，我们接下来要看看年轻和老一辈选民在一项我们已经讨论过的各种问题中是如何变化的。特别是在政党认同、公民责任、对政治的兴趣以及政治活动方面。在具体问题中，我们解开问题，即年龄组间的差异是否会导致公共政治参与的长期变化。（See the Technical details chapter for further explanation of this type of analysis.）

**政治认同**

如果我们看看不同年龄群体中识别与政党与政治派别的人口比例，那么这个在识别与政党和政治派别的人口比例中，我们已经看到自1990年代中期以来的下降趋势吗？Table 3.7展示了说他们认同政党时，他们认同与政党派别的人口比例。如果我们沿着每行我们可以建立每个年龄组的政党认同在政治派别中如何改变的年龄越老。例如，我们的1930年代出生的年龄组，在1983年，90%的人口比例认同一个政治派别，而在1983年，90%的人口比例认同一个政治派别。与此同时，如果我们像这样地向上读，我们可以比较同一年龄组中具有政党认同的人口比例。这是这个对角线比较告诉我们，是否在相似年龄组中的每一个相邻的年龄组中，它告诉我们，是否有代际差异，以及在每一代连续的年龄组中，加入选民的选民的选民是否有不同的观点。
We can take a number of key points from this table. Firstly, looking across each row, it seems that there has been a drop in the proportion of people with a party allegiance across all age groups. So, there are changes at a societal level (a period effect) causing certain people across the age spectrum to dis-align themselves from a political party, resulting in fewer people overall connecting with any party. For instance, among those born in the 1950s, 85 per cent entered the electorate with a political allegiance but only 75 per cent of them still have one in 2012. This runs counter to evidence published in the 1960s that partisanship increases with age, as one builds on continuing support for one party (Converse, 1969): this seems no longer to be the case. Secondly, the younger cohorts seem to be more likely than older cohorts to have lost their allegiances (shown by the percentage point differences in the right hand column). So, mixed with the period effect, is a lifecycle effect, differentially affecting younger cohorts. This leads us to our third point: by looking diagonally upwards from left to right, we see that, since 1991, each successive cohort of young voters has entered the electorate less likely to identify with a political party than its predecessor. So, there is a ‘generational’ change. For instance, in 1983, 85 per cent of 24 to 33 year olds had an allegiance with a political party; by 2002 only 75 per cent of 25 to 34 year olds did, and by 2012 that figure has dropped further to 66 per cent.

As a result of these period, lifecycle and generational effects, there is a widening gap in partisanship between young and old. In 1983 and 1991 there was very little difference across the age spectrum, with our youngest group only three percentage points behind our oldest group in 1983, and no difference in 1991 in terms of the proportion with a party allegiance. Young people were as likely as their older counterparts to enter the electorate with a party allegiance. By 2002, the gap was 16 percentage points, and by 2012 it is 25 percentage points.

Table 3.7 Identifying with a political party, by cohort, 1983, 1991, 2002 and 2012[8]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>23–32</td>
<td>32–41</td>
<td>43–52</td>
<td>53–62</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td>-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>24–33</td>
<td>34–51</td>
<td>53–62</td>
<td>75–84</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>24–33</td>
<td>32–41</td>
<td>45–54</td>
<td>62–72</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>34–43</td>
<td>42–51</td>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>63–72</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>44–53</td>
<td>52–61</td>
<td>65–74</td>
<td>73–82</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>54–63</td>
<td>62–71</td>
<td>75–84</td>
<td>92–104</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910s</td>
<td>64–73</td>
<td>72–81</td>
<td>75–84</td>
<td>89–101</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900s</td>
<td>74–83</td>
<td>83–95</td>
<td>84–96</td>
<td>92–104</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference youngest–oldest</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td>-25</td>
<td>-25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data are only presented for those cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year.
So, what can we conclude about the future of partisanship? Overall, these findings imply that partisanship will continue to fall, if all other things remain equal. However, one issue that we cannot factor in is the character of the political parties. Over the period since British Social Attitudes began, there has been a convergence towards the centre of the three main parties, resulting in the public differentiating less between their policies and values. Should one or more parties move away, towards the left or the right, or should parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP) move further to the fore, then the nature of the parties may influence trends in partisanship.

Duty to vote

Table 3.8 uses the same format as Table 3.7, showing the British public’s views on whether it is their civic duty to vote, which we first asked on British Social Attitudes in 1991. Just as older people are more likely to vote, they are also more likely to say that it is their civic duty to do so: in 2011 50 per cent of 22 to 31 year olds and 70 per cent of people aged 72 to 81 said that it was. But, our interest is in whether this is simply a factor of people’s life stage, with people’s sense of duty increasing as they get older, or whether there are generational shifts in people’s views on the issue, and whether the overall decline in feelings of civic duty has happened across all, or only certain, age groups (that is, whether there is a period effect).

The answer seems to be that there are lifecycle, generational and period effects going on here. At the top of Table 3.8, we repeat the figures showing an overall decline in the proportion of people saying it is everyone’s duty to vote that we showed in Figure 3.2. Looking across the table rows, at each age cohort, we find a mixed picture, with some age cohorts showing a fall in feelings of civic duty as they age, and others showing an increase. There is limited evidence to suggest that, among more recent cohorts, their feelings of civic duty increase as they age, but the picture is by no means clear. The difference between our youngest and oldest groups at each time point shows a fairly consistent difference (of between 20 and 26 percentage points) in the proportions who believe it a civic duty to vote. So, while the gap between oldest and youngest is not widening, we have seen that younger people entering the electorate have been less likely to believe in this civic duty than their predecessors 20 years ago, but no different to those a decade ago. The trajectory in terms of future levels of civic duty is currently unclear.

Table 3.8 Duty to vote, by cohort, 1991, 2001 and 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>22–31</td>
<td>32–41</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>22–31</td>
<td>32–41</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>22–31</td>
<td>32–41</td>
<td>42–51</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>32–41</td>
<td>42–51</td>
<td>52–61</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>32–41</td>
<td>42–51</td>
<td>52–61</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>42–51</td>
<td>52–61</td>
<td>52–61</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>52–61</td>
<td>62–71</td>
<td>72–81</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>62–71</td>
<td>72–81</td>
<td>72–81</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference youngest–oldest</td>
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<td>-20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data are only presented for those cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year.
Interest in politics
We noted earlier that, while levels of public interest in politics have fluctuated over the past 25 years or so, they are higher now than in 1986 (36 per cent and 29 per cent respectively). Given the link between interest in politics and voting, what is happening here in terms of the younger and older electorate, and what can that tell us about the young and future electorates? Table 3.9 shows the proportions saying they have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of interest in politics. We can see that young people are less likely to be interested in politics than older people: in 2012, 23 per cent of 23 to 32 year olds are interested, compared with 39 per cent of those aged 73 to 82, and 51 per cent of those aged 63 to 72. We can see that this gap between young and old has widened: in 1986 the gap between the proportions of our interested youngest and oldest groups was seven percentage points, while our latest reading is more than double this at 16 percentage points. Most of the increased interest in politics overall (seven percentage points up on 1986) can be attributed to the older electorate – becoming more interested in politics over their lifetime (shown by the percentage point differences in the right hand column).

Table 3.9 Interest in politics, by cohort, 1986, 1994, 2003 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>+7</td>
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<td>Cohort</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Age in 1986</td>
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<td>23–32</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
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<td>1960s</td>
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<td>Age in 1986</td>
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<td>25–34</td>
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<td>1950s</td>
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<td>37–46</td>
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<td>1920s</td>
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<td>Age in 1986</td>
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<td>57–66</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910s</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age in 1986</td>
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<td>67–76</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>youngest–oldest</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-14</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data are only presented for those cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year

Other ways of engaging in the political process
We have established that young people are less likely to turn out to vote, they are less likely to identify with a particular political party, they have less of a feeling of civic duty about voting and they are less interested in politics. We also have (albeit mixed) evidence that things are getting worse over time, with the young electorate increasingly disengaged with the democratic system. One thing we established earlier (from Table 3.3) is that less conventional forms of engagement with politics are slightly on the rise. So, we wondered whether, perhaps, this was being dominated by young people, deciding to attempt to influence the way the country is run by alternative routes. Table 3.10, showing what people of different ages report having done in 2011, indicates that this is in fact not the case. People over the age of 30 were more likely than their younger counterparts to have done things like sign a petition or contact their MP.
Table 3.10 Undertaken political activity, by age, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% saying undertaken activity</th>
<th>18–29</th>
<th>30–59</th>
<th>60+</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signed a petition</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted your MP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gone on a protest or demonstration</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a government department</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken to an influential person</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised an issue in an organisation you belong to</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted radio, TV or newspaper</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formed a group of like-minded people</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 407 1132 656 2198
Unweighted base 297 1122 794 2215

Respondents could choose more than one answer and so columns do not add to 100 per cent

However, it is possible that the British Social Attitudes question does not adequately capture the range of political activities with which younger people engage. Commentators such as McCaffrie and Marsh (2013: 114) talk about the fact that younger people think less about politics as things that happen within formal institutions and processes and more about “politics as occurring more broadly in society, both within and outside formal institutions and processes”. So, for example, it may be that young people buy fair trade or environmentally friendly products rather than boycott ‘bad’ ones. Added to this is the notion of the ‘Everyday Maker’ (see Bang and Sorensen, 1999), whereby political identity or allegiance is associated with a particular problem or project; once the problem is solved the participant may not engage again in politics until something else comes along which they feel strongly about (McCaffrie and Marsh, 2013).

The effect of a more educated electorate

Over the past 30 years the proportion of people going on to higher education has increased dramatically. For instance, in 1983, seven per cent of the people interviewed in the first British Social Attitudes survey had a degree level qualification. In the 2012 survey, that percentage was 21 per cent, with younger people far more likely to have a degree than older people.[12] Traditionally, those with higher levels of education turn out to vote in higher numbers than those who are less well educated: 76 percent of British Social Attitudes respondents with degree level qualifications or above reported voting in 2010, compared with 63 per cent with O levels or equivalent (though we should note that 73 per cent of those with no qualifications also reported voting).[13] Given this, there are some interesting questions about likely future voting patterns, taking into account the traditional disengagement of youth and engagement of the more educated.

In 2012, across a range of measures, people with higher levels of education are engaging in politics more than those who have lower or no qualifications. Table 3.11 shows the proportion of people interested in politics, feeling they have a civic duty to vote, that politics are too complicated to understand and that they have no say in government, split by their highest educational qualification.
Table 3.11 Engagement in politics, by educational qualification[14]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% interested in politics</th>
<th>% saying everyone’s duty to vote (2011)</th>
<th>% agreeing politics is too complicated to understand</th>
<th>% agreeing have no say in government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational qualification</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education below degree/ A level</td>
<td>34  64</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O level or equivalent/CSE</td>
<td>31  51</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, with rising education levels, we might have expected a long-term increase over time in the proportion of the public engaged in the political system. But, apart from a slight increase in interest in politics, we have shown this not to be the case. In fact, where we do find differences over time between the education levels, these suggest that any positive changes are being driven by the less rather than better educated sectors of the population. For instance, Table 3.12 shows the proportion of the population expressing an interest in politics over time. Comparing 1986 with 2012, the increased interest in politics comes from those with O levels or equivalent (up five percentage points) and those with no qualifications (up four percentage points).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational qualification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education below degree/ A level</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O level or equivalent/CSE</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This might be a feature of increased media coverage and accessibility to following politics now than in the past. However, it may also be to do with the fact, with the relatively recent rise in levels of people entering higher education, that those with degree level qualifications are now younger on average than they were in the early 1980s. So, we may be seeing the interaction between younger people’s tendency to be less engaged in politics with the more educated’s tendency to be more engaged.
Conclusions

The key questions we have examined in this chapter are whether the health of British representative democracy is in trouble, and whether today’s young people are more disengaged than previous generations. As politicians and the parties begin to prepare for the 2015 general election, they will want to keep in mind the following four key points from our findings.

Firstly, a majority of the British public does engage with the political system: they vote in general elections, they affiliate themselves to a particular political party and they feel a civic duty to vote. True, there are concerns about a medium-term trend in declining participation, with lower turnouts at general elections, reduced partisanship and less of a belief that it is one’s duty to vote. But still more people engage than not. That said most people remain resolutely uninterested in politics itself.

Secondly, there are signs of increasing engagement with politics: interest in politics has fluctuated over the last 30 years, but is now higher than in 1986; overall people are reporting increased political activity, such as signing a petition; after a long period of steady decline, people’s belief in their duty to vote has risen slightly over the last few years; and the long-term trend in people’s belief that they can make a difference is upwards, even if most people still feel they cannot do so.

However, in contrast with some of the positive messages above, trust in politicians remains at very low levels, and has shown no real signs of recovery. People continue to believe that MPs lose touch quickly, and that it does not make much difference who is in power.

Lastly, there are large differences in engagement levels between the young and the old, and between those who have more educational qualifications and those who have fewer. So high level concerns about the future of representative democracy must remain, especially as the signs are that the older, more engaged cohorts of the electorate are being replaced by a generation less engaged: on key measures such as affiliation to any political party, today’s young people are more detached than yesterday’s young people. However, increasingly, even today’s older cohorts are now also showing some decreased affinity with political parties over time.

With the next general election two years away at most, our evidence of some small signs of increased public interest in politics offer an important opportunity to the political parties. In this respect, we raise four further points:

• A large majority of the public still identifies with a particular political party, but we are seeing a downward trend in party identification. As such, the group of non-aligned voters (always important) are becoming disproportionately influential. Politicians have always been conscious of ‘wooing’ the floating voter, often risking alienating their core vote. But the dominant modus operandi continues to involve spending a good deal of time criticising other political parties. An increasing consequence is that, as the major parties attack one another, they also risk turning off the non-aligned voters who are considering voting for the other party, but who could be persuaded to vote in a different way. There is a challenge for politicians to manage their communications to show more respect for the public by respecting their right to choose.

• We know from earlier British Social Attitudes chapters that the only constitutional changes that command wholesale popular support are those which hand power directly to voters, such as referenda, and the ability to recall errant
politicians. Governments of all parties have legislated to increase openness and transparency but it appears these reforms have not resulted in increased trust or respect. Politicians may want to consider further shifts towards direct democracy.

- While many of the long-term trends represent a shift towards increasing mistrust of and cynicism about government and politicians, there are actually many positive signs. The long-term downward trend in duty to vote may be reversing. People feel they have more say than they used to. Interest in politics, while still low, is a little higher than it used to be. And more people are actually engaging in political activity (beyond party membership) than before. There are questions about how politicians can capitalise on this trend, and perhaps inculcate a sense that voting really does matter.

- Finally, as in any line of business, reputations are hard won and easily lost. The long-term decline in trust in politicians is corrosive, and politicians pay a heavy price for any actions that reinforce the public’s mistrust. This means that politicians need to think carefully about the promises and behaviours they guarantee to abide by as they head towards the next general election. Ultimately, this is about authenticity: avoiding the pitfalls of broken promises, and living up to the highest standards of integrity.

Notes
1. Following failed attempts by Parliament to block Freedom of Information requests, it emerged that politicians across the board had taken liberties in the expense claims they submitted, many profiting substantially from the taxpayers’ purse. This was followed by a number of resignations, sackings, de-selections and retirement announcements, as well as a handful of prosecutions for false accounting. All MPs’ expenses and allowances in 2004–2008 were examined and around £500,000 has been requested back so far. www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2013/may/09/mps-told-repay-profits-homes.

2. The direction of someone’s party identification is ascertained via a sequence of questions as follows: first, all respondents are asked

   *Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party?*

   Those who do not name a party in response are then asked

   *Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one political party than to the others?*

   Those who still do not name a party are then asked

   *If there were a general election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?*

3. This finding is sharply at variance with that reported by the Hansard Society’s annual Audit of Political Engagement in 2012 and 2013, which found that there had been a marked decline in interest in politics. We would note that the change in the level of reported interest in that survey coincided with a change in the contractor undertaking it and thus perhaps might be a consequence of a change in how the survey was conducted (Hansard Society, 2013).
4. Data are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting by interest in politics, 2010</th>
<th>% voted in 2010</th>
<th>Weighted base</th>
<th>Unweighted base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest in politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal/quite a lot</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much/none at all</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. The Labour government hosted such a page on its Number 10 website, and the coalition government launched a directgov webpage in 2011 to house all e-petitions (which repeatedly crashed on its first day as it received more than 1,000 unique visits a minute) (www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/aug/04/government-e-petition-website-crashes). Any petition with more than 100,000 signatures is assured a chance to be debated and voted in the House of Commons.

6. Data are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting by trust in government, 2010</th>
<th>Voted in 2010</th>
<th>Did not vote in 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust government</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just about always/most of the time</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>324</td>
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7. Bases for Table 3.6 are as follows:

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<th>Identifying with a political party</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saying it’s everyone’s duty to vote (2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With great deal/quite a lot of interest in politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saying voted in 2010 general election (2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Bases for Table 3.7 are as follows:


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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1719</td>
<td>2836</td>
<td>3435</td>
<td>3248</td>
<td>1761</td>
<td>2918</td>
<td>3435</td>
<td>3247</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
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Cohort

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<th>1970s</th>
<th>1960s</th>
<th>1950s</th>
<th>1940s</th>
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<td>187</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>112</td>
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9. Bases for Table 3.8 are as follows:


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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1207</td>
<td>2821</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>1224</td>
<td>2795</td>
<td>1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1970s</th>
<th>1960s</th>
<th>1950s</th>
<th>1940s</th>
<th>1930s</th>
<th>1920s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
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<td>411</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>182</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>281</td>
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<td>172</td>
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</table>

10. Bases for Table 3.9 are as follows:


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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1548</td>
<td>2282</td>
<td>4432</td>
<td>1099</td>
<td>1548</td>
<td>2302</td>
<td>4432</td>
<td>1103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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Cohort

<table>
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<th>1960s</th>
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<th>1940s</th>
<th>1930s</th>
<th>1920s</th>
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</thead>
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<td>480</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>194</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
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<td>163</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>155</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Arguably the British Social Attitudes question is biased against young people, given it asks whether someone has “ever” done something. A better question might be whether an individual had undertaken an activity in the past 12 months (this is asked on the International Social Survey Programme, see Martin, 2012).

12. In 2012 the figures reported on British Social Attitudes were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>% with degree level qualification or above</th>
<th>% with higher education below degree level/A level</th>
<th>Weighted base</th>
<th>Unweighted base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3248</td>
<td>3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>415</td>
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<td>35–44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>578</td>
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<td>45–54</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. In 2010 our data showed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest educational qualification</th>
<th>% voted in 2010</th>
<th>Weighted base</th>
<th>Unweighted base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>1081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education below degree/A level</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O level or equivalent/CSE</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/Refusal/NA</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>112</td>
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14. Bases for Table 3.11 are as follows:

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<th>Interested in politics</th>
<th>Saying everyone's duty to vote</th>
<th>Agreeing politics is too complicated to understand</th>
<th>Agreeing have no say in government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>1099</td>
<td>1103</td>
<td>1890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational qualification</th>
<th>Interested in politics</th>
<th>Saying everyone's duty to vote</th>
<th>Agreeing politics is too complicated to understand</th>
<th>Agreeing have no say in government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education below degree/A level</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O level or equivalent/CSE</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>473</td>
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<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>328</td>
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15. Bases for Table 3.12 are as follows:

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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>1548</td>
<td>1548</td>
<td>2282</td>
<td>2302</td>
<td>4432</td>
<td>4432</td>
<td>1099</td>
<td>1103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational qualification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
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<td>113</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education below degree/A level</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>1223</td>
<td>1163</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O level or equivalent/CSE</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>1284</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>240</td>
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<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
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<td>689</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>1208</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


UK Political Info, available at: www.ukpolitical.info/Turnout45.htm
Appendix

The data on which Figure 3.1 is based are shown below.

Table A.1 Voting in general elections and political party identification, 1983–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party identify with</th>
<th>83</th>
<th>84</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>86</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>91</th>
<th>92</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>94</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies with any party</td>
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<td>89</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>87</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 1719 1645 1769 3066 2766 2930 2698 2836 2930 3469
Unweighted base 1761 1675 1804 3100 2847 3029 2797 2918 2926 3469

UK turnout (%) 72.7 75.3 77.7

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Party identify with</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>97</th>
<th>98</th>
<th>99</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>04</th>
<th>05</th>
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</thead>
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<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
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<td>83</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>82</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 3633 3620 1355 3146 3143 3426 3287 3435 4432 3199 4268
Unweighted base 3633 3620 1355 3146 3143 3426 3287 3435 4432 3199 4268

UK turnout (%) 71.4 59.0 61.4

<table>
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<th>08</th>
<th>09</th>
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<th>12</th>
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<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies with any party</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>76</td>
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<tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 4290 4124 4484 3420 3294 3309 3072
Unweighted base 4290 4124 4483 3419 3294 3309 3074

UK turnout (%) 65.1

n/a = not asked
Source: UK turnout figures from UK Political Info
No party identification (‘None’) only includes those who explicitly deny that they identify with a party. It excludes those saying “don’t know”, or giving some other answer other than naming a party
‘Liberal Democrat’ 1983–1987 includes those who answered Liberal or Social Democratic Party
The data on which Figure 3.2 is based are shown below.

### Table A.2 Trends in civic duty, 1987–2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>91</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude to voting</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's not really worth voting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People should only vote if they care who wins</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's everyone's duty to vote</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>64</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<td>1207</td>
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<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>It's not really worth voting</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People should only vote if they care who wins</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's everyone's duty to vote</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1017</td>
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+Source: British Election Study

The data on which Figure 3.3 is based are shown below.

### Table A.3 Trust in government, 1986–2012

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>86</th>
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<th>87+</th>
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<th>96</th>
<th>97</th>
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<td>%</td>
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<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just about always/most of the time</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Only some of the time</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<th>05</th>
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<tr>
<td>Trust government</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just about always/most of the time</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only some of the time</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
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<th>12</th>
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<tr>
<td>Trust government</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just about always/most of the time</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Only some of the time</td>
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<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Almost never</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>1103</td>
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</table>

+Source: British Election Study
Health
How have the public’s views of the NHS changed over the last 30 years?

In the last 30 years the NHS has undergone great periods of change. We have seen increased financial investment in the NHS, and a number of changes to the structure and management of the service. At the same time the demands placed on the NHS have increased, as the British population grows and ages. How has satisfaction with the NHS changed over the period, and how far is it linked to particular policies or spending?

Satisfaction with the NHS
Levels of public satisfaction with the NHS are higher than they have been throughout most of the last 30 years. However, satisfaction is lower than it was at the end of Labour’s term in office.

Attitudes to funding
Over the last 30 years support for increasing taxes to fund health and other public services has been associated with satisfaction with the NHS, with lower levels of support for extra funding when levels of satisfaction are high.

Support for increasing taxes and spending is at its third lowest level (34%) since 1983 with the majority (53%) wishing to keep taxation and spending at the same level as now.

As levels of public satisfaction increase, people feel there is less of a need to increase taxation and spend more on the NHS and other public services.
Introduction

Since British Social Attitudes began in 1983, the National Health Service (NHS) has undergone great periods of change. There have been three switches in government power (from Conservative (to 1997), to Labour (1997 to 2010), to the current coalition government), each time resulting in a shift of philosophy about how the NHS should be run. Spending on the NHS has more than trebled in real terms in the past 30 years, from around £39 billion in 1983 to nearly £120 billion in 2012. Increased spending has far outstripped the growth of the British population and the demands entailed by an ageing society. It has facilitated an increase in the number of doctors, and advances in medical technology and new drugs. Alongside increased financial investment in the NHS, the last 30 years have seen a number of policy changes affecting the structure and management of the NHS. A number of the resultant changes have been very visible to the British public, such as a dramatic decline in NHS waiting times and a decrease in the number of hospital beds.

The 30th anniversary of British Social Attitudes provides an opportunity to examine how the British public’s views and attitudes towards the NHS have evolved in the last 30 years. British Social Attitudes has measured public satisfaction with the NHS virtually every year since 1983. Each year, we have also asked the public about government priorities for taxation and spending, including the relative priority it places on health care. Focusing particularly on age and party political identification, we seek to understand how and why the public’s attitudes towards the NHS have changed over the last 30 years. We report on public levels of satisfaction with the NHS over the past 30 years, and discuss whether, and if so how, satisfaction with the NHS appears to be aligned with government health care policies and government spending on the NHS. We look at the extent to which people’s views on the NHS reflect whether they support the political party in power, as well as whether changes in levels of public satisfaction with the NHS reflect the fact that Britain is an ageing society. We assess whether, over the past 30 years, the British public has continued to support the founding principle of the NHS as a health care system which is funded collectively on the basis of ability to pay through taxation, but accessible to all on the basis of need and regardless of income. And we attempt to answer how far the British public has supported government policies around spending on the NHS, and where has there been a divergence of views. Finally, we think through the implications of these issues for the future of the NHS.

Changes for the NHS between 1983 and 2012

Understanding how public perceptions of the NHS have evolved over the last 30 years requires us to consider how the NHS in particular and Britain more generally have changed over that period. Firstly, there have been changes in the size, age profile and health of the British population, affecting the demands on the NHS. Secondly, there have been major changes in government spending on health care, and in policies around the structure and management of the NHS. Table A.1 in the appendix to this chapter shows how Britain and the NHS have changed between 1983 and 2012, across a range of measures; key ones are described below.
Population changes
Over the last 30 years there have been huge changes in the size of the population of Great Britain and in its demographic structure. Between 1983 and 2012, the British population grew by 6.7 million people – twice the population of Wales and equivalent to the creation of six new cities the size of Birmingham (Office for National Statistics, 2012). In terms of the number of people drawing on NHS services, demand has increased by 12 per cent over the period. In reality, however, the demand on NHS services has risen more than this, as the British population has also aged. Between 1983 and 2012 there was a historic switch in the demographic profile of NHS users, with the number of people of pensionable age overtaking the number of children in the population: the number of pensioners in Britain increased by 21 per cent, to 11.9 million (Office for National Statistics, 2011a, 2011b). Over the same period, greater wealth, lifestyle changes and increased funding for health care have also contributed to people living longer: life expectancy has increased from 90 to 94 years for women and from 85 to 91 years for men between 1983 and 2012 (Office for National Statistics, 2011c).

Spending on the NHS
Over the past 30 years, the UK economy has grown considerably: its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (an indicator of the country’s standard of living) increased in real terms by 73 per cent over the period.[1] Health care has been a major focus of government spending of this extra wealth, with spending on the NHS more than trebling in real terms between 1983 and 2012, from around £39 billion to nearly £120 billion. The government now spends an average of £2,054 per person on their NHS care, compared with only £737 in 1983 (the 1983 amount is inflated to reflect 2012 prices) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). Figure 4.1 shows how real spending has grown since 1983, with real increases in most years. While there have been year to year fluctuations in the change in real spending, average annual spending increases from 1983 to 1997 were generally smaller (+3.2 per cent) than the period from 1997 to 2009 (+5.9 per cent). The more recent impact of the spending restraint from 2010 onwards is also evident with a real average annual reduction in spending of around 0.8 per cent.

Figure 4.1 UK NHS spending (2012 prices)


Extra spending on the NHS has led to increases in resources – the number of doctors for every 1,000 people in the population has more than doubled, for example. Together with changes in medical technology and new drugs, this has
contributed to a fall in death rates by a quarter and a fall in infant mortality rates by 60 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2013b). Importantly, factors other than health care – such as increased wealth and changes in lifestyle – have also made major contributions to improved health. For example, in 1983 37 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women smoked; by 2010 these figures had dropped to around 20 per cent for both sexes (Cancer Research UK, 2013).

**Changes in the structure and management of the NHS**

At the start of British Social Attitudes in 1983 there was a Conservative government. Over the period to the end of Conservative rule in 1997, the NHS was subject to a number of organisational changes. In 1984 for example, the general management restructuring following the Griffiths Inquiry (Griffiths, 1983) a year earlier was implemented together with changes in management and organisational layers in the NHS. Perhaps the most significant policy development of the period was the introduction in 1991 of an internal market into the NHS. The White paper *Working for Patients*, published in 1989, set out the basic idea of a separation between purchasers (health authorities and GP ‘fundholders’) and the providers of secondary care services (Department of Health, 1989). The competition between providers for contracts and patients was expected to improve quality and efficiency.

While the various structural reorganisations – including the internal market – kept the administrative and political groups busy, the impact of these changes on patients, the public and the performance of the NHS was more difficult to discern. On a key and high profile measure of NHS performance – hospital waiting times – the Conservative administrations from 1983 recorded some success, reducing the proportion of English inpatients (excluding day cases) waiting over 12 months from around 30 per cent in 1983 to just four per cent (including day cases) in the summer of 1997. Figure 4.2 shows trends in waiting times for inpatients and day cases on a consistent basis (Department of Health, 2010). But such success was largely a result of specific efforts, such as directing money through the waiting times initiative as well as setting targets for reductions via the Patients’ Charter (Department of Health, 1991), rather than the various reorganisations of the NHS. And despite this, over the period from 1983 to 1997 the number of people on English NHS waiting lists grew and over a quarter of those on lists still waited over six months for admission to hospital.

**Figure 4.2 Trends in inpatient waiting times, 1988–2010 (March)**

![Figure 4.2 Trends in inpatient waiting times, 1988–2010 (March)](image-url)

Source: Department of Health (2010)

Data prior to 1988 and post 2010 not available

The data on which Figure 4.2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.
In the year that the Labour Party regained power, spending on the NHS across the UK fell in real terms, the first time since the early 1950s. Waiting times were still an issue of concern for the public, to the extent that a promise was made as part of the Labour Party’s 1997 ‘pledge card’ to reduce the number of patients on NHS waiting lists by 100,000. While this missed the point that the public’s concern was with waiting times rather than the length of the queue per se, over the next decade the Labour government achieved significant reductions in waiting times. However, as Figure 4.2 shows, it was only from 2003 that they made further inroads into reducing long waiting times.

Again, this success came not through large-scale organisational reform (although that too was to happen) but through tough targets and sanctions on hospitals and managers, coupled with increased spending and practical support to disseminate ways of managing patients through the system more speedily. By March 2010, just over nine in ten inpatients waited three months or less for admission and virtually no one waited more than six months (Figure 4.2).

The Labour government stuck with the spending plans of its Conservative predecessor until 1999, when the significant decision was taken to increase spending on the NHS (with the aim of eventually matching the average of those countries then constituting the European Union). Between 1997 and 2009, NHS spending increased from 5.4 per cent of GDP to 8.4 per cent, compared with virtually no change in spending as a proportion of GDP between 1983 and 1997. Higher spending allowed the NHS to employ more staff. While the number of NHS doctors per 1,000 population increased by 0.6 over the 16 years from 1983 to 1999, over the 11 years from 1999 to 2010 the number increased by 0.7 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013).

More contentiously perhaps, the Labour Party’s 1997 manifesto policy to abolish the internal market was, by 2000, revised and a more active approach was taken to encouraging competition within the NHS through greater formalisation of patient choice and the introduction of incentives to market entry from the independent sector. However, as a result of devolution, the NHS in Wales and Scotland took a different path, embarking on a more integrated and alternative approach to the use of competition.

When the coalition government came to power in 2010, Britain’s economic problems necessitated a combination of tax rises and retrenchment of public spending in the wake of the global financial crisis and ensuing recession. Although spending on the NHS in England was ring-fenced, in practice this meant very small real rises compared with previous years, while in other parts of Britain, there were real cuts (in Wales) and zero real increases (in Scotland). Despite the squeeze on funding, in England at least, the historically low waiting times were more or less maintained.

Satisfaction with the NHS

Virtually every year since 1983, we have included a question on overall satisfaction with the NHS, providing an overarching measure of health service performance:

*All in all, how satisfied or dissatisfied would you say you are with the way in which the National Health Service runs nowadays?*
By looking at the way in which people have responded to this question each year over the past 30 years, we can answer a number of the questions we posed above:

- How satisfied has the public been with the NHS over the past 30 years?
- How closely does public satisfaction with the NHS appear to be aligned with government health care policies and government spending on the NHS? What policies have proved more or less popular with the public?
- How far are people’s views simply reflecting their views more widely about the political party in power?
- To what extent might changes in levels of public satisfaction with the NHS reflect the fact that Britain has an ageing society?

The answers to these questions are not necessarily easy to predict, given the potentially competing issues at work. As we have shown, spending on the NHS has increased hugely over the last 30 years, and on a key performance measure – hospital waiting times – there have also been significant improvements. It would be surprising if these developments had not had some positive impact on public satisfaction with the NHS. Added to this, the fact that we are an ageing society might lead us to predict, for two reasons, that levels of satisfaction with the NHS have gone up. Firstly, older people are more frequent users of NHS services, and, secondly, NHS users, on average, are more likely to report being satisfied with the NHS (Appleby and Phillips, 2009). Conversely, with a state-funded health care system which has been the norm for over 60 years, it may well be that the public’s expectations of the NHS have also increased, making them harder to please: this might suggest a drop in, or levelling out of, satisfaction levels. It is also possible that people’s perceptions of the NHS will be coloured by the political party in power. Health care in Britain, as in most countries, is an intensely political issue, as every government which has tried to change or reform the NHS can attest. It is possible that satisfaction with the NHS is associated with people’s party political affiliations and whether they support the government in power.

**Trends in satisfaction with the NHS**

Our first question is: how satisfied has the public been with the NHS over the past 30 years? Figure 4.3 shows levels of public satisfaction from 1983 to 2012, with one line showing the percentage in each year who reported being “very” or “quite satisfied” with the way in which the NHS runs, and the other showing the percentage who reported being “very” or “quite dissatisfied”.

**Figure 4.3 Satisfaction with the NHS overall, 1983–2012**

The data on which Figure 4.3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.
In 1983, at the start of the time-series, 55 per cent of the public were satisfied with the NHS, twice the proportion (26 per cent) who felt dissatisfied with how it was run. Three years later, in 1986, satisfaction levels had dropped to only 40 per cent of the population, with equal proportions expressing dissatisfaction. Over the subsequent decade and a half, to 2001, while levels of satisfaction fluctuated a little, the broad trend was relatively flat (the lowest point was in 1997 when only 34 per cent of the population was satisfied and half (50 per cent) reported being dissatisfied). Then, between 2001 and 2010, satisfaction rose, with 2010 seeing 70 per cent of the British population satisfied with the NHS, nearly four times the number of people who were dissatisfied. In the last two years, satisfaction levels with the NHS have dropped dramatically, to 61 per cent in 2012. That said, compared with the 1980s and 1990s, public satisfaction with the NHS is still high: satisfaction in 2012 remains at its third highest level since 1983.

Are the trends in satisfaction connected with government funding and policies?

The fluctuations in levels of satisfaction with the NHS suggest that public opinion is associated with what is happening within the NHS during any given period (or in the recent past, given we might expect changes in satisfaction to lag somewhat behind events). Any changes attributable to demographic shifts in the population would tend to show up as smooth – or linear – slopes in the line graph, rather than the peaks and troughs we saw in Figure 4.3. In order to unpick what might be affecting public satisfaction, we look firstly at the relationship between levels of government spending on the NHS and public satisfaction (Figure 4.4), and then at potential associations between government policy and satisfaction. As well as looking at overall satisfaction with the NHS, we report on trends in satisfaction with individual elements of the NHS, to see if they can help explain the fluctuations in the overall trend.

Figure 4.4 Real annual changes in UK NHS spending and percentage satisfied with the NHS overall, 1983–2012

As Figure 4.4 suggests, it is hard to discern any consistent association between annual changes in real funding and levels of satisfaction with the NHS. (Indeed, this is confirmed statistically, with a correlation coefficient of just 0.1 between spending and satisfaction across the whole period from 1983 to 2012.) Given the likelihood that details of changes in real NHS spending from year to year are almost certainly unknown to most people, the lack of a relationship between...
the two is perhaps not surprising. Nevertheless, it is in the decade from around 1999 to 2009 when NHS spending increased at a new and accelerated rate that satisfaction too recorded its most consistent increases. While the public may not have known about the detail of spending changes over time, it may have been more aware of the broader upward trend.

Alternatively, the rise in public satisfaction with the NHS may have been a result of the tangible effects of the extra spending. By way of example, and as Figure 4.2 showed, over the period between 2003 and 2010 the proportion of inpatients waiting over three months for admission to hospital fell from around 49 per cent to nine per cent. If we look at this in relation to public satisfaction, we see that levels of satisfaction started to rise at the same time as long waits started to decrease.

We can try to unpick the relationship between government policy and public satisfaction further by looking at a set of questions, again asked on British Social Attitudes virtually annually since 1983, on satisfaction with key parts of the NHS: general practice (GPs), dentistry, inpatients, outpatients and accident and emergency (A&E) departments.[3]

Looking firstly at satisfaction with hospital services in Figure 4.5, while satisfaction with outpatient and A&E services broadly mirror the fluctuations in levels of overall satisfaction with the NHS, for inpatient services there has been a long-term general decline in satisfaction. Although levels of satisfaction with inpatient services rose for a period between 2004 and 2010 (at the time when overall satisfaction was rising rapidly, as was spending on the NHS), in the 30 year period between 1983 and 2012, the proportion of the public satisfied with inpatient services fell by 22 percentage points from 74 per cent to 52 per cent.

Figure 4.5 Percentage satisfied with NHS inpatients, outpatients and accident and emergency services, 1983–2012

The data on which Figure 4.5 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Unlike other NHS services and the NHS overall, trends in satisfaction with GPs have remained relatively constant since 1983, continuing to be one of the most highly rated parts of the NHS. Satisfaction with NHS dentists on the other hand was in long-term decline between 1983 and 2005, then recovering to some extent from 2008 – a change most likely linked to government attempts to improve accessibility to NHS dentistry (Appleby, 2012) (Figure 4.6).
Are the trends in satisfaction connected with affiliations with the party in power?

The origins and funding of the NHS, not to mention its direct accountability to ministers, have meant that it has remained for all of its history intensely political. And it has been clear since the earliest British Social Attitudes surveys that there has been a link between people’s party political identification and their satisfaction with the NHS. So, with seven changes of government over the last 30 years – two continuous periods of rule by the Conservative Party and the Labour Party respectively, and latterly a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government – to what extent can changes in the public’s satisfaction with the NHS be accounted for by affiliation with the party in power?

Figure 4.7 shows how satisfaction levels with the NHS have fluctuated over the 30 year period among Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat identifiers. The timeline is split into periods of Conservative, Labour and coalition government and, within these, into each parliament. It is clear that supporters of the party in power tend to rate their satisfaction with the NHS as higher than those who support the opposition. So, during the period of Conservative government from 1983 to 1996, Conservative supporters expressed greater satisfaction with the NHS than supporters of either the Labour or Liberal Democrat parties. For most of this period, the gap between Conservative and Labour/Liberal Democrat identifiers averaged around 12 percentage points. And in the period of the Labour governments (1997–2010) Labour supporters’ satisfaction tended to be higher than that of Conservative or Liberal Democrats (although the gap tended to be smaller than that between Conservative and Labour supporters between 1983 and 1996). Statistically, the correlation over the years 1983 to 2012 is strongest between Labour and the Liberal Democrats and weakest between the Conservatives and Labour.[4] That is, the views of Labour party and Liberal Democrat supporters are quite similar, much more so than the views of Labour and Conservative supporters.
Figure 4.7 Percentage satisfied with the NHS overall, by party identification, 1983–2012

However, while party affiliation is clearly influencing levels of satisfaction, it does not explain the general trends in satisfaction with the NHS. It is clear that other, non-party political, factors influence satisfaction with the NHS among supporters of different parties. Fluctuations in the levels of satisfaction from supporters of all three political parties follow a very similar pattern. For instance, satisfaction with the NHS from supporters of all three parties fell in the years leading up to the switch from the Conservative to Labour government in 1997. And satisfaction with the NHS rose among supporters of all three parties during Labour’s reign. While there is general evidence of satisfaction levels being higher among those identifying with the party of government, and of satisfaction among those identifying with the party in power rising more quickly once they come to power than supporters of other parties (for instance, satisfaction among Labour supporters rose more quickly and more steeply than satisfaction among Conservative supporters after Labour came to power in 1997), there are clearly factors other than party affiliation affecting satisfaction with the NHS.

**How and why does satisfaction vary across age groups?**

We have established that trends in satisfaction with the NHS are explained to a certain extent by the political landscape in general and policies around the NHS in particular. However, that is not to say that there have not been more linear changes in trends caused by wider societal changes over the past 30 years. There is a long-established link between age and satisfaction with the NHS, with older groups tending to express more satisfaction with the NHS than younger groups. Figure 4.8 shows trends in satisfaction levels for those aged 18 to 24 and those aged 75 and over. Clearly, satisfaction among both age groups fluctuates in line with the overall trend showing that satisfaction among both age groups is being affected by the changes in external factors we describe above. This is often referred to as a ‘period effect’, where there are factors or shifts in attitudes affecting all age groups. However, while the size of the gap between the two groups fluctuates, the proportion of people aged 75 and over who express satisfaction with the NHS is 15 to 25 percentage points higher than the proportion of 18 to 24 year olds who say they are satisfied. We look now at differences in satisfaction levels by age over the past 30 years, and what the causes of these might be.
Some suggest that the difference in the views of younger and older people reflects younger people’s higher expectations of the NHS, which makes them harder to please than their older counterparts. This could be down to someone’s life stage (a so-called ‘lifecycle effect’), with satisfaction increasing naturally as people age. Conversely, differences in expectations or satisfaction levels with the NHS could be due to the generation in which people were born (a ‘generational effect’). If that is the case, older people may be more favourably disposed to the NHS because of their greater experience of life before it. There is also a further plausible reason why older people express higher levels of satisfaction than their younger counterparts: people make greater use of the NHS as they age, and we know that satisfaction is generally higher among those with recent experience of the NHS (Appleby, 2013).

Table 4.1 disentangles some of these potential effects by looking at changes in satisfaction by 10-year birth cohorts between 1983 and 2012 (see the Technical details chapter for detail on this type of analysis). The first row shows that, overall, satisfaction with the NHS increased by six percentage points between these two years. The subsequent rows show the views of the different cohorts. The table points to evidence of a period effect and of a lifecycle effect, with little evidence of there being a generational effect.

Table 4.1 Satisfaction with the NHS overall, by cohort, 1983 and 2012

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Data are only presented for those cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year.
Looking firstly for period effects – or shifts in attitudes over time across the whole population – it is clear that, across all age cohorts, the proportion satisfied with the NHS in 1983 and in 2012 has increased, as seen in our column showing difference between 1983 and 2012. For example, among the cohort born in the 1950s, 49 per cent were satisfied with the NHS in 1983 (when they were aged between 24 and 33) and 56 per cent were satisfied 2012 (when they were aged 53 to 62), an increase of seven percentage points across this time period.

Evidence of a lifecycle effect comes from the fact that, both in 1983 and in 2012, as people get older, they express higher levels of satisfaction with the NHS than their younger counterparts. Both in 1983 and in 2012, there was a step-change in the proportion of people satisfied with the NHS as they got older. However, it appears that this change happened later in life in 2012 than it did in 1983. In 1983, 48 per cent of people aged 54 to 63 were satisfied with the NHS compared with 67 per cent of those aged 64 to 73 and 72 per cent of those aged 74 to 83 – so the step-change was between the first two of those age groups. The parallel figures in 2012 were 56 per cent, 63 per cent and 76 per cent, with the substantial rise in satisfaction happening as people move into the 73 to 82 group.

There is little evidence to suggest that differences in satisfaction levels are due to the generation to which people belong. That is, there is little evidence of a generational or cohort effect. This may be because now, 60 years since the start of the NHS, there are few people who fully remember Britain without it.

**Attitudes to taxation and spending on the NHS**

Public satisfaction with the NHS has fluctuated over time. Although, in 2012, it was at its third highest point since British Social Attitudes began in 1983, the last 30 years have seen substantial peaks and troughs in levels of satisfaction. It appears that satisfaction is to some extent linked to government spending and policies around health care – but these are by no means the only factors affecting public views. So, how has the public felt about government spending on health care over the same period? More specifically, we return to the two questions we raised at the start of the chapter:

- Over the past 30 years, has the British public continued to support the founding principle of the NHS as a health care system which is funded collectively on the basis of ability to pay through taxation, but accessible to all on the basis of need and regardless of income?
- How far has the British public supported government policies around spending on the NHS, and where has there been a divergence of views?

The answer to the first question appears to be yes. Historically, Britain has prided itself on its health care system. Support for the twin founding principles of inequity in financing and equity in provision has survived throughout the 30 year period. In virtually every year since 1983, we have asked:

> It has been suggested that the National Health Service should be available only to those with lower incomes. This would mean that contributions and taxes could be lower and most people would then take out medical insurance or pay for health care. Do you support or oppose this idea?
There has only ever been minority support for the idea of restricting the NHS to those on low incomes.

Figure 4.9 shows that, consistently over the past 30 years, at least twice as many people have opposed this idea as supported it. (The question was not asked in 2012, so the most recent findings are from the 2011 survey.) Since 1989, the proportion opposing it each year has remained above 70 per cent. (As reported in Appleby and Lee (2012), the lowest level of opposition – and highest level of support – was recorded back in 1983 when then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was at her most popular.) There has only ever been minority support for the idea of an NHS restricted to those on low incomes: always less than 30 per cent.

Figure 4.9 Support for the NHS being made available only to those on lower incomes, 1983–2011

The data on which Figure 4.9 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

The answer to the second question on public support for government spending on the NHS is a little more complex. As we have noted, total spending on the NHS across the UK has more than trebled in real terms over the last 30 years as successive governments – particularly the Labour governments in the first decade of the 21st century – took decisions to increase spending not only ahead of inflation but faster than general economic growth, increasing health spending as a proportion of GDP. Extra spending for health has been achieved in part by decreases in other government spending (such as defence) but also by increases in taxation (and borrowing). Do these decisions appear to concur with the public’s views about taxation and government spending over the last 30 years?

The British public places a high priority on government spending on health care, over all other areas of government spending. Each year, we ask respondents to choose, from a list of 10 areas, their first and second priority for extra government spending:

Here are some items of government spending. Which of them, if any, would be your highest priority for extra spending? And which next?

Education; defence; health; housing; public transport; roads; police and prisons; social security benefits; help for industry; overseas aid

Every year since 1983 the public has put health at the top of its priority list for extra government spending. Figure 4.10 shows the proportion of people who put health as their first or second priority, together with education and the public’s third and fourth priorities in 2012: housing and help for industry. Since 1985, at least 70 per cent of the public has prioritised the NHS (as either their first or second choice) for extra government spending. Along with education, support for extra spending on health far outstrips support for extra government funding in any other area.
The public’s views may not be, however, totally impervious to the huge additional investment in the NHS since 2000. Although health remains the public’s top priority for extra spending, the last decade has seen a steady decline in support for additional spending on health care, from 83 per cent in 2001 to 71 in 2012, to the point that, in the last three years, support for extra spending on education, people’s second highest priority, is almost as high as support for extra spending on health. Nevertheless, health remains a popular spending priority for the public – support for the relative protection that the NHS has received (in England at least) in recent government spending decisions.

A second question which has also been asked in British Social Attitudes most years since 1983 can shed further light on this issue:

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

Figure 4.11 shows trends in responses to this question since 1983. Over the 30 year period, the general preference of the public has been either to increase taxes or to keep them at prevailing levels; a relatively small minority has opted for cutting tax and spending. However, there are perhaps three notably different periods over the last 30 years. From 1983 to 1991 there was a more or less continuous upward trend in the proportion of people agreeing that taxes and spending should rise. In fact, over this period the proportion of people supporting increased taxation and spending doubled from 32 per cent to 65 per cent. For the decade from 1992 to 2002 however – and apart from a significant fall in 2000 – the trend remained broadly flat at the relatively high level of around 60 per cent opting for higher taxation and spending. Since then, support for higher taxes and spending has slumped – from 63 per cent in 2002 to 34 per cent in 2012 – back to a level similar to that found in 1983.
Figure 4.11 Attitudes to tax and spend and satisfaction with the NHS, 1983–2012

The data on which Figure 4.11 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

It seems that the public’s view on whether more state funding is needed is, to some degree, responsive to the level of NHS spending, in terms of average annual real NHS spending shown in Figure 4.11. In the period between 1983 and 1991, when there were relatively small increases in NHS funding, the public thought that there should be increased taxation and spending. Conversely, over the period of higher spending between 2002 and 2009, support for increased taxation and spending dropped, with increasing proportions of the public thinking that the government had it about right in terms of taxation and spending. That said, the public’s view does not always seem to be associated with what was happening to NHS funding: the period from 1991 to 2002 was also a relatively high spending period on average, but saw continued high levels of support for further taxation and spending. This may be because the public continued to perceive the need for improvements in the NHS (only met in the last decade, meaning that further increases in investment were not required). Alternatively, it may reflect the fact that the question covers not only health but also education and social benefits: to some extent these trends may reflect what was happening in terms of these policy areas over that period.

We reported earlier on the fact that there appeared to be some link, at least in broad trend terms, between public satisfaction with the NHS and actual NHS funding, and with key measures of NHS performance such as waiting list times. It seems plausible therefore that the public will adjust its views on the need for additional government spending on the basis of their level of satisfaction with the NHS at any given time. Figure 4.11 suggests that this is indeed the case. In periods of lower satisfaction, the public is more likely to think that the government should be raising taxes and spending more on health, education and social benefits. And when satisfaction is higher, the public is less likely to think that additional taxation and spending is required, presumably because it thinks that the NHS is doing well under current spending levels. For instance, in 1989, 37 per cent of the public was satisfied with the NHS and 56 per cent thought that taxes and spending should rise. In 2010, with 70 per cent of people satisfied with the NHS, the proportion wanting increased taxation and spending was only 31 per cent.[8]
Conclusions

We have used the 30th anniversary of British Social Attitudes as an opportunity to focus on changing attitudes over the last three decades in two key areas: satisfaction with the NHS and views about government priorities for taxation and spending. Here we give some thought to what these tell us about the way in which the public might react to the most recent set of funding and policy changes by the coalition government. Fluctuations in public satisfaction with the NHS over the last 30 years appear to be related at least in part to NHS performance, policy and spending. Satisfaction was highest in 2010 after a period of intensive injection of additional funds, and lowest in 1997 at the cusp of the Conservative and Labour governments. The last two years (under the coalition government) have seen a substantial drop in public satisfaction with the NHS, and there is no suggestion of a quick recovery. This may be because there are continuing concerns about the government’s organisational reforms of the English NHS (Appleby, 2013). The Health and Social Care Act was passed in 2012 and local clinical commissioning groups only assumed responsibility in April 2013. It may take a few years to see what the impact of these reforms in practice has on public satisfaction.

The change over the last three decades in the proportion of the population of pensionable age and its impact on health care is one of the stated driving forces for the NHS reforms (HM Government, 2011). It is therefore interesting to see that, while older people continue to rate the NHS more highly than their younger counterparts, this step-change happens later in 2012 than it did in 1983.

While the public remains firmly committed to the founding principle of the NHS as a redistributive free-at-source health care system, support for increased spending is currently lower than at other points in the last 30 years. We are now in the midst of a spending freeze that is likely to last beyond the end of the 2010 spending review period (2010/11 to 2014/15) and into the next parliament. Historically, support for increasing taxation and spending on health and other public services generally falls when spending is rising and rises when spending is falling. If the past is any guide we might expect support for higher taxation and spending to increase as spending remains flat in real terms for the NHS (with real cuts in many other areas of government spending). On the other hand, views about taxation and spending will be influenced by the public’s attitudes towards the reasons for and origins of the current economic stagnation and debt situation, and their view about the government’s policies in regard to these problems. Although the NHS remains the public’s top priority for any extra government spending, the proportion supporting health as a priority has fallen over the last decade. Taxing more to spend more on health and other public services may not be seen as reflecting the right priorities given the nature of the economic problems the country faces.

As well as having a broad association with spending on the NHS, attitudes to taxation are associated (in fact, more strongly) with satisfaction with the NHS. We have seen that over the last three decades, when satisfaction decreases, people appear to feel there is more need to increase taxation and spend. However, the dramatic drop in satisfaction levels in the last two years has only been met by a small rise in the proportion supporting increased taxation and spending (by three percentage points), suggesting that spending more to improve satisfaction may no longer be viewed as the solution. This may reflect the particularities of the current general economic situation and a recent period which has seen large increases in NHS funding. On the other hand, it may suggest that the public does not see the level of funding as the key problem with the NHS – at least, not yet.
Notes
1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the monetary value of all goods and services produced in a country in a given year.
3. The question on satisfaction with A&E departments was not introduced until 1999.
4. Correlation between Labour and Liberal Democrats r=0.92; correlation between Conservative and Labour r=0.49.
5. The correlation is very high between the two age groups: r=0.88.
6. Weighted bases for Table 4.1 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with the NHS overall, by cohort, 1983 and 2012</th>
<th>Weighted base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>1521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910s</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900s</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n/a = not asked

7. There have been some minor variations to this question over the years. 1983–1994 the answer options were “support” and “oppose”; 1995–2010 the answer options were “support a lot”, “support a little”, “oppose a lot”, “oppose a little”, with respondents being prompted to say “a little” or “a lot”; in 2011 the same four answer options were retained but also added to a showcard.

8. In statistical terms, there is a strong negative correlation between the level of satisfaction with the NHS and views on increasing taxation and spending (over the whole period from 1983 to 2012, r=−0.85). There is a similar, but positive, correlation with the opinions that taxes and spending should be kept the same (and with views on reducing taxes and spending).

References


Acknowledgements
NatCen Social Research would like to thank The King’s Fund for funding the questions reported in this chapter. The views expressed here are those of the authors alone.
## Appendix

### Table A.1 Changes in population, the economy, health care, health and lifestyles, 1983 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>1983</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>Change 1983 to 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (GB)</td>
<td>Million</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensionable age (GB)</td>
<td>Million</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under 16 (GB)</td>
<td>Million</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>14,236</td>
<td>24,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health care</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total health spend (%) GDP</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS spend (£m)</td>
<td>£m</td>
<td>38,973</td>
<td>119,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS spend per capita (£) (authors’ calculations)</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>2,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors (per 1,000 pop)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>+115%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS beds (per 1,000 pop)</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>-62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patients waiting &gt;1 year for inpatient admission (England)</td>
<td>% all waiting</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth Females</td>
<td>years</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth Males</td>
<td>years</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Death</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude death rate (estimated at mid-point in the year)</td>
<td>Per 1,000 pop</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate (ONS, 2013b)</td>
<td>Per 1,000 live births</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifestyle</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking Men (CRUK, 2013)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (CRUK, 2013)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

All figures are for UK except where stated

1. 2012 prices (based on GDP deflator)
2. 2011
3. 1988
4. 2010
5. 1982
The data for Figure 4.1 are shown below.

**Table A.2 UK NHS spending (2012 prices)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>83</th>
<th>84</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>86</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>88</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>90</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK NHS 2012 prices</td>
<td>38973</td>
<td>39374</td>
<td>39773</td>
<td>41313</td>
<td>43512</td>
<td>44979</td>
<td>45997</td>
<td>47517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK NHS 2012 prices</td>
<td>49902</td>
<td>54853</td>
<td>57065</td>
<td>59404</td>
<td>60699</td>
<td>62223</td>
<td>60536</td>
<td>63293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK NHS 2012 prices</td>
<td>68063</td>
<td>71039</td>
<td>76147</td>
<td>81789</td>
<td>87120</td>
<td>93763</td>
<td>99097</td>
<td>104135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK NHS 2012 prices</td>
<td>107126</td>
<td>112990</td>
<td>122463</td>
<td>121436</td>
<td>119974</td>
<td>119614</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data for Figure 4.2 are shown below.

**Table A.3 Inpatient waiting times, 1988–2010 (March)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0–3 months</th>
<th>3–6 months</th>
<th>6–9 months</th>
<th>9–12 months</th>
<th>12+ months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/3</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993/4</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994/5</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/6</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/7</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>46.7</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>23.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>26.0</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>75.2</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Department of Health (2010)
The data for Figure 4.3 are shown below.

**Table A.4 Satisfaction with the NHS overall, 1983–2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>83</th>
<th>84</th>
<th>86</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>91</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>94</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very/quite satisfied</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very/quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1719</td>
<td>1645</td>
<td>3066</td>
<td>2768</td>
<td>2932</td>
<td>2698</td>
<td>2836</td>
<td>2945</td>
<td>3469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1761</td>
<td>1675</td>
<td>3100</td>
<td>2847</td>
<td>3029</td>
<td>2797</td>
<td>2918</td>
<td>2945</td>
<td>3469</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>95</th>
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<th>97</th>
<th>98</th>
<th>99</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very/quite satisfied</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very/quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
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<td>3620</td>
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The data for Figure 4.4 are shown below.

**Table A.5 Real annual changes in UK NHS spending, 1983–2012**

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Data on satisfaction with the NHS overall can be found in Table A.4.
The data for Figures 4.5 and 4.6 are shown below.


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Weighted base | 1719 | 3066 | 2766 | 2930 | 2698 | 2836 | 2945 | 3469 | 3633 |
Unweighted base | 1761 | 3100 | 2847 | 3029 | 2797 | 2918 | 2945 | 3469 | 3633 |

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Unweighted base | 2143 | 3078 | 3358 | 3421 | 3297 | 1096 | 1103 |

*n/a = not asked*
Table A.7 Satisfaction with NHS GPs and dentists, 1983–2012

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<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conservative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% very/quite satisfied</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labour</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% very/quite satisfied</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liberal Democrat</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% very/quite satisfied</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base: 2151, 3082, 3333, 3421, 3297, 1113, 1099
Unweighted base: 2143, 3078, 3358, 3421, 3297, 1096, 1103
The data for Figure 4.8 are shown below.

Table A.9 Satisfaction with the NHS overall, by respondents aged 18–24 years and 75 years and over, 1983–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>18–24 years</th>
<th>75+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Very/quite satisfied</td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data for ‘all’ can be found in Table A.4
The data on which Figure 4.9 is based are shown below.

**Table A.10 Support for the NHS being made available only to those on lower incomes, 1983–2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>83</th>
<th>86</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>94</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>98</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS only available to those on lower incomes</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1719</td>
<td>3066</td>
<td>2930</td>
<td>2998</td>
<td>2945</td>
<td>3469</td>
<td>3633</td>
<td>3620</td>
<td>3146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1761</td>
<td>3100</td>
<td>3029</td>
<td>2797</td>
<td>2945</td>
<td>3469</td>
<td>3633</td>
<td>3620</td>
<td>3146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>04</th>
<th>05</th>
<th>06</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS only available to those on lower incomes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>3426</td>
<td>2179</td>
<td>2285</td>
<td>2284</td>
<td>3199</td>
<td>3210</td>
<td>2151</td>
<td>3297</td>
<td>1113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>3426</td>
<td>2188</td>
<td>2287</td>
<td>2293</td>
<td>3199</td>
<td>3193</td>
<td>2143</td>
<td>3297</td>
<td>1096</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The full data on which Figure 4.10 is based are shown below.

### Table A.11 First or second priorities for extra government spending, 1983–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities for extra spending</th>
<th>83</th>
<th>84</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>86</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>91</th>
<th>93</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help for industry</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police and prisons</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transport</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social security benefits</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overseas aid</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(None of these)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base: 1719, 1645, 1769, 3066, 2766, 2930, 2766, 2945
Unweighted base: 1761, 1675, 1804, 3100, 2847, 3029, 2797, 2918, 2945

| Weighted base | 1793, 1724, 3200, 3266, 3200, 3043, 3300, 3320, 3248 |
| Unweighted base| 1787, 1724, 3200, 3266, 3200, 3043, 3300, 3320, 3248 |

Percentages sum the responses to two questions, so will add to more than 100 per cent.
The data on which Figure 4.11 is based are shown below.

### Table A.12 Attitudes to tax and social spending 1983–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>83</th>
<th>84</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>86</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>89</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>91</th>
<th>93</th>
<th>94</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... reduce taxes and spend less</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... keep taxes and spending at the same level</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... increase taxes and spend more</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 1719 1645 1769 3066 2766 2930 2698 2836 2945 3469
Unweighted base 1761 1675 1804 3100 2847 3029 2797 2918 2945 3469

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>96</th>
<th>97</th>
<th>98</th>
<th>99</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... reduce taxes and spend less</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... keep taxes and spending at the same level</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... increase taxes and spend more</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 3633 3620 1355 3146 3143 2302 2878 3435 3276 2130
Unweighted base 3633 3620 1355 3146 3143 2292 2878 3435 3272 2146

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>05</th>
<th>06</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>08</th>
<th>09</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... reduce taxes and spend less</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... keep taxes and spending at the same level</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... increase taxes and spend more</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 2167 3228 3082 2184 1134 3297 3311 3248
Unweighted base 2166 3240 3094 2229 1139 3297 3311 3248

Data on satisfaction with the NHS overall can be found in Table A.4.
Gender roles
An incomplete revolution?

Female participation in the labour market has increased markedly over the past 30 years. Both men and women in Britain’s couple families now tend to work, albeit with women often working part-time when children are young. Has this change been accompanied by a decline in support for a traditional division of gender roles in the home and workplace? And has women’s involvement in unpaid labour within the home declined at the same time as their participation in the labour market has risen?

Attitudes to gender roles
Support for a traditional division of gender roles has declined over time, though substantial support remains for women having the primary caring role when children are young.

In the mid-1980s, close to half the public agreed “a man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family”. Just 13% subscribe to this view now. This decline is primarily a result of generational replacement, with consecutive generations being less supportive of traditional gender roles.

Household work
Yet, as in the early 1990s, women still undertake a disproportionate amount of unpaid labour within the home and are much more likely to view their contribution as being unfair.

Women report spending an average of 13 hours on housework and 23 hours on caring for family members each week; the equivalent figures for men are 8 hours and 10 hours. Both sexes view their relative contributions as unfair; 60% of women report doing more than their fair share (compared with just 10% of men), while 37% of men report doing less than their fair share (compared with just 6% of women).
Introduction

Families in contemporary society are becoming more individualised. The so-called nuclear family norm of a married heterosexual couple bringing up their children, with a traditional gender division of labour, is increasingly under challenge. There has been a rise in women’s participation in the labour market over the past few decades and, in today’s couple families, the tendency is for both partners to work. However, women, especially those with young children, still disproportionately work part-time, and they still do the bulk of unpaid care. So, this suggests that, at least as yet, we have not seen a so-called ‘gender role revolution’ (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

In this chapter, we ask whether there is evidence that the increase we have seen in women’s labour market participation is coupled with a more widespread shift in perceptions about gender roles. In other words, we report how far a gender role revolution has been evolving in Britain in the last 30 years, and whether it seems set to continue to progress or whether it has now run its course. Firstly, using questions fielded on British Social Attitudes since 1984, we chart changes in public attitudes to mothers playing a dual role in paid work and raising children, and what is seen as the appropriate division of labour in this respect between mothers and fathers. And we take a closer look, with new questions fielded in 2012, at how people think couple families should divide their work and familial responsibilities. By looking at generational change in attitudes, we try to unpick what is driving or hindering change towards greater gender egalitarianism.

Secondly, we report on what couples say about their own division of labour within the household – who does what at home – to see the extent to which things have changed over the past 30 years. While the male breadwinner family system has been in decline for at least half a century, concerns about ‘work-family conflict’ have only been voiced more recently. Some argue that the only way that family conflicts associated with women’s labour market participation can be avoided is if men take on more of the housework and childcare (Witherspoon and Prior, 1991; Lewis et al., 2008; Himmelweit, 2010). So, in 2012, are men doing more of the household tasks than they used to, or are women still expected to do a ‘second shift’, adding employment to their primary responsibility for housework and family care (Hochschild, 1989)? As well as looking at what men and women do within the household, we also look at whether or not they perceive their own division of unpaid labour as fair, and whether they feel conflicted by their responsibilities at work and at home. Importantly, in addressing the question of whether there is evidence of a gender role revolution, we report on how these perceptions have changed over time.

Certainly, with the rise in mothers’ labour market participation, there is a role for policy measures that seek to reduce family-work conflicts, including childcare provision, improvement in part-time working conditions and parental leave. In the UK there was little relevant policy on such issues until the 1990s. After 1997 there was a surge in policies designed to support the ‘adult-worker model’, whereby mothers, including lone mothers, were encouraged to work (Lewis, 2008). From 1997 onwards steps have been taken to improve childcare provision (e.g. Sure Start was launched in 1998). However, childcare in Britain remains among the most expensive in Europe (Schober and Scott, 2012). The Part-Time Work Directive (1997) was an important advance, stipulating that part-time workers were entitled to the same benefits as full-time workers, in terms of training, pay and parental leave. In reality, parental leave provision in the UK is mainly about
maternity leave, which became a statutory right in the 1999/2001 Employment Relations and Employment Act (Williams, 2004). While paternal leave entitlement has improved somewhat since it was first introduced in 2003, it remains the case that few families can afford to take it up, as income loss is often prohibitive. Even so largely symbolic policies – like the notion of shared parental leave – do matter, because they encourage fathers to get more involved in the care of infants.

It is questionable as to how far the public will endorse policies that are costly at a time of economic crisis, when the country has to restrict public expenditure. We conclude the chapter by examining current attitudes to parental leave when a new child is born. Does the public favour policy measures which promote a greater merging of gender roles in the home and workplace, or do preferences reflect the status quo? These are big issues which get to the heart of questions about how far the state should be involved in shaping family life, gender equality, and parental rights and responsibilities.

Our chapter builds on a wealth of literature about family and gender role change, providing an up-to-date picture of Britain today. Given some suggestion of a more recent retreat from gender egalitarianism because of concerns voiced about potential conflicts between maternal employment and family wellbeing, especially for families with young children (Scott, 2010), we look for any changes to earlier findings about public support for mothers’ dual paid work and family roles (Witherspoon and Prior, 1991; Scott et al., 1996).

**Participation in the labour market**

Changes in women’s participation in the labour market over the past 30 years give important context to our later findings on the general attitudes of the public and the personal views of couples about their own circumstances. Behavioural and attitudinal changes often flow in both directions. Thus, more women enter employment as female participation is viewed as more acceptable, and more acceptance follows in the wake of women’s increased labour market participation.

Since the early 1980s (when our British Social Attitudes questions on gender roles were first asked), there has been substantial change in the extent and ways in which women have participated within the British labour market. In Figure 5.1 we present data from the Office for National Statistics’ Labour Force Survey to show how men and women’s participation in the labour market has changed over the past three decades to 2012.

From the mid-1990s, full-time employment for both women and men continued to grow steadily and the gap between men and women’s employment is narrowing. The dip for men in the 1980s and early 1990s partly reflects an increasing number of men over 55 taking early retirement (Guillemard, 1989). More recently from 2009 onwards, the dip in both men’s and women’s full-time employment is associated with the global economic crisis. (The rise in the relatively small numbers of men in part-time employment reflects, in part, increased numbers in higher education, with students supplementing grants with part-time jobs). For women, the growth in full-time employment from the mid-1990s onwards was stronger than the growth in part-time employment. As part-time work is often used by women – and mothers in particular – to juggle family and work responsibilities, it is worth looking more closely at the statistics associated with the work-patterns of women, with and without dependent children.
Women’s participation in paid employment has been encouraged by UK and EU policies aimed at reducing barriers to work caused by conflicting work and family life responsibilities (Lewis, 2012). Such policies have gone hand-in-hand with a marked increase in the proportion of mothers in the labour force and a narrowing in the gap between the employment rates of women with and without dependent children such that, in 2010, there was less than one percentage point difference in the participation rates of mothers (66.5 per cent) and women without dependent children (67.3 per cent) (Office for National Statistics, 2011). In 2010, a higher proportion of mothers still worked part-time (37 per cent) rather than full-time (29 per cent), sharing their time between work and looking after the family.

Our chapter focuses on the division of labour within couple families. For mothers in couple families, where there are increased opportunities to share childcare responsibilities, employment rates were higher (72 per cent in 2010) than for mothers in single-parent families (55 per cent) (Office for National Statistics, 2011). And, unsurprisingly, the Labour Force Survey statistics also show that, as the age of the youngest child in the family increases, so does the proportion of mothers in work.

### Attitudes to gender roles: change over time

Periodically since the mid-1980s, British Social Attitudes surveys have included attitudinal questions asking about the roles of men and women within the family, in particular around providing an income from work versus playing a caring role in the home. Tracking responses to these questions over the past three decades, we report on whether, in line with women’s increased participation in the labour market, there have also been changes in what the public believes men’s and women’s roles should be. Have we reached a point where the public thinks that men and women should have equal roles in the workplace and at home? Or is there still a perception that there should be a gender divide?
Figure 5.2 shows the percentage of people who agree to each of the following two statements about the gender division of responsibilities around providing an income versus looking after the home:

A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family

Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income

Figure 5.2 Attitudes to gender division of responsibilities, 1984–2012

In the mid-1980s, close to half (43 per cent in 1984 and 48 per cent in 1987) of people supported a gendered separation of roles, with the man in the ‘breadwinner’ role and the woman in the caring role. Clearly, at that time, there was a strong belief in the traditional gender divide. Since then, there has been a steady decline in the numbers holding this view. In 2012, only 13 per cent of people – or one person in eight – thinks that this should be the case. So, in respect of whether women should stay at home rather than take on paid work, there has been a dramatic shift in attitudes to gender roles in the past 30 years.

The second measure, asking whether men and women should both contribute to the household income, has been asked in British Social Attitudes since 1989, when half (53 per cent) of the public agreed this should be the case. In 2012, the proportion agreeing has risen to 62 per cent (with some fluctuations in the intervening period). So, while few people now support the idea that there should necessarily be a clear gender division of labour, with men working outside and women working inside the home, there is considerable support for both men and women contributing to the household income.

Figure 5.3 shows the responses over time to two further statements which explore whether the ‘caring’ role ascribed to women is one which people think reflects women’s own preferences and experiences:

A job is alright, but what most women really want is a home and children

Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay
In 1987, a third (36 per cent) of the public thought that most women would prioritise their caring role over having a job. That proportion has dropped to a quarter (26 per cent) in 2012. There has been very little change (from 41 per cent in 1989 to 45 per cent in 2012) in the proportion of people believing that the role of the housewife is just as fulfilling as the role of worker. The answers indicate more limited change in the public’s perceptions of how women regard and experience a ‘caring’ role in practice, compared to the substantial change we saw in relation to abstract perceptions of what male and female roles should be.

People’s attitudes on the appropriate gender division between men and women may relate to their views about whether mothers’ employment is detrimental for family life and for children. We know about public perceptions of this issue by their responses to the following statements:

- **A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work**

- **A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works**

- **All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job**

The data on which Figure 5.4 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

![Figure 5.4 Views on impact of maternal employment on family and children, 1989–2012](image-url)
On each measure, there has been a clear decline since the questions were first asked in 1989 in the proportion of people who perceive a woman’s adoption of a ‘breadwinner’ role (by having a paid job) as damaging for her children and family. However, it is still evident among a minority, particularly when children of pre-school age are involved. In 1989, six in ten (58 per cent) people agreed that a working mother can establish as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work, but almost three in ten (28 per cent) disagreed. By 2012, almost eight in ten (77 per cent) subscribe to this view, with only one in ten (11 per cent) disagreeing. Similarly, there have been drops in the proportion of people thinking that pre-school children suffer if their mother works (from 46 per cent in 1989 to 30 per cent in 2012), and in the proportion of people expressing the view that family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job (from 42 per cent in 1989 to 27 per cent now).

So, it seems that while attitudes that there should be a clear gender divide – with male breadwinners and female home-keepers – have been almost eradicated (believed by only one in eight people in 2012), when children are involved, substantial minorities of the public still believe that women would prefer to, and indeed should, stay at home rather than take on paid work.

In addition to the measures of how far the public agrees to the statements above, British Social Attitudes has included the following question, asked in relation firstly to when there is a child under school age, and secondly to when their youngest child has started school:

*Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all under the following circumstances?*

We look at people’s responses to these two questions to explore further how people’s attitudes on women working are influenced by the age of their children – and whether these attitudes have shifted over the past two decades, since the questions were first asked in 1989.

| Table 5.1 Attitudes to mothers’ employment, in different circumstances, 1989, 2002 and 2012 |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Work full-time                  | 2    | 3    | 5   | 13   | 15   | 28   |
| Work part-time                  | 26   | 34   | 43  | 68   | 66   | 52   |
| Stay at home                    | 64   | 48   | 33  | 11   | 5    | 2    |
| Can’t choose                    | 6    | 12   | 17  | 7    | 12   | 16   |
| Weighted base                   | 1274 | 1984 | 953 | 1274 | 1984 | 953 |
| Unweighted base                 | 1307 | 1960 | 950 | 1307 | 1960 | 950 |

Since 1989, there has been a substantial shift in people’s views, particularly about mothers working while their children are under school age. Here, the major shift has been between thinking that mothers should stay at home and thinking they should work part-time. In 1989, two-thirds of the public thought a mother should stay at home with pre-school children; by 2012, the proportion thinking this had dropped to a third. Over the same period, the proportion thinking she should work
part-time rose from 26 per cent to 43 per cent. While support remains rare for the idea that a mother with a child below school-age should work full-time, it has doubled from two per cent in 1989 to five per cent in 2012.

In terms of views about a mother whose children are all of school age, support for her staying at home or working part-time has dropped since 1989, while the proportion holding the view that she should work full-time has increased – from 13 per cent in 1989 to 28 per cent in 2012. Working part-time remains the most popular option (cited by 52 per cent in 2012), although support for this is less pronounced now than it was in 1989 (when 68 per cent agreed a woman with children of school age should work part-time). Interestingly, uncertainty has risen in relation to both circumstances (from six and seven per cent in 1989 to 17 and 16 per cent now) – perhaps resulting from the fact that mothers’ actual behaviour is more diverse now than it has been in the past.

A generational shift in attitudes?

In order to reflect on whether we are likely to see a further erosion of traditional values, and further progression of the ‘gender role revolution’, it is helpful to understand whether the trends in societal attitudes we report above are the result of generational change – with more ‘traditional’ generations being replaced by less ‘traditional’ ones as time goes on. If that is the case, we might expect to see a continued decline in support for traditional gender divides into the future.

To look at this, we focus on the proportion of the public who agree with the statement that “A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family” – a view which most clearly encapsulates a traditional division of gender roles. We first look at variations in the responses of people in different age groups. Because there is very little difference in the views of men and women on this issue, either in 1984 (when 45 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women agreed with the statement) or in 2012 (when levels of agreement were 13 per cent and 12 per cent respectively), we do not separate our analysis by sex.

Table 5.2 Attitudes to gender roles, by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18–25</th>
<th>26–35</th>
<th>36–45</th>
<th>46–55</th>
<th>56–65</th>
<th>66+</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weighted base**: 107 164 177 168 155 180 953
**Unweighted base**: 63 129 173 153 172 259 950

Table 5.2 shows that, in 2012, support for a traditional division of labour is much more pronounced among older people (those aged 66 years and over) and least popular among the youngest age groups. Less than one in 20 of those aged...
25 years and under and around one in ten of those aged 26-35 agree with a traditional division of gender roles, compared to three in ten of those aged 66 and over. More markedly, around three-quarters of those in the youngest two age groups disagree with a traditional division of gender roles, compared to just four in ten of those in the oldest age group. On the face of it, this might suggest that decreasing support for a traditional gender divide is due to ‘generation replacement’, with older generations, more likely to be supportive of traditional gender roles, dying out and being replaced by younger, less traditional, generations.

To explore this theory further, we looked at the responses over time of different age cohorts. So, in each survey year, we divided the respondents into people born in particular decades (those born between 1910 and 1929, between 1920 and 1939, and so on). In this way, in Figure 5.5, we can see the differences in the attitudes of particular age cohorts, and how these change over time. Within each cohort, with the exception of those born in the 1970s (and most notably among those born in the 1940s and 1950s) there is some decline over time in support for a traditional division of gender roles, suggesting that people are to some extent influenced by changing societal norms. However, the overriding story here is one of generational replacement, with each successive age cohort – or generation – being less likely to support a traditional division of gender roles, compared to the one that preceded them. The gap is narrowing between the differences of the most recent cohorts. This implies that, while we might expect to see further reductions in support for a traditional division of labour in coming decades, the speed of change in attitudes may slow down.

Figure 5.5 Agreement with a traditional division of gender roles (man’s job to earn money; woman’s job to look after home and family), by generation, 1984–2012

The data on which Figure 5.5 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

Data are only presented for those generation cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year.

How should parents divide their work and caring responsibilities when children are young?

The questions we report above about how much mothers should work when their children are pre-school or school-age focus on the mother’s employment alone, without regard to the working patterns of the father. It may be that responses are based on an (unstated) assumption that the father would be working full-time. If so, people’s views might be somewhat different if this
was not necessarily the case. To explore this issue, British Social Attitudes included a new question in 2012 tapping public perceptions of ‘ideal’ divisions of parental responsibility between employment and childcare. Specifically, the question asked:

*Consider a family with a child under school age. What, in your opinion, is the best way for them to organise their family and work life?*

*And, in your opinion, which of these options would be the least desirable?*

Respondents were presented with a range of options, set out in Table 5.3. It is striking that, in 2012, only one in ten (nine per cent) people choose options that did not involve the mother being ascribed the sole or main ‘carer’ role. The most popular approach, selected by almost four in ten people, is for the mother to work part-time and the father to work full-time. Three in ten think the mother should stay at home while the father works full-time. There is minimal support for a role reversal: less than one per cent think that the father should stay at home or work part-time while the mother works full-time. Likewise, very few people (four per cent) think that it is best for both parents to work full-time: there is clear opposition to this, with almost half (47 per cent) viewing this as the least desirable way of organising things. There is also minimal support for splitting the breadwinner and carer roles equally (with both parents working part-time). So, these data suggest that the public retains a view that there should be a gender divide in terms of caring responsibilities: the shift has been in accepting the idea that a mother works part-time, rather than not at all.

**Table 5.3 Best and least desirable way for family with child under school age to organise family and work life, by sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best way</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>Women %</th>
<th>All %</th>
<th>Least desirable</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>Women %</th>
<th>All %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mother stays at home and the father works full-time</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mother works part-time and the father works full-time</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both the mother and the father work full-time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both the mother and the father work part-time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The father works part-time and the mother works full-time</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The father stays at home and the mother works full-time</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t choose</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Weighted base* 507 446 953  *Unweighted base* 438 512 950

The views of men and women on this issue are very similar: it is not the case that men express substantially greater support for options involving a traditional division of labour roles, or indeed that they would advocate a greater care-giving role for fathers. Moreover, the views of parents reflect those of the population as a whole, while the views of mothers and fathers of children aged under 18 are not significantly different.
We have shown earlier that older people tend to be more supportive than younger people of traditional gender roles. We might therefore expect them to be more likely to advocate a traditional arrangement here, where the mother stays at home while the father works full-time. Table 5.4 shows this is the case. People aged 66 and over – who were mostly born during or before World War Two – show the strongest support for the ‘male breadwinner’ – with almost half (48 per cent) recommending the mother stays at home and the father works full time. This generation is also the least likely to select the “can’t choose” option. When this generation had dependent-aged children, they would have taken traditional gender roles for granted (although economic necessity forced some women to work part-time); whereas for subsequent generations the male breadwinner family is only one option among several different ways that families with young children can choose to organise the divide of work and care.

Table 5.4 Most desirable way for family with child under school age to organise work and family life, by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18–25</th>
<th>26–35</th>
<th>36–45</th>
<th>46–55</th>
<th>56–65</th>
<th>66+</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% agreeing best way for family with child under school age to organise their family and work life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male breadwinner</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified breadwinner</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual earner</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both part-time</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t choose</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male breadwinner – the mother stays at home father works full time
Modified breadwinner – the mother works part-time and the father works full time
Dual earner (full-time) – both the mother and the father works full-time
Both part time – both the mother and the father works part-time

The youngest age group (aged 25 or less) are by far the most likely to favour both the mother and father working part-time (although, still, just 14 per cent of young adults favour this option); we should treat this figure with caution due to the small number of respondents in this age group. Both parents working part-time may make possible a more egalitarian approach to parenting. However, this option would only be realistic in Britain if wider opportunities for part-time work become available across different job sectors. Moreover, behaviour is more constrained than attitudes, and whether parents would actually risk opting for part-time over full-time work in times of tough economic conditions is not something our data can answer.

Given the changes in attitudes to gender roles and labour force participation reported above, we might expect domestic labour to have also shifted away from the traditional gender division. It is to this question that we turn next.
Attitudes have changed, but have behaviours?

We have shown how, during the past three decades, the public has become less traditional in its views about mothers working per se, but that the majority view is that mothers, with young children at least, should still retain the primary care role (be that by staying at home or by combining part-time work with the caregiving role). At this point in the chapter, we turn to look at what people report is happening in their own households. Using questions included in British Social Attitudes since 1994 or 2002, we explore the issue of the domestic division of labour from a number of angles. First we examine how much time men and women report spending on housework and family care. Second, we examine whether particular tasks are more or less likely to be undertaken exclusively by men and women than they have been in the past. Thirdly, we look at whether or not men and women view their own gender division of domestic labour as fair. These findings add to our evidence of whether, with increasing numbers of women (and mothers) in the workplace, this has resulted in increased equity in terms of looking after the home.

In order to see how household work and caring is divided between couples, British Social Attitudes ask those living with a partner:

- On average, how many hours a week do you personally spend on household work, not including childcare and leisure time activities?
- On average, how many hours a week do you spend looking after family members (e.g. children, elderly, ill or disabled family members)?

The average (mean) hours that men and women report spending on these activities in 2002 (household work only) and 2012 are shown in Table 5.5. Other studies have found that men somewhat ‘inflate’ their participation in household chores, compared with the estimates given by their partners about how much the men do (Scott and Plagnol, 2012). In this table we therefore show the hours spent by men and women, as reported by the individual themselves and by their partner. There has been little change in the gender division of unpaid work across the past decade. Both men and women agree that women spend much more time each week on average – both on household work and on looking after family members. In 2012, according to self-reports, men spend an average of eight hours on housework per week, while women spend 13 hours. The comparable figures for care of family members are 23 hours a week for women and 10 for men.
Table 5.5 Average (mean) reported hours spent by men and women in couple on household work, 2002 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of person doing tasks</th>
<th>Household work</th>
<th>Looking after family members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male (self-reported)</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (reported by partner)</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (self-reported)</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (reported by partner)</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Men
- Weighted base: 527 438
- Unweighted base: 527 438

Women
- Weighted base: 619 512
- Unweighted base: 619 512

Base: respondents who live with a partner
n/a = not asked

When we combine self-reported involvement in household work and looking after family members, we find that men in 2012 report spending an average of 19 hours a week on these activities, compared to the 36 hours reported by women. A similar magnitude of difference is found when we consider the reported time spent by fathers and mothers specifically; while fathers report an average of 24 hours per week spent on household work and looking after family members, the comparable figure for mothers is 49 hours.

Periodically since 1994, British Social Attitudes also asked people in couple households to identify who in their household performs each of the tasks listed in Table 5.6. The table shows the percentages of people who say that each particular task is performed generally by the man or by the woman in the household (although, since 2002, the question was asked in terms of whether each task was done always/usually by themselves, their partner, or both equally, with the option of saying the task is done by someone else).

The overall story is that there has been very little change over the past two decades in the percentage of couple households dividing household responsibilities along traditional gender lines. The biggest gender divides are in who does the laundry (women, in 70 per cent of couple households in 2012) and who makes small repairs around the house (men, in 75 per cent of couple households in 2012). However, there has been some shift in responsibilities for doing the laundry since 1994, when in eight in ten households it was largely the woman's task. While the extent to which other tasks are typically undertaken by men or women is less pronounced, it was the case in 1994 and remains the case in 2012 that, to differing degrees, women are much more likely than men to always or usually care for sick family members, shop for groceries, do the household cleaning and prepare the meals. (However, both caring for sick family members and shopping are as likely to be done equally by both partners, as to be usually done by only the woman.) While women are less likely to be primarily responsible for caring for sick family members than they were decades ago, there is little evidence of a substantial increase in men undertaking this activity or it being shared.
Table 5.6 Household tasks undertaken by men and women, 1994–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual reported as always/usually undertaking task</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the laundry</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually man</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both equally</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually woman</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes small repairs around the house</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually man</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both equally</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually woman</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cares for sick family members</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually man</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both equally</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually woman</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops for groceries</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually man</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both equally</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually woman</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the household cleaning</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually man</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both equally</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually woman</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepares the meals</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually man</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both equally</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always/usually woman</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base: 704 1339 1278 679
Unweighted base: 601 1146 1147 598

Base: respondents in heterosexual couples

The percentages in the table do not add up to 100 per cent because we have not shown the very few responses that say they can’t choose or the task is done by someone else

n/a = not asked

Knowing how couples divide their time does not tell us whether they think this is an appropriate division of labour given their other commitments (for instance, paid work). So, in 2002 and 2012, British Social Attitudes asked:

Which of the following best applies to the sharing of household work between you and your spouse/partner?

The answer options were framed in terms of the extent to which someone felt they were taking on a “fair share”.

NatGen Social Research
The views presented in Table 5.7 highlight substantial differences in the perceptions of men and women on this matter – and that these views have not changed much over the past decade. Around six in ten women in 2002 and 2012 consider that they do more than their fair share of the household work. However, only around four in ten men in both years think that they do less than their fair share. Men are unlikely to say they do more than their fair share, as are women to say that they do less than their fair share. Just under half of men and around a third of women think that they do roughly their fair share.

So, although significantly fewer men in 2012 than in 2002 report that they are doing less than their fair share, still the key finding is that, when it comes to their own division of labour within the home, most women think that the division of labour is unjust because she is doing more than her fair share. Within couple households, there is little sign of a gender role revolution in terms of who does what around the home.

Table 5.7 Perceptions of division of household work by sex of respondent, 2002 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of fairness of housework divide by sex</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much more/a bit more than my fair share</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roughly my fair share</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bit less/much less than my fair share</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base: 616, 723, 390, 273
Unweighted base: 527, 619, 311, 263

Base: respondents in heterosexual couples

These findings are broadly replicated when we focus on the views of mothers and fathers specifically. Moreover, when we look at couple households where both members of the couple are doing a comparable amount of paid work (both full-time, both part-time or both not working) we find similar perceptions of fairness in the gender division of domestic labour – although the numbers available are too small for analysis in some instances. In couples where partners are doing the same amount of paid work, 63 per cent of women say that they are doing more than their fair share of housework, while 15 per cent of men say that this is the case for them – almost exactly replicated in the figures presented in Figure 5.7.
Conflict between work and family life

If more women are doing paid work and they remain primarily responsible for family care and household chores, we may find that there has been an increase in the conflict between balancing work and family life. British Social Attitudes includes four questions that tap into people’s perceptions of work-family conflict, by asking how often they have had four different experiences in the past three months. Two of these questions address the spillover from work to home:

- I have come home from work too tired to do the chores which need to be done

- It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job

The other two questions look at how family responsibilities can make paid work difficult:

- I have arrived at work too tired to function well because of the household work I had done

- I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities

The responses of working people in couple relationships are presented in Table 5.8.

Again, the key message here is that there appears to be little change in work-life conflict, for either men or women, between 2002 and 2012. This reflects the fact that, over this period, there has been little change in women's labour market participation rates and in their division of labour within the home. In 2012, as in 2002, women are more likely than men to say that they come home from work regularly (weekly or several times a month) too tired to do the household chores (52 per cent of women and 40 per cent of men in 2012). They are also significantly less likely than men to say they have found it difficult to fulfil family responsibilities (20 per cent of women and 30 per cent of men in 2012). What is striking is that neither men nor women admit to family chores or family responsibilities getting in the way of their work. In the case of arriving at work too tired to function, in 2012 two thirds of men and women say this has never happened in the last three months, with a further one in five saying it has happened only once or twice. And, on the issue of whether family responsibilities have interfered with work concentration, half of men and women say this has never happened and a further three in ten in each group say it has only happened once or twice.

Thus there is a gap between people’s perceptions of how work can interfere with family life, and how people report family life interferes with work. It could be that people are wary of admitting to underperforming at work, or it could be that they feel they must prioritise work over family life. What is missing from our data, are the people for whom the conflicts proved too much and who gave up their jobs. Thus, if anything these responses might underplay the extent to which jobs can cause difficulties for family life. However there is enough evidence of tensions between work and family life to be a cause for concern.
Table 5.8 Reported work-life conflict, by sex, 2002 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come home too tired to do chores</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent on job made it difficult</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meet family responsibilities</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too tired to function well at work</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because of housework</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to concentrate at work</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because of family responsibilities</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Weighted base | 418 | 459 | 310 | 229 |
| Unweighted base | 353 | 380 | 245 | 233 |

Base: respondents in heterosexual couples, in paid work for at least 10 hours per week

Public attitudes to parental leave

In this final section, we turn to the public’s views on one policy measure designed to make it easier for men and women to share breadwinner and carer roles: parental leave for parents with a newborn child – which we asked about for the first time in 2012. It is in these circumstances, where parents have young children, that we have seen the public continuing to advocate the most ‘traditional’ division of gender roles.

The current provision of paid leave for parents of a newborn child is set out on the government website (GOV.UK). Currently, employed mothers can take up to 52 weeks leave, of which 39 weeks has an entitlement to statutory maternity pay. The first six weeks of this is paid at 90 per cent of average weekly earnings (AWE) and the remaining 33 weeks are paid at £136.78 or 90% of their AWE, whichever is lower. Paternity leave allows only one or two weeks paid ordinary paternity leave, and up to 26 weeks of paid additional leave, but only if the mother returns to work. For many families there is a considerable financial
disincentive for the father to take paid leave. The gender pay gap means that on average men's hourly wage is higher than that of women. If the couple make a decision about how to divide up work and care in order to maximize the family income, then it is usually advantageous for the woman to take maternity leave, as the pay penalty is not as large as it would be if the man took paternity leave. Plans to introduce shared parental leave are in the pipeline, with the goal being to encourage fathers to play a more active role in care, from when the child is born. However, this is likely to be a symbolic gesture, which does little to shift maternity and paternity take-up. To be more than symbolic, statutory pay would need to be increased markedly. This is not realistic in the current economic climate.

To see what arrangements the public believes should be in place to support couples with babies, who should provide them and how they should work in practice, British Social Attitudes asks:

Consider a couple who both work full-time and now have a newborn child. One of them stops working for some time to care for their child. Do you think there should be paid leave available and, if so, for how long?

And who should pay for this leave?

Still thinking about the same couple, if both are in a similar work situation and are eligible for paid leave, how should this paid leave period be divided between the mother and the father?

The results are presented in Table 5.9. Most people believe that there should be some paid parental leave when a child is born: just one in ten suggest that no paid leave should be available. The majority of people think that parents should be given at least six months paid leave (33 per cent between six months and a year, 28 per cent a year, and four per cent more than a year). The majority view, among those who think that some period of leave should be provided, is that the government should pay for at least part of this leave: 16 per cent think it should be solely responsible and more than half think the responsibility should be split between government and employers. One in eight thinks it should be solely the responsibility of employers to cover parental leave.

When it comes to how paid leave should be divided between mothers and fathers, there is clear support for the mother taking all or the majority of this leave (16 per cent think she should take all the paid leave and a further 43 per cent think she should take most of it). This reflects the majority support noted earlier for mothers staying at home, or working part-time, when there is a child under school age – and confirms that this support is not simply a reflection of what is currently available in terms of policy options, but rather what people think government policy should be. However, one in five people think paid leave should be divided evenly between the mother and father. So there is limited support for the proposed policy of allowing mothers and fathers to share parental leave.

Interestingly, the views of men and women in relation to this issue are relatively similar. There is a tendency for women to support a longer period of paid leave – one year's leave is the option most frequently selected by women, while men most commonly say that less than a year's leave should be available. Men and women are relatively united in their attitudes towards who should pay for this
leave. And, while women are slightly more in favour of sharing the “carer” role, the fact remains that just one quarter advocate the mother and father sharing the period of paid leave and none recommend the father taking the majority or all of the leave. Clearly, when it comes to caring for a child under school-age, there is much more public support for a traditional division of labour roles, among both sexes, even when policy options facilitate a more diverse range of possibilities. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that there is much greater support among the youngest age groups for the paid leave being divided between the mother and father; 44 per cent and 26 per cent of those aged 18–25 and 26–35 respectively think that both should take half of the leave, although numbers in the youngest age group are small, so this finding should be interpreted with caution. On the other hand, just 13 per cent of those aged 66+ think the paid leave should be divided in this way, reflecting the higher levels of support for a traditional division of gender roles when it comes to childcare among the older age groups, noted previously.

Table 5.9 Attitudes to the provision of paid leave for newborn child, by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much paid leave should be available</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>Women %</th>
<th>All %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than six months</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least six months but less than a year</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one year</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base | 507 | 446 | 953
Unweighted base | 438 | 512 | 950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who should pay for this</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The government</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employer</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both the government and the employer</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How paid leave should be divided between mother and father</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother should take entire period</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother should take most of period</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both should take half period</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father should take most of period</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father should take entire period</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base | 439 | 394 | 832
Unweighted base | 369 | 439 | 808

Base: all respondents were asked how much paid leave should be available, but only those who provided an answer other than “none” were asked the follow-up questions.

There is a tendency for women to support a longer period of paid leave for a new born child – one year’s leave is the option most frequently selected by women.
Conclusions

Public support for a traditional division of gender roles within the home and the workplace has declined substantially over the last three decades, a change that goes hand in hand with the marked increase in the labour force participation of women and mothers. Changes in attitudes have been driven in part by generational replacement, indicating that we might expect a continuing decline of support for the traditional gender division of labour, in the future. However, even if dual-earner households are now the norm, it is wrong to think that the gender role revolution is anywhere near complete.

Gender equality in terms of who does the bulk of the chores and who is primarily responsible for looking after the children has made very little progress in terms of what happens in people's homes. Men's uptake of unpaid domestic work is slow, and women continue to feel that they are doing more than their fair share. Whether women's 'double shift' – both doing a paid job and the bulk of family care and housework chores – is sustainable is an important question for the future.

Gender inequalities in the home undoubtedly make it difficult to achieve gender equality in the workplace. This is a cause for public concern. The state has an important role to play in reducing work-family conflict for both men and women. However, the public is likely to be cautious about specific policy changes because opinions are shaped by existing practices and constraints. We have seen, for example, that there is almost zero support for any gender role reversal when it comes to preferences for juggling work and family responsibilities. However there is a non-trivial minority who support a more equitable divide of parental leave between mothers and fathers.

The literature depicts two extremes when discussing trends in gender equality. On the one hand we have suggestions that there is a 'rising tide' of support for gender equality (Ingelhart and Norris, 2003); on the other hand we are told that there has been an 'incomplete revolution' (Esping-Andersen, 2009). On balance, the findings from this chapter are more equivocal. The British public perceives a mismatch between depictions of gender-neutral 'adult worker' families and the practical realities of the gender division of paid and unpaid labour, especially when children are young. Is the gender role revolution stalled? Or are we seeing what can be called a 'structural lag' – whereby men and societal institutions (parental leave, childcare, employment, and so on) have to catch up with the realities of changing families and women's new roles? Only time will tell.

Notes
1. When this question was originally developed in 1984, it asked about “a husband” and “a wife” rather than “a man” and “a woman”. This was replaced by a variant of the question using the latter terminology in 1994.
2. In 2002 and later years, answer categories were framed with reference to the respondent – “always me”, “usually me”, “about equal”, “usually spouse/partner” and “always spouse/partner”. In 1994 and earlier years, response categories were framed with reference to the gender of the individual performing the specific task – “always the woman”, “usually the woman”, “equal or both”, “usually the man” or “always the man”. The data presented in Table 5.6 was re-classified for the later years, to reflect the format in which the question was asked in earlier years.
References


Acknowledgements
NatCen Social Research would like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number RES-501-25-5002) for funding the questions reported in this chapter. The views expressed here are those of the authors alone.
Appendix

The data on which Figure 5.1 is based are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>13441</td>
<td>5578</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>4353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>13525</td>
<td>5718</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>4452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>13426</td>
<td>5860</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>4507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>13451</td>
<td>5999</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>4617</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>13855</td>
<td>6291</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>4738</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>14243</td>
<td>6537</td>
<td>841</td>
<td>4943</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>14247</td>
<td>6683</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>4947</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>13776</td>
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<td>920</td>
<td>4952</td>
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<td>13129</td>
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<td>989</td>
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<td>1994</td>
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<td>6408</td>
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<td>6503</td>
<td>1152</td>
<td>5206</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>12951</td>
<td>6550</td>
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<td>5318</td>
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<td>6678</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>13536</td>
<td>7616</td>
<td>2001</td>
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The data on which Figures 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 are based are shown below.

### Table A.2 Attitudes to male and female roles in workplace and home, 1984–2012

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<tr>
<td>% agree a man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>% agree both the man and woman should contribute to the household income</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>59</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% agree a job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>% agree being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% agree a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
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<td>% agree a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>% agree all in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
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Weighted base 1522 1243 1274 1000 1984 1842 953
Unweighted base 1562 1281 1307 984 1960 1845 950

n/a = not asked
The data on which Figure 5.5 is based are shown below.

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<td>63–72</td>
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Devolution
Identities and constitutional preferences across the UK

In 1983 the United Kingdom was a unitary state, with all legislative power and executive responsibility lying with Westminster and Whitehall. Thirty years on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have separately elected representative bodies with law-making powers. Has the advent of devolution strengthened or weakened the foundations of public support for keeping Britain together?

National identity and constitutional preferences

The arrival of devolution has not been accompanied by an increase in people’s readiness to acknowledge a British national identity. If anything the reverse has happened. But there is no consistent evidence that devolution has either strengthened or weakened the foundations of public support for the Union.

Scotland

- Only 20% of people in Scotland choose British as their main identity, but the figure was just the same in 1997.
- Support for independence has fallen from 30% in 2006 to 23% now. Only around half of those with a strong Scottish identity back independence.
- However, around three-fifths feel that the Scottish Parliament should be running taxes and welfare north of the border.

Northern Ireland

- In Northern Ireland support for remaining in the UK dropped from 70% to 56% during the decade before the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.
- More recently, the proportion saying they are British has fallen, from 48% in 2004 to 39% now. People seem more inclined to say they are Northern Irish instead.
- However, since 2007 support for reunification with the rest of Ireland has fallen from 23% to 15%.

England

- Asked to make a single choice, 43% of people in England now say they are British, down from 65% in 1992 – but the drop occurred before devolution.
- 25% now think that Scotland should leave the UK, up from 19% in 2000, while the proportion thinking Scotland gets more than its fair share of public spending has doubled since 2000 to 44%.
- However, there is little evidence that this apparent ‘English backlash’ has occurred primarily among those who feel English rather than British.
Introduction

In 1983 the United Kingdom was very clearly a unitary state. Despite consisting of three distinct nations and a territory whose national status is disputed, all legislative power and executive responsibility lay with Westminster and Whitehall. Proposals to introduce separately elected devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales had failed to secure adequate support in referendums held in 1979. Meanwhile in Northern Ireland, where a devolved parliament and government had existed until 1972, hopes of reintroducing devolution were looking unlikely to be fulfilled in the wake of continuing civil strife. All that was in place was an assembly that had the ability to scrutinise the Westminster government’s Secretary of State, but which was being boycotted by its nationalist members – and before long even that limited institution was to come to an unheralded end.

Thirty years on the position is very different. Both Scotland and Wales now have separately elected representative bodies that have the ability to make laws without reference to Westminster, and governments that can decide for themselves how many of the public services in their country should be funded and run. Northern Ireland too now enjoys devolution once more, albeit in a very different form to what was in place before 1972 or is to be found anywhere else in the UK today. In order to ensure that power is shared between the two distinct ethno-religious communities living there – a Protestant community whose roots lie in 17th-century immigration from Scotland and a Catholic community that shares many ties and affinities with the rest of the island of Ireland – not only is the territory’s law-making Assembly elected by proportional representation, but ministerial posts are allocated in that way too.

Much of the impetus for these developments lay in a wish to demonstrate that the United Kingdom was capable of accommodating the diverse identities and aspirations that lie within it, and thereby help end disputes that threatened its territorial integrity (Aughey, 2001; Bogdanor, 1999; Mackintosh, 1998). It was hoped that by giving Wales and (especially) Scotland their own separate political institutions that had the ability to determine much of their country’s domestic affairs, demands for independence that were being spearheaded by nationalist political parties would be headed off. Meanwhile in Northern Ireland it was anticipated that, together with the creation of institutions to facilitate dialogue and collaboration with the neighbouring Irish Republic, giving nationalist politicians who represented the minority Catholic population a guaranteed role in the territory’s government would facilitate accommodation of the identities and aspirations of Catholics, while recognising that, for the time being at least, a majority of the territory’s population wanted to remain part of the UK (McGarry and O’Leary, 1995; 2006).

These innovations were not, however, without their critics. In Scotland in particular, it was argued that the creation of a separate parliament would put the country on a ‘slippery slope’ towards independence (Dalyell, 1977). The new institution’s politicians would inevitably want to increase their power at Westminster’s expense. Creating distinctively Scottish political symbols would simply stimulate and fuel Scottish national identity rather than strengthen adherence to Britishness and the UK state (Thatcher, 1998). At the same time, relations with England would be soured because while Scotland and Wales would now be able settle many of their own affairs for themselves, politicians from the rest of the UK could still meddle in the affairs of England, where no
Devolution was in place and where public spending per head would continue to be less than that enjoyed elsewhere. It was even suggested that an ‘English backlash’ might ensue (Wright, 2000).

In Northern Ireland there were doubts whether the devolution settlement that was agreed in talks concluded on Good Friday 1998 would succeed in bringing all parts of the territory together. One of the two main Protestant political parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), chose not to be party to the Agreement. For many unionist politicians, much rested on whether the proposals for decommissioning weaponry that had been accumulated during 30 years of civil strife, not least by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), would be seen to work in practice. Meanwhile, by providing guaranteed representation to both unionist and nationalist politicians in the executive as well as the legislature, and in requiring that major legislative decisions have the support of the representatives of both communities in the Assembly, some commentators were concerned that the settlement would simply reinforce existing lines of division as well as potentially undermine the effectiveness and accountability of ministerial decision-making (Wilson and Wilford, 2003; Horowitz, 2001).

Initially, at least, it was the doubts about the stability and effectiveness of the settlement in Northern Ireland that appeared to have the greater force. The Assembly only operated for 10 weeks before it had to be suspended because of a perceived lack of progress on arms decommissioning. After a number of other hiccups the devolved institutions actually lay in abeyance for nearly five years, from 2002 to 2007. However, some nine years after the conclusion of the Good Friday Agreement (also known as the Belfast Agreement) and with the issue of decommissioning finally resolved, the devolved institutions began to operate in 2007 on a continuous basis, and this time with the DUP as full participants. Indeed Northern Ireland was faced with the remarkable sight of the DUP’s leader, the Revd. Ian Paisley, a long-standing and rhetorically flamboyant advocate of hard line unionism, working in government with Martin McGuinness, who had formerly been an active member of the Provisional IRA.

More recently, however, it has been the durability of Scotland’s constitutional position that has looked to be in most doubt. Far from killing nationalism ‘stone dead’ as had been anticipated by the former Labour Cabinet Minister, (Lord) George Robertson (Hassan, 2011), it soon became apparent that elections to the Scottish Parliament were proving to be a relatively happy hunting ground for the Scottish National Party (SNP) (as indeed were Assembly elections for the Welsh nationalist party, Plaid Cymru, in Wales). In 2007 the SNP narrowly succeeded in securing the largest number of MSPs, and for the next four years formed a minority government. Still, the party’s ambitions to hold a referendum on whether Scotland should leave the UK and become an independent country remained on hold thanks to the absence of a majority for such a move in the Edinburgh Parliament. However, in 2011 the nationalists dramatically won an overall majority and the UK government accepted that this gave the party the moral right to hold an independence referendum. After extended negotiations between the two governments the way has now been cleared for a referendum on independence to be held in September 2014. Should there be a majority ‘Yes’ vote then preparations will begin to be made for Scotland to leave the UK.

In this chapter we look underneath the bonnet of these election outcomes and political developments to examine the trends in identities and constitutional preferences among the general public since the advent of devolution in Scotland.
and Northern Ireland.[2] Has public support for remaining part of the UK in fact
either grown or diminished in the wake of constitutional change? At the same
time we also examine developments in the UK’s largest component: England.
Does it accept the patchwork of asymmetric devolution that has emerged or
are there signs of discontent? To answer these questions we address three key
issues that are central to understanding the role that devolution has so far played
in helping to maintain – or fracture – the UK.

First, what has happened to patterns of national identity? A shared sense of
Britishness is often regarded as the emotional glue that helps keep the UK
together. Yet it coexists alongside other ‘national’ identities, Scottish, English,
Irish, Northern Irish and Welsh. Has the establishment of a distinctive Scottish
Parliament undermined adherence to Britishness north of the border? Has
England become more aware of its own separate English identity? And has
greater acknowledgement of the aspirations of many Northern Irish Catholics
served in practice to reinforce in them a sense of having a distinct Irish identity?

Even if the pattern of national identity has not changed, people’s preferences
as to how they would like to be governed may have done so. The electoral
success of the SNP certainly gives good reason to wonder whether in Scotland
support for leaving the UK has increased since devolution has been in place.
Meanwhile, perhaps England has begun to question whether it should continue
to accommodate the demands of its seemingly increasingly truculent neighbour
and/or whether it should be enjoying some form of devolution itself. At the same
time, we might wonder now that the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland
have been up and running for a while, whether more people in the region are
willing to accept its continued role as part of the UK. So, our second key issue
is, ‘What trends have emerged in how people in each part of the UK would like
to be governed?’

Finally, we turn to the relationship between identity and preferences, and ask
how far those with different national identities disagree about how their part of
the UK should be run. If devolution really has been successful in strengthening
public support for keeping the UK in its current form, then arguably those
whose primary sense of identity is something other than British should have
come to accept that where they live should remain in the UK. In short it should
have succeeded in healing the constitutional divisions between those with
different identities. On the other hand, if the fears of those who were critical of
devolution have been realised we might find those who do not feel primarily
British have become even less likely to accept that they should be part of the
British state. Those who feel Scottish or Irish may have become even more
determined to want to leave the UK, while those who primarily feel English may
have particularly come to wonder whether their part of the UK is getting a raw
deal. So our third issue is then, ‘Has the link between identity and constitutional
preference strengthened or weakened?’

To answer these questions, we draw on data from three complementary
sources. The first is the British Social Attitudes survey which, since the late
1990s, has been asking its respondents in England, on a regular basis, about
both their national identity and their constitutional preferences. In addition, since
1983 British Social Attitudes has asked all respondents in Britain what they
think the constitutional position of Northern Ireland should be, and so we can
examine how far the rest of the UK believes that territory should form part of the
British state.
British Social Attitudes covers Scotland too, but it contains too few respondents in any one year to provide us with reliable estimates of the distribution of public opinion north of the border. Instead for this information we turn to British Social Attitudes’ sister survey, the Scottish Social Attitudes survey, which was first established in the immediate wake of the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and is conducted using the same methodological approach as British Social Attitudes. It is the only survey to have asked the same questions about national identity and constitutional preferences in a consistent manner ever since the advent of devolution in 1999.

British Social Attitudes has never been conducted in Northern Ireland, but in 1989 NatCen Social Research helped establish an equivalent survey there, known as the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes survey. Funding ended in 1996, but two years later researchers at Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster launched the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey, using much the same methodological approach as the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes survey and, in turn, British Social Attitudes. Between them the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes survey and the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey provide the longest running series of Northern Irish data on our subject matter. Furthermore, the similarity in the way in which all three surveys are conducted means they provide the most robust opportunities for comparing trends in opinion across all three parts of the UK.[5]

Trends in national identity

Scotland

We begin by looking at what has happened to the incidence of British national identity in Scotland since the advent of devolution. Scottish Social Attitudes has regularly presented its respondents with a list of all the national identities associated with one or more parts of Great Britain and Ireland and asked which best describes themselves. Respondents can select more than one if they wish, but are then asked to choose one single identity. A few surveys conducted before 1999 presented their respondents with much the same list but asked them to choose just one identity in the first place. By combining the two sources of information we can see how the most salient national identity of people living in Scotland has evolved since 1979. As by far the two most popular answers throughout have been “Scottish” and “British” and given too that these are the two responses that are of most interest to us, we only show in Figure 6.1 the proportion choosing one or other of those.

Figure 6.1 Trends in ‘forced choice’ national identity, in Scotland, 1979–2012


The data on which Figure 6.1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.
British identity clearly plays second fiddle to Scottish identity north of the border. Forced to choose a single identity, at most only around one in five say that they are British, while typically around three-quarters or so indicate that they are Scottish. There is, though, nothing new about this. Much the same pattern has been in evidence since the late 1990s; there is no evidence of a secular increase in adherence to a Scottish identity since the advent of devolution. However, throughout the last decade and a half, far fewer people have regarded themselves as British than did so in the 1970s. Evidently Britishness has been in decline north of the border over the longer term, but it would seem that devolution is better seen as a consequence of Scotland’s distinct sense of identity rather than something that has led to its development.

However, forcing people in Scotland to choose just one identity runs the risk of underestimating the degree to which they are willing to acknowledge at least some sense of Britishness. When Scottish Social Attitudes has given them the chance to choose more than one identity, typically around 40 per cent have chosen both Scottish and British, with the most recent reading (for 2012) standing at 45 per cent. The possibility that people might feel both identities is explicitly acknowledged in a different approach to asking about national identity that has also been implemented on a regular basis on Scottish Social Attitudes. This is the so-called Moreno question, which was originally inspired by the existence of a pattern of dual identities in much of Spain (Moreno, 1988; 2006). Respondents are presented with a set of options that range from exclusively Scottish at one end to exclusively British at the other, while at the same time also offering various possible combinations of feeling both Scottish and British:

> Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?

- Scottish not British
- More Scottish than British
- Equally Scottish and British
- More British than Scottish
- British not Scottish

The responses to this question confirm the impression that Scottishness is the more strongly felt of the two identities. Typically no more than around one in ten place themselves in one of the last two rows of Table 6.1, thereby indicating that they are exclusively or predominantly British. In contrast, the proportion claiming to be exclusively or predominantly Scottish has often exceeded 60 per cent. However, there is no sign that this proportion has increased since devolution has been in place. Indeed, if anything, in recent years it has tended to be a little lower, averaging 58 per cent since 2007 as opposed to 66 per cent between 1999 and 2006.\[4\] True, the proportion saying they were Scottish and not British was lower in 1997 than in all but one year thereafter, but this is the only evidence that can possibly be cited in support of any claim that there is a link between the introduction of devolution and a decline in Britishness.\[5\] Overall, our evidence suggests that devolution has not served to undermine Britishness in Scotland, though it is clearly relatively weak compared with Scottishness.
Table 6.1 Trends in Moreno national identity, in Scotland, 1992–2012

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<th>Scottish not British</th>
<th>More Scottish than British</th>
<th>Equally Scottish and British</th>
<th>More British than Scottish</th>
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<td>92</td>
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<td>40%</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>99</td>
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<td>35%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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Weighted base: * 882 1482 1663 1605 1508 1594 1508 1482 1495 1196 1229
Unweighted base: 957 882 1482 1663 1605 1508 1594 1508 1482 1495 1196 1229

*There is no weighting variable in this dataset

Northern Ireland

While many people in Scotland might be willing to acknowledge more than one identity, in Northern Ireland identity is often regarded as singular and therefore a potential source of conflict. Those who say they are British are thought to deny any sense of being Irish, and vice versa. Indeed when in 2003 the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey gave respondents the opportunity to select more than one identity, only 11 per cent chose both, far fewer than we have seen claim in Scotland to be both Scottish and British. However, on the couple of occasions, in 2007 and 2012, when the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey administered the Moreno question, as many as between 47 per cent (2012) and 58 per cent (2007) claimed to be some mixture of British and Irish. Though still rather less than the three-fifths or so in Scotland who claim to be some mixture of Scottish and British (see Table 6.1). This suggests that in practice many people in Northern Ireland may in fact have at least some sense of both British and Irish identity.

Further evidence pointing in this direction emerges from Figure 6.2, which shows the responses to the question on national identity that has been asked on a regular basis on the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey. Respondents are asked to choose which one of four possible identities best describes themselves: British, Irish, Northern Irish or Ulster. It is not just British and Irish that prove to be relatively popular, Northern Irish proves to be too, and especially so since 2005. Since then, on average, 27 per cent have said they are Northern Irish, compared with 20 per cent in the period between 1989 and 2004.[6] Meanwhile, further analysis reveals that over three-quarters of this group (78 per cent in 2012) say that they are some mixture of British and Irish when presented with the Moreno question. It appears then that Northern Irish is an identity that is particularly likely to be adopted by those who do not feel that British and Irish are necessarily mutually exclusive identities. The increase in its popularity might therefore be regarded as some evidence of a decline in the potential of national identity to act as a source of division and conflict – in line with the hopes of many supporters of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement.

It appears that Northern Irish is an identity adopted by those who do not feel British and Irish are mutually exclusive identities.
But while claiming a Northern Irish identity may signal some sense of being both British and Irish, the increase in the identity’s popularity seems to have been wholly at the expense of the proportion who simply say they are British. Before 2005, on average, 45 per cent said that they were British. Since then only 38 per cent have done so. In contrast, the proportion saying they are Irish has not declined at all. Indeed it has in fact been slightly higher, on average, since 2005 (29 per cent) than it was beforehand (26 per cent). The rise in the proportion of people saying they are Northern Irish seems to represent an increased willingness to acknowledge having an Irish as well as a British heritage rather than an increased acceptance of having a British as well as Irish one.

Indeed, if we examine separately the trends in identity among those who claim adherence to a Protestant denomination and those who say they are Catholic (see Table 6.2), we find that the increase in adherence to a Northern Irish identity has occurred more or less exclusively among Protestants. As a result, whereas once a Northern Irish identity was more common among Catholics than Protestants, now, if anything, it is more likely to be claimed by the latter. Not only does claiming a Northern Irish identity seemingly enable people to avoid having to make the historically polarised choice between British and Irish, but also it appears to help bridge the divide between the region’s two religious communities.

### Table 6.2 Trends in ‘forced choice’ national identity, by religion, in Northern Ireland, 1989–2012[7]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Protestant</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>% 66</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>% 70</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>% 67</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>% 75</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>% 63</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>% 57</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>% 60</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>% 69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of this might well be thought beneficial to reducing the potential for conflict in Northern Ireland, without necessarily undermining support for its continued membership of the UK – although intriguingly the shift in national identities started a little before the successful conclusion of the political agreement that finally lead to the resumption of devolution in 2007. Still, as Table 6.2 shows, the distributions of identities among Protestants and Catholics continue to look very different from each other – Britishness remains almost exclusively a preserve of the former while Irishness remains largely confined to the latter. In fact, the most recent reading for 2012 suggests that there has been something of a reversal of the increase in a Northern Irish identity (and especially so among Catholics) while both British and Irish identities have become more common within the religious communities with which they are traditionally associated. This may represent a reaction to a sequence of events that took place shortly before or during the period when the 2012 survey was conducted, including a row about the number of days the Union flag was to be flown over Belfast City Hall.[8] This reversal is a reminder that despite the growth in acknowledgement of what appears to be a more cross-community form of identity, issues of identity can still cause conflict in the region.

**England**

If in Northern Ireland national identity often appears to be a source of conflict, in England it is perhaps most commonly seen as a source of confusion. National identity in the UK’s largest nation has been described as ‘fuzzy’, and the terms ‘English’ and ‘British’ called a distinction without a difference (Cohen, 1995; Kumar, 2003). But perhaps the emergence of devolved institutions in the rest of the UK has helped make people in England more aware of the fact that the two are not synonymous and, more importantly, more inclined to say that they are English rather than British?

In Figure 6.3 we show how people in England have responded when presented with a list of identities and asked to initially choose more than one if they wish, but then asked to pick just one. In this case we can add one further reading, for 1992, from a survey that only invited people to choose one identity in the first place. Once again we focus on the two most common identities, British and English.

It would appear that English has proved relatively more popular, and British less so, since and including 1999. Before that, the proportion choosing English ranged between 31 per cent and 37 per cent; it has been above that range on all but two subsequent occasions. Conversely, the proportion saying they are British has usually been lower than it was at any time before 1999. To that extent the advent of devolution elsewhere in the UK appears to have coincided with some increase in the relative popularity of Englishness as opposed to Britishness. However, we should also note that the reduction in the proportion selecting a British identity is only evident when respondents are required to choose a single identity; the proportion choosing British as one of their identities has not discernibly changed at all, standing usually at a little under 70 per cent. Moreover there is no evidence of any further change in the relative popularity of the two identities since 1999; the figures for 2012 (43 per cent English, 43 per cent British) are almost exactly the same as those for 1999 (44 per cent English, 44 per cent British). In short, any effect that devolution has had on national identity in England has only been in the form of a one-off step change, rather than a continuous secular change.
Unfortunately, evidence on the pattern of responses to the Moreno question is only available for one year prior to 1999 (see Table 6.3). However, this proves to be consistent with the suggestion that a one-off step change occurred in 1999. In 1997 just seven per cent said that they were English not British; since then the figure has never been less than 17 per cent. However, once again there is no sign since 1999 of any secular trend towards more people saying they are predominantly or wholly English. At 29 per cent, the most recent reading for the proportion saying either that they are English not British or that they are more English than British, is much the same as the equivalent figure for 1999, 31 per cent.

**Table 6.3 Trends in Moreno national identity, in England, 1997–2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>97</th>
<th>99</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>08</th>
<th>09</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English not British</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More English than British</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally English and British</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More British than English</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British not English</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1997: British Election Study; 1999–2012 British Social Attitudes (respondents living in England only); 2012 figure excludes those born in Scotland or Wales (N=76)
+In 1997 the British Election Study contained an ethnic boost, which was then weighted down, hence the difference between the weighted and unweighted base

Still, we should also note that, contrary to what we might have expected from the evidence of Figure 6.3, the proportion saying they are exclusively or primarily English is typically greater than the proportion indicating they are exclusively or primarily British. One possible explanation is that some of those who say they are British in response to the question on which Figure 6.3 is based are stating a fact about their legal citizenship rather than indicating their identity. Perhaps it is only when asked a question that explicitly asks them to weigh the two that their Englishness emerges. That said, we should bear in mind that by far the most common answer to the Moreno question is “Equally English and British”. In truth, identity still seems to be much ‘fuzzier’ in England than it is in the rest of the UK.
Summary
One point is clear: devolution has certainly not proved to be the harbinger of any strengthening of Britishness. Rather, that identity seems to have weakened somewhat in both England and Northern Ireland, while in Scotland it has remained as weak as it has ever been. However in Northern Ireland, the decline has been accompanied by an increase in people’s willingness to say they are Northern Irish, a change that seems motivated more by a degree of willingness to acknowledge having a British and an Irish heritage rather than any rejection of Britishness. (It is also a change that potentially still seems to be capable of being reversed when inter-communal disagreements and disputes break out.) And although in England, the relative importance of being English and being British tipped a little in favour of the former in 1999, since then the two identities have lived side by side with each other in much the same way as before. Still, arguably the acid test of whether devolution has undermined the popular basis of the Union is what has happened to constitutional preferences since 1999. It is to that topic that we now turn.

Constitutional preferences

Scotland
In Figure 6.4 we show how people in Scotland have responded when asked the following question:

Which of these statements comes closest to your view?

Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK and the European Union
Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK but part of the European Union
Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has some taxation powers
Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has no taxation powers
Scotland should remain part of the UK without an elected parliament

Figure 6.4 shows combined responses for the first two options, both of which refer to independence, and the third or fourth, both of which indicate support for having a devolved Scottish Parliament within the framework of the UK.
What stands out above all from this chart is the relative stability of constitutional preferences north of the border. Some form of devolution has consistently been the most popular option, independence has typically secured the support of between a quarter and a third, while usually only around one in ten or so have not wanted any kind of parliament for Scotland at all. There is certainly no evidence that the electoral success of the SNP in 2007 and 2011, success that led to the decision to hold a referendum on independence, was occasioned by an increase in support for leaving the UK. In fact, if anything the opposite is the case. Between 1999 and 2006 support for independence averaged 30 per cent; since the SNP first came to power in 2007 it has averaged 26 per cent. As we have demonstrated elsewhere (Curtice and Ormston, 2013a) one reason at least for this apparent decline seems to have been the emergence since the SNP first came to power in 2007 of a less critical attitude towards the deal that Scotland gets from the Union. Thus, for example, whereas previously, on average 36 per cent felt that England benefited most out of the Union economically, while just 20 per cent reckoned Scotland did, since and including 2007 the former figure has fallen to 27 per cent while the latter has increased a little to 24 per cent.[11] Much the same change has occurred with respect to the views of people in Scotland towards the share of public spending that their country enjoys.[12] Having an SNP government in power in Edinburgh that avowedly and publicly stands up for Scotland’s interests seems to have helped persuade some that the Union can be made to work satisfactorily after all (see also Curtice and Ormston, 2010).

However, even if there is no evidence of any growth in support for independence since 1999, and it has therefore remained a minority point of view, this does not necessarily mean that the current constitutional settlement matches the contours of public opinion north of the border. In Table 6.4 we show how people in Scotland have responded when on four separate occasions during the last five years they have been asked which institution “ought to make most of the important decisions for Scotland” about various policy areas. Two of these, health and schools, are primarily the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament. Two others, taxation and welfare benefits, are the two main areas of domestic policy that are still primarily the preserve north of the border of the UK government. The list also includes defence and foreign affairs, responsibility for which is the distinguishing feature of an independent state.
Table 6.4 Preferences for who should decide policy areas, in Scotland, 2007–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scottish Parliament</th>
<th>UK Government at Westminster</th>
<th>Local councils in Scotland</th>
<th>EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>% 63</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>% 65</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>% 66</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>% 66</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>% 62</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>% 65</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>% 62</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>% 63</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>% n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>% 59</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>% 57</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>% 56</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>% 63</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>% 60</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>% 62</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>% 64</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence and foreign affairs</td>
<td>% 33</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>% 31</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>% 31</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>% 34</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n/a = not asked
Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

As we might anticipate, around two-thirds or so think that the Scottish Parliament should be primarily responsible for making decisions about health and schools, a figure that has changed little during the last five years. Indeed, in so far as there is much dispute about where responsibility for schools in particular should lie, it centres on whether local councils in Scotland should be making the key decisions instead of the Scottish Parliament – and not on whether the UK government should be the principal decision-maker. What we might not have anticipated, however, is that support for devolving responsibility for both taxation and welfare benefits to the Scottish Parliament is almost as high as for health and schools – and has been consistently so too. Only when it comes to defence and foreign affairs does a clear majority of the Scottish public think that responsibility should lie with the UK government.
It appears that the instinctive reaction, of a majority of the Scottish public at least, is that the legitimate locus for deciding their country’s domestic affairs is Edinburgh and not London. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that, although the option of more devolution will not appear on the referendum ballot paper, all three of the principal political parties that back Scotland’s continued membership of the United Kingdom are now at various stages of developing plans for further devolution (Scottish Liberal Democrats, 2012; Curtice and Ormston, 2013b; Scottish Labour Party, 2013; Davidson, 2013). If Scotland does opt to remain part of the UK its terms of membership look likely to remain the subject of continuing discussion.

Northern Ireland
At the heart of the long-standing constitutional debate in Northern Ireland is whether the territory should continue to be part of the UK or whether it should be reunified with the rest of Ireland, from which it was separated when the remainder of the island became independent in 1922. The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey, and before it the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes survey, has regularly asked its respondents to choose between these two diametrically opposed options for how Northern Ireland should be governed – though the view of respondents who instead spontaneously stated that Northern Ireland should become a separate state has also been recorded separately. However, following the final restoration of devolution in 2007 this question was amended so that respondents were presented with two alternative ways of remaining part of the UK – with direct rule from Westminster or with devolved government at Stormont – as well as the prospect of reunifying with the remainder of Ireland. We clearly need to bear this change in mind when examining the resulting time series, shown in Table 6.5.

Once we take that caveat into consideration, it appears that support for remaining within the UK has fallen since the late 1980s, when the initial political moves that were to lead eventually to the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement were being made.[14] Between 1989 and 1993 around 70 per cent of people in Northern Ireland said that they preferred to remain part of the UK. By the time the Agreement was concluded in 1998 that figure had fallen to a little under 60 per cent, while by 2006, shortly before the suspension of devolved government was ended, only 54 per cent were saying they wished to remain in the Union. Thereafter, the change of question wording in 2007 clearly served to increase the level of support expressed for remaining within the UK, but at 63 per cent the most recent reading is the lowest since that wording change was made (as well as still being lower than it was at any time between 1989 and 1993).
Table 6.5 Preferred long-term constitutional future, in Northern Ireland, 1989–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Remain part of the UK</th>
<th>% Reunify with the rest of Ireland</th>
<th>% (Independent state)</th>
<th>% Don’t know/other answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 861 890 890 838 763 737 783 1801 2213 1799 1800
Unweighted base 861 889 889 838 759 733 782 1800 2200 1800 1800

*Change in question text. From 2007 respondents were offered to remain part of the UK with direct rule and “remain part of the United Kingdom with devolved government”. Figures represent the proportion choosing either option.


And yet while commitment to the maintenance of the Union may have been eroded, there is no sign of increased support for reunification with the rest of Ireland. Between 1989 and 2006 support oscillated around an average of 23 per cent, without any discernible trend in either direction. Support for reunification proved to be 23 per cent once again in 2007 immediately after the change in wording of our survey question – while since then there has actually been some slippage in support for reunification. Rather than being accompanied by an increase in support for reunifying with the rest of Ireland, the decline in support for remaining part of the Union has been accompanied instead by an increase in the proportion saying either that Northern Ireland should become an independent state or else “don’t know”. The constitutional debate in the region has, it seems, become a little less polarised around two apparently diametrically opposed alternatives.

We can gain further insight into what has happened by looking separately at how support for remaining part of the UK has varied over time among those with different religious affiliations (see Table 6.6).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Protestant</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>No religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>93</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
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<td>1998</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>2007*</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008*</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009*</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010*</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012*</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Change in question text. From 2007 respondents were offered to remain part of the UK with direct rule and “remain part of the United Kingdom with devolved government”. Figures represent the proportion choosing either option.


In the years immediately after our first reading in 1989, much of the erosion in support occurred among Protestants. But once the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement was concluded in 1998, it was among Catholics that support fell away. It would seem that in the earlier period some Protestants became disenchanted with the Union as a result of the moves that the UK government were gradually making to secure a political accommodation that recognised the distinctive aspirations of the minority nationalist community. However the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement had been concluded the principal effect may have been to have made it easier for Catholics to believe that leaving the UK and unifying with Ireland could actually happen.

Yet it was among Catholics (together with those of no religion) that the change in the wording of our question in 2007 did most to increase the level of support expressed for remaining in the Union. In the longer run the existence of devolved institutions that give representatives of the minority nationalist community a guaranteed role in decision-making has seemingly served to secure some acceptance of Northern Ireland’s continued membership of the UK.[16] Even so, the question of Northern Ireland’s constitutional status remains a source of considerable division between the two communities.

**England**

We now turn to what the largest part of the UK, England, wants. Here there are two aspects for us to consider. First of all, how do people in England think that Scotland and Northern Ireland should be governed? Are they happy that these two territories remain an integral part of the UK even though they have a measure of self government, or are there signs of a backlash against the ‘privileges’ that they now enjoy? Second, is there any evidence that having seen devolution introduced in the rest of the UK, England would now like some measure of self-government for itself? We deal with each of these issues in turn.
In Table 6.7 we show how people in England have responded when they have been asked exactly the same question about how Scotland should be governed as has been asked on a regular basis in Scotland itself. It suggests that in the early years of devolution at least, people in England were quite willing to accommodate Scotland’s wish to have its own parliament. Indeed, at between some 50 per cent and 60 per cent, until 2003 support for devolution was as high in England as it was in Scotland itself. However, since then support for Scottish devolution has tailed off somewhat and now stands at just 43 per cent, well below the figure – 61 per cent – found north of the border. This decline has been accompanied by both somewhat greater opposition to the idea of having a Scottish Parliament at all and by rather greater support for the idea that Scotland should leave the United Kingdom. Indeed, at 25 per cent, support in England for Scottish independence is now at least as high as it is in Scotland itself (23 per cent). England has, it seems, become rather less sympathetic towards the ‘demands’ of its Scottish neighbour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>97*</th>
<th>99</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Devolution</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>No parliament</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base: 2492* 905 1956 2786 1948 1929 870 974 937
Unweighted base: 3150 902 1928 2761 1924 1917 859 967 939

*Source: British Election Study
*In 1997 the British Election Study contained an ethnic boost, which was then weighted down, hence the difference between the weighted and unweighted base
Base: British Social Attitudes respondents living in England

The source of England’s increased reluctance to accept devolution for Scotland seems, in part at least, to lie in growing discontent with some of the apparent anomalies thrown up by the asymmetric devolution settlement. As Table 6.8 shows, even in the early years of devolution nearly two-thirds of people in England agreed that Scottish MPs should no longer be able to vote on laws that only apply in England. That overall proportion is little changed, but whereas once most people simply agreed with the proposition rather than doing so “strongly”, now the proportion who “agree strongly” is only a few points lower than the proportion who “agree”. It would thus seem that the strength of feeling about the subject has intensified.[17]
Table 6.8 Attitudes in England towards the West Lothian question, 2000–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree strongly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base: 1721 2387 1548 752 794 806
Unweighted base: 1695 2341 1530 739 773 802

Base: British Social Attitudes respondents living in England

Even more striking is an apparent growth in discontent with Scotland’s share of public spending. As Table 6.9 shows, in the early years of devolution only around one in five people in England felt that Scotland secured “much more” or “a little more than its fair share” of public spending compared with other parts of the UK. By far the most common view was that it simply received its just deserts. However, in 2007 the proportion stating that Scotland receives more than its fair share rose to a third, while since 2008 it has consistently hovered around the 40 per cent mark. Still, it should be noted that around one in four or so have persistently said that they do not know whether Scotland receives its fair share or not, suggesting that the issue remains one of low salience for a significant proportion of England’s adult population.[18]

Table 6.9 Attitudes in England towards Scotland’s share of public spending, 2000–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>08</th>
<th>09</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… much more than its fair share</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… a little more than its fair share</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… pretty much its fair share</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… a little less than its fair share</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… much less than its fair share</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base: 1956 2786 2931 1929 870 1001 992 928 974 937
Unweighted base: 1928 2761 2897 1917 859 982 980 913 967 937

Base: British Social Attitudes respondents living in England

But if England has only begun to question Scotland’s position in the Union more recently, the same cannot be said of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. For many years British Social Attitudes regularly gave its respondents the same clear choice as to how Northern Ireland should be governed – remaining part of the UK or reunifying with the rest of Ireland – that has also been presented regularly to people in Northern Ireland itself. The pattern of responses persistently suggested that the region is not necessarily regarded
as an integral part of the UK. In 1983 58 per cent of people in England backed Northern Ireland’s reunification with Ireland, a figure that then changed little from year to year, and remained as high as 53 per cent in 2003. In subsequent years support for unification did begin to fall somewhat, but at 41 per cent our most recent reading, taken in 2007, was still higher than the 31 per cent who felt that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK. The political settlement in Northern Ireland, together with the conclusion of the civil strife, may have eventually helped to strengthen somewhat support for Northern Ireland’s continued membership of the UK among those living in the rest of the UK. Yet there seems little doubt that Scotland’s departure from the Union would give rise to more disappointment in England, if not necessarily dismay, than would any decision by Northern Ireland to take the same step.

Perhaps seeing devolution in action elsewhere, together with increased concern about the apparent anomalies that it has created, might have persuaded people in England that they should enjoy some form of devolution too. One important difference between the debate about devolution in England and that in the rest of the UK, however, is that there is disagreement about the form that it should take. Should it be devolution to the nation of England as a whole, just as it has been to the nations of Scotland and Wales, or should it instead be to the various regions of England, as would seem more appropriate if the aim is to bring decision-making closer to where people live? This disagreement is reflected in the set of possible answers that have been offered to respondents by a question on how England should be governed, asked regularly since 1999. We ask respondents:

*With all the changes going on in the way the different parts of Great Britain are run, which of the following do you think would be best for England …*

… for England to be governed as it is now, with laws made by the UK parliament,

for each region of England to have its own assembly that runs services like health,[19]

or, for England as a whole to have its own new parliament with law-making powers?


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>99</th>
<th>00</th>
<th>01</th>
<th>02</th>
<th>03</th>
<th>04</th>
<th>05</th>
<th>06</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>08</th>
<th>09</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following is best for England …</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… UK parliament</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… regional assemblies</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… English parliament</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 2722 1957 2931 3742 2721 1815 936 870 1001 992 928 974 937
Unweighted base 2718 1928 2761 2897 2709 2684 1794 928 859 982 980 913 967 939

Base: British Social Attitudes respondents living in England
As Table 6.10 shows, for the most part public opinion in England has been both remarkably stable and relatively uninterested in either form of devolution. Typically just over half have said that England’s laws should continue to be made by the UK Parliament, and there is no consistent evidence of any long-term decline in support for that option. At 56 per cent the most recent reading is exactly the same as it was 10 years earlier. Equally at 37 per cent, the proportion that now back some form of devolution is also exactly the same as it was in 2002, and is well in line with the average reading of 38 per cent obtained throughout the period since 1999. What has changed is the relative popularity of the two possible forms of devolution. Between 2000 and 2003 regional assemblies emerged as the more popular option as the then UK Labour government tried to introduce such assemblies in the North of England – until the idea of such an assembly for the North East was defeated in a referendum held in 2004 (Sandford, 2009). Since then having an English parliament has been the rather more popular option, though not overwhelmingly so.

So it seems that, despite the growth of some discontent about the deal that Scotland is getting out of the Union, a majority of people in England – though not much more than that – remain happy to be ruled by UK-wide institutions rather than their own. To that extent there is apparently little pressure to disassemble the core of the centralised British state as opposed to its periphery. Still we should remember that while people in England might still be willing to be governed by Westminster they are also doubtful whether MPs from outside of England should have a say in their affairs. England’s reaction to asymmetric devolution seems to have been to call for Westminster to adapt its procedures accordingly rather than to demand the creation of another set of distinctive political institutions. As yet, however, the UK Parliament has still to take up any of the many suggestions made as to how such adaptation should happen (Hazell, 2006; Conservative Democracy Task Force, 2008; McKay Commission, 2013).

**Summary**

As in the case of identity, there is no consistent evidence that devolution has had an impact on people’s constitutional preferences in one direction or the other. In some respects the Union now looks stronger: in Scotland support for independence has declined somewhat, while Northern Ireland has seen a drop in the proportion favouring reunification with the rest of Ireland. But other changes would appear to have weakened the UK: over the longer term in Northern Ireland there has been a drop in explicit support for remaining in the UK, while England has become less happy about some of the apparent anomalies thrown up by the devolution settlement granted to Scotland. It seems that while devolution may have helped reduce some sources of tension in the UK it has also exacerbated others.

**Identity and preference**

Still, any evaluation of the impact of devolution upon public support for the UK needs to consider not only what changes may have occurred in how many favour the continuation of the UK and how many its dissolution, but also among whom. In particular, is there any evidence that the issue has become more divisive, with those who feel strongly Scottish, Irish or even English becoming less keen on keeping the UK together, while perhaps at the same time those who feel mainly British becoming more keen? Such an outcome would suggest the potential for further disruption about the future of the UK rather than the emergence of a consensus about how the Union should be managed. It is to this possibility that we now turn.
Scotland

We begin by examining whether the relationship between national identity (as measured by the Moreno question) and constitutional preference has changed in Scotland. Table 6.11 shows that the more Scottish and the less British someone feels, the more likely they are to favour leaving the UK. However, the correspondence between identity and preference is far from perfect. True, few who have a strong sense of British identity wish to leave the UK. But only around half of those who deny they are British support independence, while the equivalent figure among those whose feelings of British identity are less strong than their sense of Scottish identity is only around a quarter.

Table 6.11 Support for independence, by Moreno national identity, in Scotland, 1999–2012.[20]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% prefer independence</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scottish not British</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Scottish than British</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally Scottish and British</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More British than Scottish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British not Scottish</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes

Still, it seems that identity matters no more or less now to how people in Scotland would like to be governed than it did when the Scottish Parliament was first created. In almost every case the proportions backing independence to be found in each row of Table 6.11 in 2012 are almost the same as they were in 1999 (though small bases mean that the percentages in the last two rows of the table need to be treated with caution). Although support for leaving the UK may have dropped a little overall since the advent of devolution, there is no sign that those with a strong sense of Scottish identity have particularly come to be more accepting of Scotland’s continued membership of the Union.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, in contrast, there have been some changes in the link between national identity and constitutional preference. This is evident first of all in the link between identity and support for remaining in the UK (not shown). As we might have anticipated from our earlier discussion of Table 6.6, the initial decline in support for remaining in the UK that was evident before 1998 occurred among those with a British identity, while the decline that occurred following the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement was evident primarily among those who feel Irish. At the same time the higher level of support registered since changes were made to the question wording in 2007 has also been evident among those stating they are Irish. The overall effect of these various movements has been to leave the link between identity and wishing to remain part of the UK looking a little weaker now than it did in 1989.

But what of explicit support for leaving the UK? As Table 6.12 shows, the proportion of those with an Irish identity that backed that view dropped a little (from 68 per cent to 61 per cent) in the immediate wake of the change in wording in the constitutional preferences question in 2007. Subsequently there has been a further much more marked decline in support for leaving the UK among those who claim an Irish identity, such that less than half of those with that outlook...
now take that view. There has also been a drop among those who say they are “Northern Irish”, one that can only be partially accounted for by the fact that, as we saw earlier, more Protestants now also claim that identity. Once again, it seems that we have evidence that the debate about the region’s constitutional future has become somewhat less polarised between those with a different sense of national identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Irish</th>
<th>Northern Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>64</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008*</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


England

But what of England, where we perhaps found the strongest evidence that there has been something of an adverse reaction to devolution? Perhaps the advent of devolution elsewhere has offended the sympathies of those with a strong sense of English identity in particular? Far from being a source of confusion, perhaps national identity has come to shape people’s views in a way that formerly was not the case? This view has certainly been argued by Wyn Jones et al. (2012; 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% support Scottish independence</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English not British</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More English than British</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally English and British</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More British than English</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British not English</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: British Social Attitudes respondents living in England

There is little evidence that this is what has happened, at least so far as attitudes towards Scotland’s continued membership of the UK is concerned (Table 6.13). Those who say they are English and not British are only some 10
or so percentage points more likely than those who claim to be British and not English to feel that Scotland should leave the UK – and this gap is much the same now as it was in 1999. There is not much evidence here to support the claim that it is those with a strong sense of English identity in particular who have become more inclined to believe that Scotland should leave the Union.

Much the same is true of the increased concern about Scotland’s share of public spending (Table 6.14). True, in 2000 there was very little evidence at all that those with a strong sense of English identity were any more likely than those who felt primarily British to be critical of Scotland’s share of public spending, whereas by 2003 they clearly were. But there is no sign that concern has subsequently increased more markedly among those who feel wholly or mostly English. Among those who say they are English and not British the proportion who say that Scotland secures more than its fair share of public spending is 18 percentage points higher now than it was in 2003, a little less than the equivalent figure, 21 points, among those who claim to be British and not English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% say Scotland gets more than fair share of spending</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2012</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English not British</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More English than British</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally English and British</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More British than English</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British not English</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: British Social Attitudes respondents living in England

Finally, in Table 6.15 we look at the relationship between national identity and how people think England itself should be governed. As we might expect those who say they are English and not British tend to be most in favour of having an English Parliament and are somewhat less inclined to favour continued rule by the UK parliament. These relationships are, however, remarkably weak; those for example who say they are English and not British are only 18 percentage points more likely to back an English parliament than are those who say they are British and not English (though small bases in 2012 for the groups who say they are predominantly or wholly British mean those percentages need to be treated with caution). True, it might appear that support for the idea grew most after 1999 among those who regard themselves as exclusively or primarily English – the 11 point increase in support among that group is higher than in any other – but once we undertake statistical testing that takes into consideration the relatively small size of some of these groups, we find that the difference is not statistically significant. There is remarkably little evidence in our data to support claims that the advent of devolution has so far served to turn English identity into a politically important force.

<table>
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<th>Equally English and British</th>
<th>More British than English</th>
<th>British not English</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% say England should be governed as it is now, with laws made by the UK Parliament</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>71</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>% say England as whole to have its own new parliament with law-making powers</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
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</table>

Base: British Social Attitudes respondents living in England

Conclusions

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, one might imagine from looking at a timeline of political developments that the advent of devolution has been followed by growing discontent with the Union in Scotland, some accommodation with it in Northern Ireland, and little reaction at all in England. Yet once we look at the long-term trends in identity and constitutional preferences, only one of those statements appears to be true.

There are some signs that in Northern Ireland a devolution settlement that aimed to recognise the aspirations and identities of both communities in a deeply divided society has been followed by some reduction in the degree to which its constitutional debate is polarised between being in the UK or becoming part of a united Ireland. Rather more Protestants now seemingly prefer to call themselves Northern Irish rather than British compared with 20 years ago. This could well be an implicit acknowledgement on their part that they are Irish as well as British, or at least an indication of a reluctance to have to choose between them. Meanwhile, members of the Catholic community and people who regard themselves as Irish now seem less inclined to seek unification with the rest of Ireland and thus appear more willing to accept Northern Ireland’s position as part of the UK. That said, the majority outlooks of the two communities are still very different from each other, and as the re-emergence of a rather more polarised pattern of identity in 2012 underlined, the potential for serious dispute over both substance and symbols (as evidenced by the ‘flags dispute’ of December 2012) remains.

However, the decision to hold a referendum on independence in Scotland does not seem to be the result of any increased demand north of the border to leave the Union. If anything, support for independence has appeared somewhat weaker since the SNP first came to power in 2007, a consequence perhaps of that party’s perceived ability to defend Scotland’s interests within the framework of the Union. British identity may play second fiddle to their Scottish identity in
the minds of many living north of the border, but no more so now than when the Scottish Parliament was first created in 1999. Moreover, while in Scotland those with a relatively weak British identity are more inclined than those with a strong British identity to support independence, they are no more likely to do so now than when devolution took effect. Indeed, such a disposition alone does not appear to be sufficient to persuade people to back independence.

Yet that does not mean that Scotland is entirely happy with its existing constitutional status. There is an appetite for the Parliament in Edinburgh to have more responsibility for taxation and welfare benefits. Any moves in that direction will, however, also have to be acceptable to England, which instead of playing the apparent role of uninterested bystander in the devolution process, has shown some signs of growing discontent with the demands of its neighbour to the north. There appears to be less willingness to accept the idea that Scotland should have its own relatively autonomous institutions within the framework of the Union while at the same time enjoying a seemingly generous financial settlement and MPs that have a say in England’s affairs at Westminster. True, this discontent may have little to do with some renewed or reawakened sense of English identity that seeks parity for England in the form of its own distinctively English political institutions, let alone widespread questioning of Scotland’s right to be part of the Union on a scale that once at least was true of Northern Ireland. Rather, it seems that people in England have simply become more inclined to feel that the ways of Westminster and Whitehall should be adjusted so that England’s interests are treated fairly given the very different constitutional structure the UK has now as compared with 30 years ago. Devolution may not have undermined public support for the Union, but it has left some continuing challenges to those with responsibility for managing relations between its component parts.

Acknowledgements
Partial funding for the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes data reported here was generously provided by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number ES/K006355/1) and the Electoral Reform Society. Funding for the 2012 Northern Ireland Life and Times data was provided by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and by ARK. Funding for the 2012 British Social Attitudes data came from NatCen Social Research’s own resources. Responsibility for the views expressed lies solely with the authors.

Notes
1. Entitled the Northern Ireland Executive.
2. Wales is not included because surveys using a methodology similar to that deployed by those analysed here have not been conducted there since 2007. For information on the surveys that have been conducted since then and the trends in respect of national identity and constitutional preference they suggest have occurred see Curtice (2013), and Wyn Jones and Scully (2012).
3. There is one small difference between the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey and the two social attitudes surveys so far as their reporting conventions are concerned. In the case of British Social Attitudes and Scottish Social Attitudes the standard practice is to include in the denominators on which percentages are based those who refused to answer a question or are otherwise recorded as not having answered a question. In the case of the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey, however, they are usually excluded. To avoid the risk of us quoting in this chapter figures for any of these surveys that might be slightly different from those given elsewhere we have followed as appropriate each survey’s usual practice.
4. Though we should note that the fieldwork for the 2012 survey, when there was a particularly marked drop to 53 per cent, was undertaken during and in the weeks immediately following the 2012 London Olympics and that we cannot reject the possibility that that event may have helped to foster a short-term increase in feelings of British identity.

5. It should also be noted that as long ago as 1996, a System Three poll reported that 39 per cent said that they were Scottish not British, many more than did so in our 1992 and 1997 surveys. However this System Three poll was conducted using a rather different methodological approach and thus we cannot be sure that the difference represents a methodological artefact rather than evidence that the incidence of an exclusive Scottish identity had at some point been just as high before the advent of the Scottish Parliament as it has proven to be subsequently (Moreno, 2006).

6. On the events in 2012 that might help account for the lower level of Northern Irish identity in that year see Note 8.

7. Bases for Table 6.2 are as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Weighted base</th>
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<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>490</td>
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</table>

8. Belfast City Council voted in December 2012 to fly the Union flag only on a limited number of special days rather than, as hitherto, every day. The decision occasioned some rioting. There was also some serious rioting in Belfast and elsewhere the previous summer in the wake of that season’s Orange Order parades (Nolan, 2013: 161). The year 2012 also saw the centennial commemoration of the events leading up to the signing of the Ulster Covenant in opposition to Home Rule.

9. Wyn Jones et al. (2012) claimed on the basis of an internet “Future of England” survey conducted by YouGov in July/August 2011 that there had been a marked increase in English as opposed to British identity. They found that 40 per cent said they were exclusively or predominantly English (compared with 33 per cent on the 2009 British Social Attitudes survey). However, a subsequent YouGov poll conducted for Channel 4 News in January 2012 found only 33 per cent saying they were exclusively or predominantly English while a second Future of England survey in November 2011 put the figure at 35 per cent (Wyn Jones et al., 2013). Even leaving aside the many methodological differences between the two exercises, it would appear that Wyn Jones et al.’s relatively high 2011 figure could well have been the result of no more than sampling variation.

10. It should be noted that in 2012 the English version of the Moreno question was not administered to a small number of respondents who had been born in Scotland or Wales (N=76). However, given their place of birth they might reasonably be expected to be more likely to claim to be exclusively or predominantly British rather than exclusively or predominantly English. Their exclusion thus should not have diminished the proportion saying they are predominantly or wholly English.
11. We ask:

On the whole, do you think that England's economy benefits more from having Scotland in the UK, or that Scotland’s economy benefits more from being part of the UK, or is it about equal?

- England benefits more
- Scotland benefits more
- Equal

12. We ask:

Would you say that compared with other parts of the United Kingdom, Scotland gets pretty much its fair share of government spending, more than its fair share, or less than its fair share of government spending?

Please choose your answer from this card.

- Much more than its fair share of government spending
- A little more than its fair share of government spending
- Pretty much its fair share of government spending
- A little less than its fair share of government spending
- Much less than its fair share of government spending

13. Bases for Table 6.4 are as follows:

<table>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>1495</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1229</td>
<td>1229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. In 1991 talks with the parties (other than Sinn Fein) were instigated by the then Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Peter Brooke. Sinn Féin were excluded from these talks, but at the same time Brooke authorised secret contact be made with the Irish Republican Army. Meanwhile the UK government appeared to recognise nationalist sentiment by declaring that the Britain had “no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland”, a declaration that helped pave the way for talks between John Hume of the Social Democratic and Labour Party and Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein that in turn were eventually able to help pave the way towards the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (Nolan, 2012: 20).

15. The bases for Table 6.6 are as follows:

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<td>1993</td>
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<td>1996</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16. We should also note that there has since 2007 been a marked decline among Catholics in the level of support for reunification. In that year no less than 47 per cent backed that view, but now only 32 per cent do so. A similar decline, from 21 per cent to eight per cent, has occurred among those of no religion. One possible explanation is that the prospect has come to look less attractive, for the time being at least, as a result of the particularly adverse consequences that the banking crisis of 2008 visited upon the Irish Republic. Recent demands from Sinn Fein that another poll be held on Northern Ireland's constitutional status may also have encouraged people to consider the possible practical consequences of reunification.

17. We do not, however, find intensification on the scale claimed by Wyn Jones et al. (2012; 2013) who reported the results of two Future of England internet surveys that asked, in 2011 and 2012, the same question about the voting rights of Scottish MPs as that asked by British Social Attitudes and then compared these surveys’ findings with those obtained by British Social Attitudes up to and including 2007. The Future of England surveys reported that in 2011 no less than 53 per cent strongly agreed that Scottish MPs should not vote on English laws, and in 2012 that as many as 55 per cent did so, far higher figures than obtained by British Social Attitudes either before or since 2007. The figure obtained by the 2011 survey might have been thought to have been occasioned by the fact it failed to offer respondents a “neither agree nor disagree” option, but this option was included on the 2012 survey and an even higher figure obtained. However, in both years the remaining response options on the Future of England survey read, “Strongly agree” and “Tend to agree” together with “Strongly disagree” and “Tend to disagree”, whereas the options on British Social Attitudes are, “Agree strongly” and “Agree” together with “Disagree strongly” and “Disagree”. We would suggest that respondents are more likely to say that they “Agree strongly” when the alternative is to say “Tend to agree” rather than “Agree”, and that consequently there must be severe doubt about the merits of drawing substantive conclusions from any comparison of the findings of the two series. We would also note that those who evince a relatively high level of interest in politics are more likely to agree strongly with the proposition that Scottish MPs should not vote on English laws, and that while just 36 per cent of the 2012 British Social Attitudes sample in England said that they had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of interest in politics, as many as 67 per cent of the 2012 Future of England sample said they were “very” or “fairly interested”. In short part of the reasons for the difference between the two sets of findings may well be that the internet survey contained more people with a high level of interest in politics.

18. The Future of England surveys (Wyn Jones et al., 2012; 2013) also record relatively high levels of don’t know responses on this issue, 31 per cent in 2011 and 26 per cent in 2012. However, they also report rather higher proportions saying that Scotland gets more than its fair share, 45 per cent in 2011 and 52 per cent in 2012, suggesting that attitudes have become yet more critical since 2007. However, we should note that the question is administered somewhat differently on the Future of England survey than on British Social Attitudes; respondents are simply invited to say whether Scotland gets pretty much its fair share, more than its fair share or less than its fair share whereas on British Social Attitudes respondents are presented with a showcard that lists all five options shown in Table 6.9. In addition, on the Future of England surveys the question is asked immediately after a question that asks respondents whether England gets its fair share of public spending and this may have helped cue some respondents into saying in the following question that Scotland gets less than its fair share.

19. In 2004–2006 the second option read “that makes decisions about the region’s economy, planning and housing”. The 2003 survey carried both versions of this option and demonstrated that the difference of wording did not make a material difference to the pattern of response. The figures quoted for 2003 are those for the two versions combined.
20. Bases for Table 6.11 are as follows:

<table>
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</tbody>
</table>

24. If we undertake a loglinear analysis of the data in Table 6.15, we find that the data are fitted adequately at the 5% level of probability without fitting a term for the interaction between national identity, constitutional preference and year. The residual chi-square for such a model is 13.0, which, with eight degrees of freedom, has a p value of 0.11.

25. Note that in their attempt to argue the contrary position neither Wyn Jones et al. (2012) nor Wyn Jones et al. (2013) demonstrates that the link between Moreno national identity and attitudes towards devolution is stronger now than previously. They merely demonstrate that there is a link between national identity and such attitudes now, a point that is not in dispute. What has to be demonstrated for their argument to be sustained is that the link has grown stronger.

26. Bases for Table 6.15 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>English not British</th>
<th>More English than British</th>
<th>Equally English and British</th>
<th>More British than English</th>
<th>British not English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>weighted base</td>
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<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unweighted base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>491</td>
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<td>999</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>354</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>weighted base</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>weighted base</td>
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<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unweighted base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>170</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
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</table>
References


Bogdanor, V. (1999), Devolution in the United Kingdom, Oxford: Oxford University Press


Conservative Democracy Task Force (2008), Answering the Question: Devolution, the West Lothian Question and the Future of the Union, London: Conservative Party


Moreno, L. (2006), ‘Scotland, Catalonia, Europeanization and the ‘Moreno’ Question’, *Scottish Affairs*, **54**: 1–21


Appendix

The data on which Figure 6.1 is based is shown below.

**Table A.1 Trends in ‘forced choice’ national identity, in Scotland, 1979–2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scottish</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Weighted base</th>
<th>Unweighted base</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
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*There is no weighting variable in this dataset*

The data on which Figure 6.2 is based is shown below.

**Table A.2 Trends in ‘forced choice’ national identity, in Northern Ireland, 1989–2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Northern Irish</th>
<th>Ulster</th>
<th>Weighted base</th>
<th>Unweighted base</th>
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<td>2859</td>
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</table>


*In 1997 the British Election Study contained an ethnic boost, which was then weighted down, hence the difference between the weighted and unweighted base.

The data on which Figure 6.4 is based is shown below.

Table A.4 Constitutional preferences, in Scotland, 1997–2012

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<th></th>
<th>May 97</th>
<th>Sept 97</th>
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<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devolution</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1482</td>
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<td>1605</td>
<td>1665</td>
<td>1508</td>
<td>1637</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>05</th>
<th>06</th>
<th>07</th>
<th>09</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devolution</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
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<td>1594</td>
<td>1508</td>
<td>1482</td>
<td>1495</td>
<td>1197</td>
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</table>

Social class

The role of class in shaping social attitudes

The last 30 years have seen profound political, economic and social changes in Britain. What it means to be in a particular social class now is not necessarily the same as it was three decades ago. How do the British public’s attitudes and values differ according to the social class they are in? And how similar is the relationship between attitudes and class to that which existed in the early 1980s?

Subjective class and opportunities

The proportions of people identifying as working and middle class, and the perception that a person’s class affects their opportunities have remained stable since the early 1980s.

In 2012, six in ten people in Britain think of themselves as ‘working class’ while a third think they are ‘middle class’; the proportions were the same in the early 1980s.

66% of people say that a person’s class affects their opportunities “a great deal” or “quite a lot”. This proportion has not changed substantially since 1983 when 70% thought class affected an individual’s opportunities.

A declining importance of social class

Over the last 30 years, the attitudes of the British public have become less strongly linked to their social class.

In 1984 measures of social class such as economic status, socio-economic group and income level had strong correlations with both welfare and liberal attitudes. For example, lower socio-economic groups were more likely to support increased government taxation and spending, and to be less liberal on issues such as sex before marriage.

In 2012, although there is a relatively high continuity, there are some indications that class has declined in importance, particularly around liberal issues such as sex before marriage. Ethnicity and religiosity are now more salient than class in affecting liberal attitudes – notably on sexuality and household relationships.
Introduction

This chapter addresses the question of how far British people’s attitudes and values differ according to the social class they are in, and whether the relationships we see now between someone’s attitudes and their class are the same as we saw 30 years ago, when British Social Attitudes began in 1983.

The last 30 years have seen profound political, economic and social changes. The context in which the British public forms its views has altered. Moreover, as a result of some of these changes, what it means to be in a particular social class now is not necessarily the same as it was three decades ago.

In the early 1980s, Britain was in a deep recession, where unemployment hit traditional industrial and manual jobs especially hard. In these early years of Margaret Thatcher’s first Conservative government, class politics were clearly evident, with the Labour Party moving dramatically to the left and the trade union movement seeking to resist government policy, as became apparent in the miners’ strikes in 1984 and 1985. A sign of the times was that, in 1981, nearly 20 per cent of the British population thought there was a “need for revolutionary change”, the highest proportion in Europe (Ginsbourg, 1990: Table 30, p445).

In 2012, Britain is once again in recession, but this time the focus is on the financial sector and the services rather than on manufacturing, and there is little overt sign of class polarisation between the political parties. In the intervening period between the early 1980s and 2012, there has been notable deregulation of the economy and of welfare provision. The radicalism of the trade union movement has become more muted and New Labour plays down any specific links it might claim to the working class.

What was a strong relationship in the early 1980s between someone’s social class (measured according to someone’s socio-economic group) and their identification with a particular political party is now a weaker one (Tables 7.1 and 7.2). In 1984, managers and professionals were twice as likely to support the Conservatives as to support the Labour Party (around a half compared with around a quarter did so). By contrast people in the manual working classes were twice as likely to identify with Labour as with the Conservatives (again, around a half compared with around a quarter). In 2012, the professional and intermediate classes are actually more likely to support the Labour Party (38 per cent) than to support the Conservatives (29 per cent). The identification of the manual working classes with the Labour Party has shrunk considerably (to around 40 per cent), although it remains well ahead of their identification with the Conservatives (which is around 20 per cent). Perhaps most strikingly of all, the proportion of all classes who do not identify with any party had risen substantially since 1984: for instance, in 2012, a third (31 per cent) of people in the semi or unskilled manual working classes does not identify with a particular party, compared with seven per cent in 1984.[1] The Politics chapter includes more detailed analysis of trends in party identification.
Table 7.1 Party identification, by socio-economic group, 1984

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic group</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Alliance</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Weighted base</th>
<th>Unweighted base</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owners and the self-employed</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and intermediate</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior non-manual</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled manual</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi and unskilled</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>379</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difference (managers – semi and unskilled)</td>
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<td>-31</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-4</td>
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</table>

Table 7.2 Party identification, by socio-economic group, 2012

<table>
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<th>Socio-economic group</th>
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<th>Labour</th>
<th>Liberal Democrat</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>None</th>
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<th>Unweighted base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owners and the self-employed</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>196</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional and intermediate</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>934</td>
</tr>
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<td>Junior non-manual</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled manual</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi and unskilled</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (managers – semi and unskilled)</td>
<td>+23</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wider social changes, notably with the proportion of ethnic minorities increasing from four per cent in 1981 to 10 per cent in 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2012a), and the diversification of household structure (where the proportion of households consisting of couples with children fell from 39 per cent to 27 per cent between 1981 and 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2012b) have also changed the social landscape.

We thus have an interesting paradox. On the one hand, it is clear from Tables 7.1 and 7.2 that contemporary Britain is marked by strong and pervasive class divisions, measured ‘objectively’ according to someone’s socio-economic group. In turn, these lead to sustained and possibly increasing inequalities across classes, evident in key measures of life chances ranging from educational attainment to health and morbidity. People with working-class jobs are, for example, more at risk of unemployment than those in professional jobs. Increasing disparities in income are driven by accentuating occupational class inequalities (Williams, 2013). Yet, on the other hand, as Tables 7.1 and 7.2 show, the traditional relationship between class and political affiliation has declined,
and fewer people identify with any political party. Plus, although we can ‘classify’ people according to their socio-economic group, when we ask people to classify themselves into a particular social class – what we refer to as someone’s ‘subjective’ social class – nearly half of the British population is reticent to do so. And this is no different now to how it was when the questions were first asked in 1983. Over the past 30 years, surveys (formerly the British Election Study latterly British Social Attitudes) have asked the following questions:

_**Do you ever think of yourself as belonging to any particular class? Which class is that?**_

If respondents do not spontaneously put themselves as either “middle” or “working class”, they are prompted to do so with the question –

_**Most people say they belong either to the middle class or the working class. If you had to make a choice, would you call yourself middle class or working class?**_

Table 7.3 shows people’s propensity over the years to identify themselves as being middle class or working class. The proportion of people feeling that they are middle class (around a third) or working class (around six in ten) has not changed much over the 30 year period. Nor has the fact that only half of the population spontaneously places themselves as belonging to either class, with others only doing so when prompted to put themselves into one camp or the other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective social class</th>
<th>83*</th>
<th>87*</th>
<th>92*</th>
<th>97*</th>
<th>05</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprompted middle class</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompted middle class</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprompted working class</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompted working class</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not identify with any class</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+Source: British Election Study, taken from Heath et al., 2009, p21–40

Although people are no more or less likely in 2012 as in 1984 to self-identify with the working or middle classes, the salience of class has declined substantially for people. When asked how close people feel to particular social classes, there is a marked albeit slow decline over time (Heath et al., 2009). This tallies with substantial qualitative evidence suggesting that people are ambivalent about which class they belong to (see for instance, Savage et al., 2001), or even more,
that disadvantaged working-class people actually ‘dis-identify’ with belonging to a social class (Skeggs, 1997).

Uncertainties about the contemporary cultural and social relevance of class as traditionally defined were very evident in the recent public debate about the findings of the Great British Class Survey which was launched by the BBC in April 2013 (see Savage et al., 2013). These findings attracted great interest, with most commentators recognising that class divisions were strong. Yet at the same time there was much critical commentary about whether the actual classes defined in these new analyses were accurate and whether people felt they actively belonged to any of the newly-defined classes.[2]

In the context of this Savage (2000, p.xii) has identified the “paradox of class” that the structural importance of class to people’s lives appears not to be recognised by the people themselves. Culturally, class does not appear to be a self-conscious principle of social identity. Structurally, however, it appears to be “highly pertinent”.

Our chapter therefore reflects on the significance of class – both objective and subjective – for a range of people’s attitudes on welfare and liberal attitudes. There are at least four possible reasons why we might expect the relationship between someone’s social class and their attitudes to have weakened in the last 30 years, each of which we explore in this chapter:

**Reason 1: class is no longer politically mobilised.** One line of reasoning might run that while objective class differences remain strong, powerful institutions and agencies do not seek to mobilise people on the basis of these inequalities. Marshall et al. (1988) and Evans and Tilley (2012) argue that the decline of class alignment in the political arena is due to the way that political parties themselves have moved to the centre, rather than because people themselves have changed in their political preferences. This leads us to wonder whether people’s attitudes and values on issues where political parties used to give a strong lead to their supporters have also become more weakly associated with social class.

**Reason 2: class no longer means the same thing.** A second possibility is that perhaps the apparent importance of social class as an indicator of someone’s attitudes has weakened artefactually, simply because our classifications of social class have become outdated. It may be that social class needs to be re-conceptualised, and that, if we did so, stronger associations with attitudes would be found. So, is the traditional distinction between middle class and working class no longer the relevant dividing line? Should we now be thinking in terms of distinctions based on income levels, between say the rich, the ‘squeezed middle’, and the poor? Or along the lines of Savage et al. (2013) should we be differentiating between different kinds of middle-class groupings, and distinguishing between an ‘elite’ at the top and a ‘precariat’ at the bottom? Has education now superseded class as the key source of social attitudes?

**Reason 3: people’s backgrounds do not influence their views any longer.** A third possibility is that in a post-industrial, postmodern society (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Giddens, 1994) attitudes themselves have simply become more individualistic and less tightly tied to people’s social positions. Since, according to Beck, identities can be freely chosen, attitudes too might have become more indeterminate. Perhaps class has not been replaced by income or education or by
any other social cleavage, but, rather, attitudes more generally have become more amorphous and unpredictable? This might be tied to Inglehart’s (1990) famous argument that contemporary societies are becoming more ‘post-materialist’, or ‘expressive’ in their orientations, with the consequence that the kind of material interest-based attitudes deriving from class become less important.

Reason 4: other things matter now as well as class. A fourth and final perspective might claim that society has become more fragmented and differentiated with multiple bases of social attitudes rather than a single all-embracing division between middle and working class (or between rich and poor). This might be consistent with the significance of immigration, the rise of multiculturalism and diversity. This is a point discussed in the recent Government Office for Science’s report on the Future of Identity (Foresight, 2013). Thus class, education, income, ethnicity and religion may each structure a limited set of attitudes, each within a relatively narrow sphere. We could interpret this, in Bourdieu’s terms, as the increasing differentiation of cultural fields (Bourdieu, 1993). In other words we may be seeing a British society emerging in which there are multiple, cross-cutting lines of social cleavage rather than any one dominant line of division in the way that class used to operate.

In order to evaluate the merits of these four possibilities, this chapter focuses on a range of attitudes and values towards traditional class issues such as redistribution and welfare, as well as issues around family and civil liberties. We compare results from the earliest British Social Attitudes surveys of 1983 and 1984 with those for the most recent surveys from 2011 and 2012 (focusing on questions that were asked in identical formats at the two time points). We look at how far responses to these questions are structured by social class (firstly as it is objectively measured and later by people’s subjective view of themselves) and by other measures of social identity and social position (referred to later as social cleavages). In particular we consider what may have changed in the last 30 years, and how the importance of social class in shaping attitudes competes with other ways of defining people’s social position, such as their religion, ethnicity or age.

We begin by introducing the attitude questions we have used in the chapter to explore the relationship between attitudes and social position. We also present the range of measures we use to explore social class and social position. We present tables showing the associations between someone’s attitudes and the different measures of their social class and position, followed by analysis to assess the most significant drivers of attitudes at the beginning and the end of our 30 year period. We finish by discussing the relative importance of people’s subjective social class in shaping their attitudes, and drawing conclusions about which, if any, of our four possible reasons for the declining importance of social class, might explain stability and changes in the past 30 years.

The attitude questions

There are only a limited number of questions which were asked both at the start of British Social Attitudes (in 1983 or 1984) and most recently (in 2011 and 2012). In this chapter, we focus on five questions related to income redistribution and aspects of the welfare state. Traditionally, we would expect people’s views on these questions to reflect their socio-economic position, or objective class. Commentators who talk of the dealignment of class from political affiliation predict that the relationship will have become weaker over time.
In looking at these questions, we should be aware that their meaning might vary in different periods in time. For instance, the significance of reducing taxes might vary according to the actual tax rates for various income groups, or the meaning of spending on services may vary according to whether these are means-tested or universal. This caveat applies to any question of this kind and requires care in interpreting changing distributions over time:

Which do you think the government 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

Which item of government spending would be your highest priority for **extra** spending?[3]

How much do you agree or disagree with the statement “The welfare state encourages people to stop helping each other”?

How much do you agree or disagree that the NHS should only be available to lower income groups?*

Do you feel that opportunities for young people in Britain to go onto higher education – to a university or college – should be increased or reduced, or are they at about the right level now?+

*Not available in 2012
+Not available in 1984

The second set of four questions we look at taps into the extent to which people hold liberal views. We expect these issues to be less strongly related to socio-economic position, and more closely related to religion and age. Some theoretical perspectives, such as Reason 3 which suggests that people’s backgrounds may have become less important in shaping attitudes, might anticipate that these relationships would also have become weaker over time. Conversely, theories such as in Reason 1, which emphasise the role of political parties, would tend to be more agnostic on whether there will have been changes over time (since British political parties, unlike their American counterparts, do not in general take up distinctive positions on these moral and family issues);[4]

Do you think that divorce in (Britain/Scotland) should be easier to obtain than it is now, more difficult or, should things remain as they are?

If a man and woman have sexual relations before marriage, what would your general opinion be?

What would your general opinion be about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex?

How much do you agree or disagree with the statement “The law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong”?*

*Not available in 2012
+Not available in 1984
Given that our analysis focuses only on the beginning and the end of the British Social Attitudes time series, it cannot be treated as a definitive account of trends between the 1980s and 2012. Further details on the trends for a number of these measures, both at the population level and for particular subgroups, is available in the chapters on Government spending and welfare (taxation and spending; attitudes to the welfare state) and Personal relationships (attitudes to premarital sex and same-sex relations). Nonetheless, this chapter provides a current picture of the relationship between public attitudes and social class, and an account of how this has changed since 30 years ago.

The measures of social cleavage

In our introductory section, we report on two measures of social class: someone’s socio-economic group and their subjective view of the class to which they see themselves as belonging. While someone’s socio-economic group is related to their current circumstances, someone’s subjective class can be rooted in factors other than their current situation, such as family history, political affiliation, and so on.

However, there are a number of other measures included in British Social Attitudes which are social-class indicators, which we include in this chapter:

- Household income
- Economic activity (full-time education, employed, unemployed, economically inactive)
- Housing tenure (owner, social housing, other tenures)
- Trade union membership
- Educational level (measured by age of completed education in 1983/4 and highest qualification in 2011/12)
- Private education*
- Private health insurance*
- Whether someone views themselves as high, middle or low income

*Not available in 2012

There are then a number of other social cleavage measures, beyond social class, which are known to divide the attitudes of the British population:

- Religion (Christian, other religion, no religion)
- Attendance at a place of worship (no religion, never attends, … attends weekly)
- Ethnicity (white, non-white)
- Age group
- Sex

By looking at the associations between someone’s attitudes and these wider measures of social cleavage, we can explore whether social class is becoming more or less significant in shaping attitudes than other definitions of their social position. By doing this we can test the question raised as Reason 4; that the social drivers of attitudinal differences have become more diverse. We can also see whether the relative importance of income against our measures of class has changed; this might be consistent with our second argument about the importance of material factors (although we might need a new measure of social class to effectively capture these). By looking at the significance of trade union
membership we can (partially) assess the role of political institutions in affecting attitudes (hence offering some insights on our first perspective), recognising that the social composition of trade union membership has also changed. Alternatively, if all these factors appear to have become less important over time, this might lend support to our third hypothesis about the increasing significance of reflexive, expressive and individualised attitudes.

The relationship between social attitudes and measures of objective social class or social cleavage

In this section, we take the first of a series of steps to assess the relationship between someone’s social class, or their social position, and their social attitudes – in the early 1980s and then in 2012. Step one is to look at the strength of the associations between the range of objective social class and cleavage measures above, and people’s attitudes. (We turn later in the chapter to discuss people’s subjective social class, that is, how they view themselves in terms of class and income levels.) So, without reporting at this stage on the actual percentages of who holds which views across the different social groups, we look at the overall pattern of the relationship between social position and attitudes, and where those relationships are strongest.

Tables 7.4 to 7.7 show how strongly people’s attitudes are associated with each of our measures of social class or social position, firstly in 1984, then in 2012. In each case, we have measured the strength of the association using a Cramer’s V (a statistical chi-square based measure of association), where the association between the two variables is expressed as a score between 0 and 1. The larger the V score, the more strongly the two variables are associated. So, for example in Table 7.4, someone’s social class is more strongly associated with someone’s views on the NHS (0.151) than with their views on opportunities for higher education (0.054). Using asterisks, we also show the level of statistical significance in the difference between the two variables (as measured by a chi-square test).[5]

We look firstly at the relationship between someone’s social class, and their position across other social cleavages, and their attitudes to welfare and redistribution in 1984 (Table 7.4) and in 2012 (Table 7.5). In 1984, someone’s class, measured by socio-economic group, was significantly associated with four out of the five welfare state attitudes (with the working classes being more positive towards government spending). Likewise, other measures of someone’s social class, such as their current economic activity, their education level and trade union membership were also strongly associated with attitudes to welfare, on at least three of our five attitudinal measures. It is striking that someone’s attitudes to welfare issues were often less strongly associated with someone’s income level. Other measures of social cleavage were associated with a preference for taxation and spending, but were often not related to the other welfare questions. The exception to this was someone’s age, which was significantly associated with their views on welfare across all five of our attitudinal questions. But overall, in 1984, social class appeared to be significantly more important in structuring most attitudes to welfare than our other social cleavage measures.
By 2012, people’s attitudes to welfare are less strongly related to their social class (measured by someone’s socio-economic group) and other measures of their social position are somewhat more significant. People’s housing tenure, economic activity and educational attainment are all more important now to people’s attitudes to welfare than they were in 1984, having statistically significant associations with four of the five welfare attitudes questions. Religion, sex, age and ethnicity are all more important now too. They have statistically significant associations with four of our five welfare attitudes, whereas social class is associated with three, income with one, and trade union membership with two. To this extent, there is some evidence that social class has become somewhat less dominant in structuring welfare attitudes in the past 30 years.

So, having established where there are statistically significant associations between people’s attitudes and different measures of their social position, we turn to the strength of that association (as measured by Cramer’s V). Overall, there is no clear trend that suggests that the strength of the associations we see have become more or less strong over time. For example, we see that in both 1984 and 2012, socio-economic group has a slightly stronger association with the welfare attitudes than income level does, and there is little sign that income has supplanted socio-economic group as the main economic driver of attitudes in 2012. Overall, economic activity remains as strong a predictor of people’s attitudes to welfare as it had been in 1984, as does housing tenure. Just as in the early 1980s, private health and private education do not prove to be highly associated with people’s attitudes in 2012. In contrast to theorists such as Peter Saunders (1990) who predicted that these ‘consumption sectors’ would become increasingly significant in a more marketised environment, in fact they have negligible significance. However, there does seem to be an important decline in the strength of the association between trade union membership and welfare attitudes. This may be due to the change in profile of trade union membership during this period, when there has been a shift from the majority of members being manual workers to non-manual workers, with the rise in professional trade union membership.
Table 7.4 Associations between attitudes to welfare and measures of social cleavage, 1984+ (Cramer's V and significance level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of other social cleavages</th>
<th>Taxation and spending</th>
<th>Health or education first priority for spending</th>
<th>Opportunities for higher education</th>
<th>Welfare state stops people helping</th>
<th>NHS limited to low incomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic group</td>
<td>.080*</td>
<td>.090**</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.085**</td>
<td>.151***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income quartile</td>
<td>.067*</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.109***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic activity</td>
<td>.093***</td>
<td>.670*</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.183***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing tenure</td>
<td>.090**</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.077**</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade union membership</td>
<td>.166***</td>
<td>.340</td>
<td>.930**</td>
<td>.770</td>
<td>.980***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.690*</td>
<td>.580</td>
<td>.067*</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.082**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private education</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private health</td>
<td>.105***</td>
<td>.069*</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.063*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = significant at 0.05 level, ** at 0.01 level and *** at 0.001 level
+data on opportunities for higher education from 1983

Base 1630 1629 1695 1494 1628
Table 7.5 Associations between attitudes to welfare and measures of social cleavage, 2012+ (Cramer’s V and significance level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic measures</th>
<th>Taxation and spending</th>
<th>Health or education first priority for spending</th>
<th>Opportunities for higher education</th>
<th>Welfare state stops people helping</th>
<th>NHS limited to low incomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic group</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.097***</td>
<td>.100***</td>
<td>.083***</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income quartile</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.078***</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic activity</td>
<td>.068***</td>
<td>.055**</td>
<td>.098***</td>
<td>.065***</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing tenure</td>
<td>.045*</td>
<td>.050**</td>
<td>.136***</td>
<td>.055*</td>
<td>.129***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade union membership</td>
<td>.048*</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.120***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private education</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private health</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.073***</td>
<td>.090***</td>
<td>.075***</td>
<td>.072***</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Other social measures                    |                       |                                               |                                 |                                |                           |
| Religion                                 | .048**                | .055***                                       | .107***                         | .054*                           | .044                      |
| Attendance at a place of worship         | .049                  | .078***                                       | .060                            | .066***                         | .088                      |
| Sex                                     | .063**                | .140***                                       | .119***                         | .063*                           | .057                      |
| Age                                     | .070***               | .077***                                       | .113***                         | .092***                         | .072                      |
| Ethnic group                             | .092***               | .056**                                        | .118***                         | .058***                         | .073                      |

Base (minimum) 3217 (1078) 3233 (1078) 2133 2783 (919) 1081 (928)

* = significant at 0.05 level, ** at 0.01 level and *** at 0.001 level
+data on NHS being limited to those with lower incomes from 2011
Cells are left blank where a statistic could not be estimated because the predictor and the attitude question were in different versions of the questionnaire
Figures in brackets show the minimum base

Tables 7.6 and 7.7 show the changing relationship between liberal attitudes (those listed earlier) and people’s social class and other measures of their social position, again comparing 1984 and in 2012. In 1984, someone’s socio-economic group was not as significant in shaping these liberal attitudes as most of the other social class measures, especially education. By 2012, these measures of social class have also declined in importance, and there are much closer associations between liberal attitudes and the other social cleavages, notably religion, attendance at a place of worship, age and ethnicity. In 2012, as in 1984, religion and attendance at a place of worship have the strongest associations of all (measured by the Cramer’s V score). This is especially the case with attitudes towards premarital sex (and related issues like ease of divorce). The relationship between liberal attitudes and religiosity has, if anything, got stronger over time, especially with respect to the acceptability of same-sex relationships. But educational level also remains a powerful predictor of liberal attitudes.
Table 7.6 Associations between liberal attitudes and measures of social cleavage, 1984+ (Cramer's V and significance level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic measures</th>
<th>Ease of divorce</th>
<th>Premarital sex</th>
<th>Same-sex relations</th>
<th>Obey law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic group</td>
<td>.091**</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.092***</td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income quartile</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.125***</td>
<td>.099***</td>
<td>.131***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic activity</td>
<td>.126***</td>
<td>.176***</td>
<td>.118***</td>
<td>.142***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing tenure</td>
<td>.097***</td>
<td>.101***</td>
<td>.114***</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade union membership</td>
<td>.100***</td>
<td>.136***</td>
<td>.078*</td>
<td>.047*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private education</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.092**</td>
<td>.113***</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private health</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.077*</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.105***</td>
<td>.131***</td>
<td>.139***</td>
<td>.147***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other measures of social cleavage

| Religion                | .117***         | .213***        | .130***            | .148***  |
| Attendance at a place of worship | .177***       | .206***        | .107***            | .150***  |
| Sex                     | .108***         | .113***        | .102**             | .001     |
| Age                     | .140***         | .475***        | .134***            | .245***  |
| Ethnic group            | .025            | .066           | .042               | .059*    |

Base 1625 1617 1613 1687

* = significant at 0.05 level, ** at 0.01 level and *** at 0.001 level
+ data on obeying the law from 1983

Table 7.7 Associations between liberal attitudes and measures of social cleavage, 2012 (Cramer's V and significance level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic measures</th>
<th>Ease of divorce</th>
<th>Premarital sex</th>
<th>Same-sex relations</th>
<th>Obey law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic group</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.122***</td>
<td>.099***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income quartile</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.113***</td>
<td>.127***</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic activity</td>
<td>.104***</td>
<td>.115***</td>
<td>.135***</td>
<td>.090***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing tenure</td>
<td>.089**</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.067**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade union membership</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.138***</td>
<td>.128***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other measures of social cleavage

| Religion                | .155***         | .344***        | .268***            | .048*    |
| Attendance at a place of worship | .157***       | .240***        | .202***            | .032     |
| Sex                     | .054            | .109*          | .134***            | .044*    |
| Age                     | .112***         | .106***        | .142***            | .102***  |
| Ethnic group            | .120***         | .389***        | .241***            | .044*    |

Base (minimum) 1083 1083 1082 2774 (920)

* = significant at 0.05 level, ** at 0.01 level and *** at 0.001 level
Cells are left blank where a statistic could not be estimated because the predictor and the attitude question were in different versions of the questionnaire
Figures in brackets show the minimum base
To generalise, it is clear that, even in 1984, social class (measured by someone’s socio-economic group) was not necessarily the key factor affecting people’s attitudes and values. Several other measures of economic position, notably economic activity, housing tenure and membership of a trade union were associated with attitudes as much as, or possibly even slightly more than, socio-economic group. It would be wrong, therefore to think that class (objectively measured by socio-economic group) was predominant even at this period in the 1980s of apparent class polarisation. In the early 1980s, there was a differentiation between welfare attitudes, which generally appear oriented on a left-right axis in which class, housing, economic activity, and trade union membership were important, and liberal attitudes, which were more closely related to age, education and religion. However, class and class-related factors such as economic position come over as the most significant predictor of attitudes across the board at that time – so to this extent we can usefully talk about socio-economic position being a fundamental driver of attitudes in the 1980s.

The patterns for 2012 reveal that there are many similarities and only modest changes since the 1980s. The overall pattern of associations between social position and social attitudes is broadly similar to 30 years ago, with class-related factors significantly related to the various welfare questions, and age, education, and religion, as before, being more strongly associated with liberal attitudes. However, age, education, ethnicity and religion now appear to have significant associations with many of the welfare issues in a way that was not apparent in the earliest period. Across all the measures of someone’s social position, relationships between ethnicity and people’s attitudes have shifted most in this 30 year period. Ethnicity now vies with economic activity as the single most important driver of attitudes across the board, more important than socio-economic group or sex. Its importance for same-sex relations and premarital sex is especially marked, which may well be associated with the religious views of some of the ethnic groups.

As one might expect, there is a considerable amount of fluctuation in levels of significance and magnitude of the associations over time, reflecting changing historical contexts – and also reflecting methodological issues such as sampling errors and changing sample sizes – but the overall patterns look pretty similar in the two periods. In order to illustrate some of these patterns in more detail, and the changes between the early 1980s and now, we next present some simple tables showing the relationship between people’s attitudes and various measures of their social position. For simplicity, we focus on one question on attitudes to welfare – attitudes towards taxation and government spending – and one question on liberal attitudes – towards premarital sexual relationships. We chose these because earlier factor analyses had indicated that these were the most central items in both periods for each of the two ideological dimensions. We show the full set of response categories to each of these two questions enabling us to flesh out the findings above on exactly how people’s attitudes on these two measures are associated with their position in society.

In Table 7.8, we begin with the relationship between someone’s socio-economic group and their attitudes to taxation and government spending, in 1984 and 2012. We show the proportions from each socio-economic group who prefer increased taxation and increased spending on health, education and social benefits.[7] As we can see, both now and 30 years ago, business-owners and self-employed people (often termed the petty bourgeoisie) are the least likely to
support increased taxation (28 per cent supported it in 1984, and 27 per cent
did so in 2012, due to small sample size of this group the 1984 figure should be
treated with caution), with managers not far behind in their views in 1984. Those
more likely to benefit from income redistribution, in the lower socio-economic
groups are most likely to support increased taxation and social spending. For
instance, among the semi- and unskilled-manual classes, 40 per cent supported
increased taxation and spending in 1984 and 36 per cent do so in 2012.
However, we can also see that the gaps between the classes have reduced
somewhat in 2012, compared with 1984, largely because the working classes
have become less supportive of greater spending. This may reflect the effects of
the recession of 2008, the subsequent austerity measures, and the consequent
squeeze on the incomes of ordinary working people, which has perhaps made
them more reluctant to support government spending. However, the change
in the strength of relationship does not reach statistical significance, so we are
careful not to over-interpret the change.[8]

Table 7.8 Taxation and spending, by socio-economic group, 1984 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% saying the government should increase taxation and spending</th>
<th>1984</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owners and the self-employed</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and intermediate</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior non-manual</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled manual</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi and unskilled</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (owners–skilled)</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.9 shows the pattern of responses to the same question on taxation and
spending, across people with different household incomes, divided roughly into
four quartiles. In both years, the relationship between support for increased
taxes and welfare spending and one’s own income level is weak, with no
statistically significant difference between the two time points.[9] At least on
this particular issue, income is not associated with attitudes on taxation and
spending in either year.
Table 7.9 Taxation and spending, by income quartile, 1984 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income (quartiles)</th>
<th>1984</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top income quartile</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next top</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next bottom</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom income quartile</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (top-bottom)</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 7.10 we show the differences in attitudes to increased taxation and spending comparing those in full-time education, in employment (including self-employment), unemployed, and economically inactive (for simplicity grouping together people who are retired, homemakers and other inactivity). In both 1984 and 2012, there is a clear distinction between people who are employed and those who are unemployed, with unemployed people 10 percentage points more likely to prefer greater government spending. Once again, a formal test indicates that there has been no statistically significant change over time in the extent to which people who are unemployed differ from those who are employed.

Table 7.10 Taxation and spending, by economic activity, 1984 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic activity</th>
<th>1984</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time education</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (unemployed–employed)</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next we turn to trade union membership. Here for the first time we see a major change over time with a significant weakening in the strength of association between a measure of social class and someone’s attitudes to taxation and spending. In 1984, there was an 18 point difference in support for greater spending between trade union members and non-members (the largest we have seen so far), with trade union members, not surprisingly, being much more likely to support greater spending. The relationship remained significant in 2012 but was sharply reduced to only six points. Formal testing indicates that the change in strength of relationship is highly significant.[10] However, as we mentioned earlier, these findings need to be taken in the context that the profile of trade union membership during this period has shifted from majority membership from manual workers to non-manual workers, with the rise in professional trade union membership.
We now move on to look at the relationships between someone’s social class or social position, and their attitudes to premarital sexual relationships, a core question among a set of British Social Attitudes questions about liberalism. We begin in Table 7.12 with looking at the relationship between someone’s age and their attitudes to premarital sex. As we can see, there was a very strong relationship between the two in 1984, much stronger than any involving the class-related issues or cleavages. But there is an interesting change by 2012: older age groups have become much more liberal, while the attitudes of the youngest group have barely changed.\[11\] This may well reflect processes of generational change (with younger more liberal cohorts replacing older ones with more traditional views), rather than individuals becoming more liberal as they age. Indeed, people who were aged between 25 and 34 in 1984 will broadly be concentrated in the 45 to 54 year old age group in 2012: and as we can see the attitudes of this cohort in 2012 are rather similar (67 per cent in favour of premarital sex) to the attitudes of the 25 to 34 year olds in 1984 (65 per cent in favour). One plausible interpretation therefore is that these kinds of attitudes are learned while young, and then change little over the course of life.

We see a rather different pattern when it comes to the attitudes of people with different levels of education (Table 7.13). In 1984 we see a strong ‘curvilinear’ relationship (with people at the two ends of the spectrum holding similar views and those in between holding different ones) in which graduates and those with no educational qualifications were less likely to approve of premarital sex than those with intermediate qualifications. However by 2012, there is general acceptance of premarital sex across all groups.\[12\]
Table 7.13 Premarital sex, by education, 1984 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% saying premarital sex is not at all wrong</th>
<th>1984</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong>[13]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level and higher education below degree</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than CSE</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (highest–lowest)</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We find a very powerful relationship between attendance at a place of worship (church, mosque, temple or gurdwara for example) and attitudes to premarital sexual relations (Table 7.14). If anything the relationship has strengthened over time;[14] in 2012 the gap between the level of acceptance of premarital sexual relations of people who attend a place of worship weekly and of people with no religion had widened to a massive 62 percentage points.

Table 7.14 Premarital sex, by attendance at place of worship, 1984 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% saying premarital sex is not at all wrong</th>
<th>1984</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance at a place of worship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends weekly</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a month</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a year</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never attends</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (weekly–no religion)</td>
<td>-47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally we turn to ethnicity, which we saw in Tables 7.5 and 7.7 had quite strong associations with attitudes across the board in 2012. Since the number of ethnic minority respondents in 1984 was very small, it does not make a great deal of sense to explore change over time in any detail, we therefore focus only on 2012. Table 7.15 shows the relationship between ethnicity and our two key measures of attitudes on welfare and liberal issues.
Table 7.15 Views on taxation and spending and premarital sex, by ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>% saying the government should increase taxation and spending</th>
<th>% saying premarital sexual relations not wrong at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minorities</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>-37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that ethnic minorities are less tolerant of premarital sexual relationships is no surprise. But it may surprise, given that minorities have very high levels of support for the Labour Party, that they are not supportive of the left-wing policy of increasing taxation and government spending. However, this pattern has been found before (Dancygier and Saunders, 2006; Heath et al., forthcoming) using independent data sources. One possible interpretation is that many people from ethnic minorities originate from countries with much less developed welfare states than Britain, and therefore are relatively satisfied with Britain’s, in comparison, rather generous arrangements.

The importance of objective social class in shaping social attitudes

Many of the measures of people’s social position that we have been looking at above will be associated – or correlated – with one another. So, for instance, someone’s income is correlated with their socio-economic group, with people in higher socio-economic groups more likely than those in lower groups to have higher incomes, and so on. Another example where there is a well-known association is between age and attendance at a place of worship, with older people more likely to attend a place of worship frequently. In order to understand the key underlying predictors of people’s attitudes – and the relative importance of the various measures of social class and cleavage – we have used regression analysis, which allows us to measure the independent association of each measure, controlling for the others.[15]

In Table 7.16, we show the results, for 1984 and 2012, of the two attitude factors we focus on in the earlier section: attitudes towards tax and spending and attitudes towards premarital sex. In our analysis, we included all the social class and cleavage measures listed in Tables 7.4 to 7.7. (The one exception is that we do not include both religion and attendance at a place of worship since they share the common category of ‘no religion’.) This enables us to show the independent associations between the attitude measure and each measure of social class or position, taking into account – or controlling for – all the other measures in the model. In the tables, we show which measures of social class are statistically significantly associated with each attitude (shown by the asterisks), and the strength of the association (shown by the coefficients). For example, the coefficient for ethnicity shows by how much members of a minority group differ in their attitudes compared with a member of the majority group of the same age, educational level, socio-economic position and so on. In order to focus on the key stories, we do not show coefficients where the relevant
measure was not statistically significant, in either 1984 or 2012. However, where the coefficient was significant in one of the two survey years, we also show its value in the other year in order to facilitate comparison. For example, in 1984 there was a significant difference between people who were employed and those who were unemployed in their attitudes towards taxation and government spending (as also shown in Table 7.10), and we accordingly show the coefficient for this contrast. A negative coefficient (with a minus sign) indicates that the group in question was more left-leaning or more liberal than the comparison group (shown in brackets as the reference group). Thus the negative coefficient for the unemployed in the first column of the table indicates that, in 1984, the unemployed were significantly more likely to prefer greater taxation and spending than were those in employment (just as we saw in Table 7.10).

Table 7.16 Significant associations with views of taxation and spending and premarital sex, 1984 and 2012 (coefficients and significance level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preferring more tax and spending</th>
<th>More liberal on premarital sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ref semi and unskilled)</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income+</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed (ref employed)</td>
<td>0.60***</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants in social housing (ref owners)</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union member (ref not)</td>
<td>0.63***</td>
<td>0.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private education (ref not)</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private health (ref not)</td>
<td>-0.63***</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education+</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at a place of worship*</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (ref female)</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age*</td>
<td>-0.09*</td>
<td>-0.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minority (ref ethnic majority)</td>
<td>-1.10**</td>
<td>-0.59***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2 (Nagelkerke)[16]</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Base                     | 1633  | 3204  | 1598  | 1082  |

* = significant at 0.05 level, ** at 0.01 level and *** at 0.001 level
ns = not significant in either year
n/a = not asked

Additional categories (not reported) were included for missing data on socio-economic group or income
+Age, income, education and attendance at a place of worship were treated as continuous variables

Some clear stories emerge from Table 7.16. Perhaps most importantly we see that, after taking into account other measures of social position, neither socio-economic group nor income have significant relationships with people’s attitudes, even on tax and spending. Instead it is the factors like trade union membership and unemployment which are related to these attitudes. Moreover, this is true as much in 2012 as it was in 1984. This has considerable implications for the questions we pose at the start of the chapter. It suggests that specific interests, for example from being unemployed, rather than more generalised class location are the key drivers of these particular attitudes. This is the most striking divergence of this regression analysis from the early tables (which did not take into account the interrelationship between different measures of social position) in which, in 1984, socio-economic position and income both...
had significant relationships with attitudes towards taxation and government spending. This might be an argument in favour of the view that the effects which appear to be the product of social class are in fact attributable to smaller-scale processes (see, for example, Grusky and Weedon, 2008).

In most other respects, the regression analysis confirms the findings of the earlier tables. Thus age, sex (in 2012), ethnicity, and attendance at a place of worship are all highly significant predictors of attitudes towards premarital sexual relations, even after taking into account all the other measures of social position. Our provisional conclusions about changes in strengths of relationship over time are also confirmed.[17] Trade union membership had a weaker relationship with attitudes to government spending in 2012 than it did in 1984. The effect of age on attitudes to premarital sexual relationships has weakened, and that the effect of attendance at a place of worship has strengthened.[18]

**Subjective social class**

Previous sections have focused on objective measures of social class and other measures of someone’s social position. Here, we return to our initial question of the importance of someone’s subjective class awareness. We ask how important this is in shaping social attitudes. We measure subjective social class using responses to the following questions (the first of which we report on in Table 7.17):

- **Which class would you place yourself in, middle class or working class?**
- **Among which group would you place yourself, high income, middle income, or, low income?**
- **To what extent do you think a person’s social class affects his or her opportunities in Britain today? A great deal, quite a lot, not very much, or not at all**

We reported earlier, in Table 7.3, that there has been very little change in the proportion of people identifying as “middle” or “working class” over the last 30 years. In 2012, 35 per cent of the public sees itself as “middle class” and 60 per cent view themselves as “working class”. Table 7.17 shows a similarly flat trend regarding the income group that people perceive themselves to be in, although there are signs of a slight increase in propensity to view oneself as middle rather than low income. In 2012, half (51 per cent) of people think they have a middle income, 44 per cent think low income and only four per cent perceive themselves as having a high income. Likewise there has been little movement since 1983 in whether the public perceives that someone’s class affects their opportunities. Throughout the period, a majority of people (around seven in ten) think that social class does affect opportunities, either a great deal or quite a lot.
As we discussed in the introduction, people's subjective awareness of social class may have followed a different trajectory over time from their objective one (measured by their socio-economic group), and it may be the subjective side that is more closely related to social attitudes. Thus we might see a sharper decline over time in the relationship between subjective class and attitudes than was the case with objective socio-economic group. And it could also be that people's subjective sense of where they stand in terms of income has become relatively more important. To explore these possibilities we add measures of subjective class, self-rated income and class awareness into our regression analyses on which we report. Table 7.18 shows the results for these three subjective measures only. All the other measures from Table 7.16 were also included in the model, but the coefficients are not shown as they were little affected by the inclusion of the new measures.

Table 7.18 Significant associations, 1984 and 2012 (coefficients and significance level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preferring more tax and spending</th>
<th>More liberal on premarital sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective working class (ref middle class)</td>
<td>0.55***</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-rated income*</td>
<td>-0.28*</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class awareness*</td>
<td>0.23***</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2 (Nagelkerke)</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1524</td>
<td>1031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = significant at 0.05 level, ** at 0.01 level and *** at 0.001 level
Subjective class and class awareness were asked in a different version of the questionnaire from premarital sex in 2012, and so were not answered by the same group of respondents
*Self-rated income and and class awareness were treated as continuous variables

n/a = not asked

Table 7.17 Self-rated income and whether class affects a person’s opportunities, 1983–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>83</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>91</th>
<th>97</th>
<th>98</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-rated income</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High income</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle income</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1719</td>
<td>2766</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3146</td>
<td>3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1761</td>
<td>2847</td>
<td>1445</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3146</td>
<td>3248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A person's class affects their opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>1719</td>
<td>2766</td>
<td>1414</td>
<td>1355</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>1761</td>
<td>2847</td>
<td>1473</td>
<td>1355</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1076</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This analysis confirms the view that the subjective significance of class has declined considerably over the past 30 years. In 1984, one’s self-rated class affected both welfare and liberal attitudes, even controlling all other factors we have looked at so far. To this extent, subjective class was more important than objective class in the early 1980s. By 2012, however, subjective class makes no significant difference in attitudes to tax and spend, and nor does one’s self-rated income position. It is true that class awareness remains significant and of identical magnitude, but here the causality is especially complex as it might be the case that those in favour of ‘tax and spend’ might be more predisposed to thinking that class matters in shaping opportunities.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that we are looking only at the two ends of the British Social Attitudes time series, this chapter offers powerful support to those who claim that there have been only gradual shifts in public attitudes, and that there is only limited evidence of the declining significance of class. The first key point is that – at the start of British Social Attitudes in the early 1980s – once we take into account the various ways of dividing the British population into different social positions, we find that social class in itself was not very important in shaping attitudes. Rather, people’s attitudes were related to other factors associated with social class – such as employment and trade union membership. This in itself limits the debate about the declining importance of class. So, overall, the big story is that not a great deal has changed over the years from 1984 to 2012: there is substantial continuity in the patterns of relationships between social attitudes and social class. While some relationships between attitudes and social cleavages have weakened (for instance, trade union membership with welfare attitudes) others have strengthened somewhat (such as attendance at a place of worship and liberal attitudes).

Let us reflect on the four possible explanations of the relationship between class and attitudes which were raised at the start to consider how our analysis affects them. The first of these (Reason 1) is that political agencies no longer seek to make an issue out of class, hence leading to a declining relationship between class and attitudes. Perhaps there is some evidence for this in that trade union membership is no longer a driver of attitudes in the way that it was in the early 1980s, linked in part to its different social composition. The historical remaking of the Labour Party and the weakening of the link with trade unions might be responsible for this. The declining significance of subjective class identities in shaping attitudes might also be linked to this trend. Someone’s class is now less related to their views on welfare than it used to be, in parallel to the decline in class voting and – perhaps for similar reasons – the movement of New Labour to the centre of the political spectrum and the absence of class-related cues.

We are not really able to adjudicate the second possibility (Reason 2): that the nature of class divisions have changed and require different measures, because we do not have alternative operationalisations of class in British Social Attitudes. The fact that the apparent effect of class can largely be decomposed into constituent factors associated with class might suggest that the artefactual issues might be important. However, there is no supporting evidence that this might be an issue in our study. There is certainly no evidence that one’s position in ‘consumption sectors’ (for instance in public or private systems of housing or health care) makes an increasing difference.
Is there evidence for the third view (Reason 3) that we are seeing a more individualised set of attitudes along the lines that Beck (1992) sketches out? In Giddens’s (1991) formulation, for instance, class might be expected to remain important for the politics of ‘life chances’ whereas it becomes less important for ‘identity politics’. However, our analysis suggests that attitudes on welfare are becoming less structured by objective indicators, whereas those concerned with liberal attitudes are becoming more marked by these, and especially by sex, religion and ethnicity. There is no uniform story of ‘individualisation’ as Beck would have it.

This finding may suggest some modest support for the fourth idea (Reason 4) we mentioned at the start; that we are seeing an increasing fracturing of attitudinal domains. This would be consistent with the increasing significance of religion and attendance at a place of worship on liberal attitudes. If there is an overarching story here, it concerns the declining significance of subjective class membership and awareness on attitudes and the rising significance of ethnicity which appears to be a major new division in British society.

Notes
1. The reduction in the strength of the association between socio-economic group and party identification is clear from the Cramer’s V score in each year. Cramer’s V is a chi-square based measure of association. While a chi-square coefficient depends both on the strength of the relationship and on sample size, Cramer’s V eliminates the effect of sample size by dividing chi-square by N, the sample size, (together with a further adjustment) and taking the square root. V may be interpreted as the association between two variables expressed as a percentage of their maximum possible variation. In 1984, the Cramer’s V was 0.180 (Chi² = 179.7 (20 df), p < 0.0001). In 2012, it was 0.125 (Chi² = 181.4 (20 df), p < 0.0001).

2. The seven classes identified by Savage et al. (2013) are the elite; the established middle class; new affluent workers; the technical middle class; the traditional working class; emergent service workers and the precariat.

3. Our analysis of the responses to the items on the first and the second priority for government spending (cross-tabulating the two variables and inspecting the adjusted standardised residuals) indicated that the responses “health” and “education” were highly significantly associated, while the responses “defence” and “police and prisons” were also significantly associated. None of the other responses showed a distinctive pattern of association. In our analysis we have therefore constructed three categories: health and education; defence and police; other.

4. Factor analysis (see Technical details for more information) confirms that the questions we selected do indeed belong (in both periods) to two distinct ideological dimensions, the structure remaining largely unchanged over time. See the appendix to this chapter for the results of the factor analysis.

5. Chi-square is very sensitive to the sample size, and sample sizes vary both between surveys and within surveys (since some items were asked only of randomly chosen subsets of respondents). We cannot therefore use chi-square to tell us about the strength of association, only about its statistical significance. As a measure of strength of association we use Cramer’s V (explained in note 1).

6. We also explored alternative ‘objective’ measures of class and reached the same conclusion.

7. Since the factor analyses indicated that attitudes towards tax and spending and towards premarital sex had the strongest loadings on the two ideological dimensions...
(both in 1984 and in 2012 – see the appendix to this chapter), we focus on these two issues in our more detailed cross-tabular and regression analysis.

8. The 1984 and 2012 datasets were pooled and a loglinear model fitted to the data. The model was one which assumed that there were relationships between social cleavage and attitude, between social cleavage and year, and between year and attitude, but that there was no three-way inter-relationship. In effect this tested whether the relationship between cleavage and attitude was the same in both years (allowing for changes in the marginal frequencies over time). It is analogous to the ‘constant social fluidity model’ in social mobility research. If the model does not give a good fit to the data, as judged by the deviance, then the null hypothesis of a constant relationship has to be rejected.

9. Deviance 14.0 with 8 df, p > 0.05.

10. Null hypothesis that the relationship is unchanged is rejected: Deviance = 9.9 with 2 df, p < 0.01.

11. Deviance 76.9 with 16 df, p > 0.001.

12. The measure of education level is different in the two years, so we therefore hesitate to interpret the changing pattern.

13. The only measure available in 1984 was age when education completed, namely 19 and over (plus “still at college or university”, equated to degree), 18 (equated with A levels), 17 (equated with GCSE), 16 (equated with CSE) and 15 or less (equated with CSE). These are very crude equivalences but do capture the hierarchical nature of education.

14. Deviance 76.9 with 16 df, p > 0.001.

15. We used ordered logit modelling, which is the appropriate technique when we have dependent variables such as attitudes towards premarital sex which are ordered (responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

16. Variance explained, or R squared, is a statistical measure of “the proportion of the total variability of the outcome that is accounted for by the model”. It is used in OLS regression, where continuous, normally-distributed variables are assumed. The OLS interpretation has no formal equivalent in logistic regression (which does not assume that variables are either continuous or normally distributed). However, if some heroic assumptions are made, a statistic that looks like R-squared, and which has the same range from – to 1, can be developed. (They are essentially counterfactuals – what might the variance explained have been if this were a continuous normally distributed variable?) Lots of different pseudo R-squareds have been developed, and none has become standard. We use the Nagelkerke version. These measures should not be used to compare different datasets but only really to compare goodness of fit of different models within the same dataset.

17. See note 8.

18. We also found some evidence, from the measures of variance explained (the pseudo R2 statistic) that the overall explanatory power of the predictors has declined somewhat between 1984 and 2012. We have to be a little cautious here, since the multivariate analyses reported in Table 7.16 only cover two of our nine attitude measures. To check our results we constructed composite measures of the two main ideological dimensions, using all the available attitude items. This composite analysis confirmed our individual analysis of government spending on the welfare state (R2 for the government spending dimension falling from 0.061 to 0.022) but it did not confirm a decline in explanatory power for the liberal dimension (R2 actually increasing when a composite measure was constructed from 0.264 to 0.301).
References


Acknowledgements

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Appendix
Below are the results of two factor analyses, on 1984 and 2012 data, on the attitudinal items used in the analysis in this chapter. 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. For further details on this kind of analysis see the Technical details chapter.

Table A.1 Factor analysis of attitudes in 1984

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premarital sex</td>
<td>0.751</td>
<td>0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex relations</td>
<td>0.647</td>
<td>0.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of divorce</td>
<td>0.635</td>
<td>-0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax and spend more, same or less</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare encourages people to stop helping each other</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS should be available to all</td>
<td>0.530</td>
<td>0.423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First priority for government spending</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td>0.587</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A.2 Factor analysis of attitudes in 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premarital sex</td>
<td>0.820</td>
<td>-0.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex relations</td>
<td>0.808</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of divorce</td>
<td>0.536</td>
<td>-0.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax and spend more, same or less</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare encourages people to stop helping each other</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS should be available to all</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First priority for government spending</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>0.495</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n/a = not asked
Technical details

In 2012 the sample for the British Social Attitudes 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, each ‘module’ of questions was thus asked either of the full sample (3,248 respondents) or of a random third or two-thirds of the sample. The structure of the questionnaire can be found at www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk.

Sample design

The British Social Attitudes 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 Great 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 242 postcode sectors, with probability proportional to the number of addresses in each sector.

Selection of addresses

Twenty-eight addresses were selected in each of the 242 sectors or groups of sectors. The issued sample was therefore 242 x 28 = 6,776 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 PAF. In Scotland, tenements with many flats tend to appear as one entry on PAF. However, even in Scotland, the vast majority (98.9 per cent) 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 PAF and listed all those eligible for inclusion in the British Social Attitudes 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 British Social Attitudes 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 one per cent 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 was 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 were: region, the relative condition of the immediate local area, the relative condition of the address, population density, and whether there were entry barriers to the selected address. 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 entryphone) and if the general condition of the address is the same or better than other addresses in the area. Response decreases if the relative condition of the immediate surrounding area is mainly good or fair, and decreases as population density increases. Response is also higher for addresses in the North and in the Midlands. The full model is given in Table A.1.
Table A.1 The final non-response model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Odds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorks. and Humber</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.538</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.323</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.387</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.926</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.739</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>(baseline)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to address</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No barriers</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more</td>
<td>(baseline)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative condition of the local area</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainly good</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly fair</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly bad or very bad</td>
<td>(baseline)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative condition of the address</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the same</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.528</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>(baseline)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population density</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(population in private households/area of postcode sector in hectares)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 0.023 (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 one per cent 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.

Table A.2 Weighted and unweighted sample distribution, by region, age and sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Unweighted respondents</th>
<th>Respondent weighted by selection weight only</th>
<th>Respondent weighted by un-calibrated non-response weight</th>
<th>Respondent weighted by final weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorks. and Humber</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>7.4</td>
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<td>9.6</td>
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<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
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<td>10.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>South West</td>
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<td>8.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
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<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
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<td>8.5</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Age and sex</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>M 18–24</td>
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<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
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<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
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<td>M 35–44</td>
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<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
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<td>8.4</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 65+</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 18–24</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 25–34</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 35–44</td>
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<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 45–54</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 55–59</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 60–64</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 65+</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base 48,306,543 3248 3248 3248 3248

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 2011 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 raking-ratio (or rim) weighting. As a result, the weighted data should exactly match the population across these three dimensions. This is shown in Table A.2.
The calibration weight is the final non-response weight to be used in the analysis of the 2012 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DU and person selection weight</td>
<td>3248</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-calibrated non-response weight</td>
<td>3248</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final calibrated non-response weight</td>
<td>3248</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 2,446 and efficiency of 75 per cent.

All the percentages presented in this report are based on weighted data.

**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. Thus, each interviewer was allocated 10 cases from each of versions A, B and C. There were 2,259 issued addresses for versions A and B, and 2,258 for version C.

**Fieldwork**

Interviewing was mainly carried out between June and September 2012, with a small number of interviews taking place in October and November.

Fieldwork was conducted by interviewers drawn from NatCen Social Research’s regular panel and conducted using face-to-face computer-assisted interviewing. Interviewers attended a one-day briefing conference to familiarise them with the selection procedures and questionnaires, with the exception of very experienced interviewers who completed a self-briefing containing updates to the questionnaire and procedures.

The mean interview length was 61 minutes for version A of the questionnaire, 63 minutes for version B and 62 minutes for version C. Interviewers achieved an overall response rate of between 53.2 and 53.5 per cent. Details are shown in Table A.4.
Table A.4 Response rate on British Social Attitudes, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Lower limit of response (%)</th>
<th>Upper limit of response (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addresses issued</td>
<td>6776</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of scope</td>
<td>674</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper limit of eligible cases</td>
<td>6102</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain eligibility</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower limit of eligible cases</td>
<td>6070</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview achieved</td>
<td>3248</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With self-completion</td>
<td>2866</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview not achieved</td>
<td>2822</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused(^1)</td>
<td>2133</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-contacted(^2)</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-response</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 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.

2 ‘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.

3 ‘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. If necessary, up to three postal reminders were sent to obtain the self-completion supplement.

A total of 382 respondents (12 per cent of those interviewed) did not return their self-completion questionnaire. Version A of the self-completion questionnaire was returned by 86 per cent of respondents to the face-to-face interview, version B of the questionnaire was returned by 90 per cent and version C by 89 per cent. 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**

Interviewers were supplied with letters describing the purpose of the survey and the coverage of the questionnaire, which they posted to sampled addresses before making any calls.[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 there are references to specific question numbers, the full question text, including frequencies, can be found at www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk.
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
Two variables classify the respondent’s earnings [REarn] and household income [HHInc] (see www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk). 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/). Four derived variables give income deciles/quartiles: [RearnD], [REarnQ], [HHIncD] and [HHIncQ]. Deciles and quartiles are calculated based on individual earnings and household incomes in Britain as a whole.
Attitude scales
Since 1986, the British Social Attitudes surveys have included two attitude scales which aim to measure where respondents stand on certain underlying value dimensions – left–right and libertarian–authoritarian. 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]

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 2012 are 0.82 for the left–right scale, 0.81 for the welfarism scale and 0.73 for the libertarian–authoritarian 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 (see www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk). The principal ones are:

- Sex (Q. 63)
- Age (Q. 64)
- Household income (Q. 1020)
- Economic position (Q. 465)
- Religion (Q. 816)
- Highest educational qualification obtained (Q. 948)
- Marital status (Qs. 162–168)
- Benefits received (Qs. 543–598)
Sampling errors
No sample precisely reflects the characteristics of the population it represents, because of both sampling and non-sampling errors. If a sample were 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 per cent 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 British Social Attitudes sample, like that drawn for most large-scale surveys, was clustered according to a stratified multi-stage design into 242 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 per cent 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.5 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.5 Complex standard errors and confidence intervals of selected variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification variables</th>
<th>% (p)</th>
<th>Complex standard error of p</th>
<th>95% confidence interval DEFT Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q. 274–279 Party identification (full sample)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>25.0–29.1 1.291 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>33.7–38.1 1.271 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>5.3–7.5 1.275 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q. 809 Housing tenure (full sample)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>64.9–70.2 1.635 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rents from local authority</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>8.4–11.6 1.518 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rents privately/HA</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>19.2–23.5 1.536 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q. 816 Religion (full sample)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
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<td>45.5–50.4 1.407 3248</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>20.3</td>
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<td>18.7–21.9 1.172 3248</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>7.7–9.8 1.098 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q. 880 Age of completing continuous full-time education (full sample)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 or under</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>45.5–50.4 1.413 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 or 18</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>18.7–22.1 1.244 3248</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 or over</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>25.5–29.8 1.386 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q. 267 Home internet access (full sample)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>82.6–85.6 1.203 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>14.3–17.4 1.202 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q. 813 Urban or rural residence (full sample)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A big city</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>7.9–12.8 2.308 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The suburbs or outskirts of a big city</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>24.0–31.6 2.452 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small city/town</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>35.9–44.9 2.645 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country village</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>15.0–21.7 2.499 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm/home in the country</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.3–4.7 1.851 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudinal variables (face-to-face interview)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q. 375 Benefits for the unemployed are … (full sample)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… too low</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>20.6–24.3 1.298 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… too high</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>48.8–53.7 1.422 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q. 411 How serious a problem is traffic congestion in towns, cities (full sample)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A very serious problem</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>9.3–12.2 1.348 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A serious problem</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>26.0–30.0 1.286 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a very serious problem</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>39.1–43.4 1.261 3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a problem at all</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>18.1–22.1 1.446 3248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A.5 shows that most of the questions asked of all sample members have a confidence interval of around plus or minus two to three per cent of the survey percentage. This means that we can be 95 per cent certain that the true population percentage is within two to three 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**

**Cohort analysis**

A number of the chapters in this report employ ‘pseudo-cohort’ analysis (which we describe as ‘cohort analysis’ throughout). When applied to attitudinal research cohort analysis traditionally uses longitudinal survey data to examine how the views of the same individuals have changed over time. Pseudo-cohort analysis uses cross-sectional data and is based on the assumption that a particular age group within a given year is equivalent to an age group five years older, five years later.

Cohort analysis is used to explore whether change over time can be explained by generation, period or lifecycle effects – or a combination of the three:

- **A generational effect** can be identified when each successive generation expresses an attitude that is different to the one which preceded it. As a result, and when these differences all occur in a similar direction, change at the population level can be driven by the ageing of the population, as older generations die out and younger generations enter the population (in the case of British Social Attitudes, those aged 18+).
- **A period effect** can be identified when the views of all or most generations change in a consistent way within a particular period. This can often be linked to an external event.
- **A lifecycle effect** can be identified when the views of all of most generations change in a particular way during a particular life-stage such as adolescence or retirement or, alternatively, across the life-cycle.

While a cohort or generation is a subjective construct and these can be defined in a number of ways, in this report we have consistently allocated respondents to cohorts based on their decade of birth (for instance, those born between 1980 and 1989 are defined as the ‘1980s’ cohort). This approach was adopted to explore in considerable detail how the attitudes of generations have changed over time and in relation to one another.

Data has only been included in the charts and tables produced to illustrate cohort analysis when data on the measure of interest is available for at least 100 cases in a given year. This means that, in some cases, data is not presented for the oldest cohort, given the small sample sizes involved.

**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 five per cent level if the range of the values encompassed by its 95 per cent confidence interval (see also section on sampling errors) are either all positive or all negative. This means that there is less than a five per cent 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 British Social Attitudes 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 2012, the chosen subject was Family, Work and Gender Roles, and the module was carried on version A of the self-completion questionnaire (Qs. 1a–33).[9]
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. As the name implies, CAPI involves the use of a laptop computer during the interview, with the interviewer entering responses directly into the computer. 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 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 mid-point of the scale and “Not answered” was recoded to the scale mean for that respondent on their valid items.

9. See www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk.
References


