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Key findings

How will Britain navigate the global, social, economic and Brexit challenges of the near future?

The challenges of the near future

Commentators who agree on little else are in agreement that this is a turbulent time for Britain. The Brexit process has started but its conclusion is far from clear. The country seems divided in new ways and ill at ease with itself. Meanwhile, global disruptions pick up pace - climate change is rapidly ceasing to be a purely theoretical concern, while new technologies are changing established industries.

In many ways it feels as if the early 21st century has posed a series of questions about the future of the country that will have to be answered sooner rather than later. There is no shortage of policy reports on *how* Britain should go about doing so. However, this year's National Centre for Social Research British Social Attitudes report takes a different approach. We examine how the British public views these challenges and whether we are as divided as it can seem on the questions that arise. In doing so we hope to expose where there might be important divergences between expert and public expectations and highlight where current attitudes might pose particular problems for policymakers.

In the course of this year's report we examine four major types of challenge facing Britain:

- **Global challenges:** these are issues that no country can hope to avoid. In particular, we examine climate change and the impact of new technology on current jobs with a view to assessing how people view challenges with far-reaching impact that is often hard even for experts to comprehend fully.
- **Social cohesion challenges:** many feel that the country is more divided than it has been in a long time. We analyse whether this is correct and examine the challenges for bridging attitudinal divides.
- **Economic settlement challenges:** this decade has been shaped by government austerity and a high employment, low wage growth economy. As politicians on the left and right debate the best way forward, we explore what the British people want from work, welfare and public spending.
- **Brexit challenges:** as much as many may be tiring of discussing Brexit, there is little doubting how profound a challenge it is. We examine its political ramifications for political parties and the Union, and examine how hard it will be for politicians to reach a post-EU membership settlement that has widespread support.

In summary we find:

- **The British public are not as worried about major global challenges as the experts who work on them.** Public concern about the threat of climate change and technology replacing their jobs is relatively low.
- **Age and education are major dividing lines in how we voted in the 2016 referendum and the 2017 General Election.** These divides also show up in other areas such as climate change and welfare.
- **But on social issues these divides are narrowing, and our trust in one another is as high as it has ever been.** Learning from these areas could help attempts to bridge the country's political differences.
- **People increasingly want a new spending settlement on public services and expect employers to pay wages that cover the basic cost of living.** Most people feel the NHS has a major funding problem and a large proportion want to see the minimum wage increased.
- **The public is divided into two evenly sized groups who have coalesced around opposing views of the UK's future relationship with the EU.** Politicians face an uphill struggle to deliver a post-referendum settlement that will unite the country.

Global challenges: are we as worried as we should be?

Most experts believe the impact of climate change and that of technology on jobs will be dramatic

Britain faces two global challenges where expert opinion commonly believes that the effects could be profound: climate change and the impact that new digital, artificial intelligence (AI) or robotic technologies will have on jobs. In the case of climate change there is an overwhelming consensus among the international scientific community that it is happening, that it is predominantly caused by humans and that its consequences, if left unchecked, are going to be dramatic. The most recent assessment of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014) was unambiguous:

“Without additional mitigation efforts beyond those in place today... warming by the end of the 21st century will lead to high to very high risk of severe, widespread and irreversible impacts globally”

Analysis of the impact of new technologies on jobs is less advanced but the picture that is emerging is one where economists expect the changes to be notable. Relatively conservative assessments

suggest that just over 10% of UK workers are in roles that are highly automatable (Arntz et al., 2016). Other reports put the proportion of British jobs vulnerable to technological replacement closer to 20% (Manyika, et al., 2017) or even 30% (Hawksworth et al., 2018). In industries where these studies expect fewer jobs to be lost, nonetheless they expect workers in those roles to need to undergo a lot of re-skilling if they are to adapt to technological advancements.

The public agrees that these challenges are real ...

Using data from the 2017 BSA survey and the European Social Survey¹, we find the British public overwhelmingly shares the expert view that these global challenges exist:

- 93% of people believe that the world's climate is definitely or probably changing.
- 75% of people think it is likely that machines and computer programmes will definitely or probably do many of the jobs currently done by humans.

It is, however, noteworthy that only 36% of people believe that humans are entirely or mainly the cause of climate change. A majority (53%) believe that it is caused equally by human activity and natural processes, while 9% think it is mainly or entirely happening naturally. In contrast, the UN Intergovernmental Panel is again unambiguous, and notes that human action is “extremely likely to have been the dominant cause” of global warming (IPCC, 2014).

... but it is far more relaxed about their impact

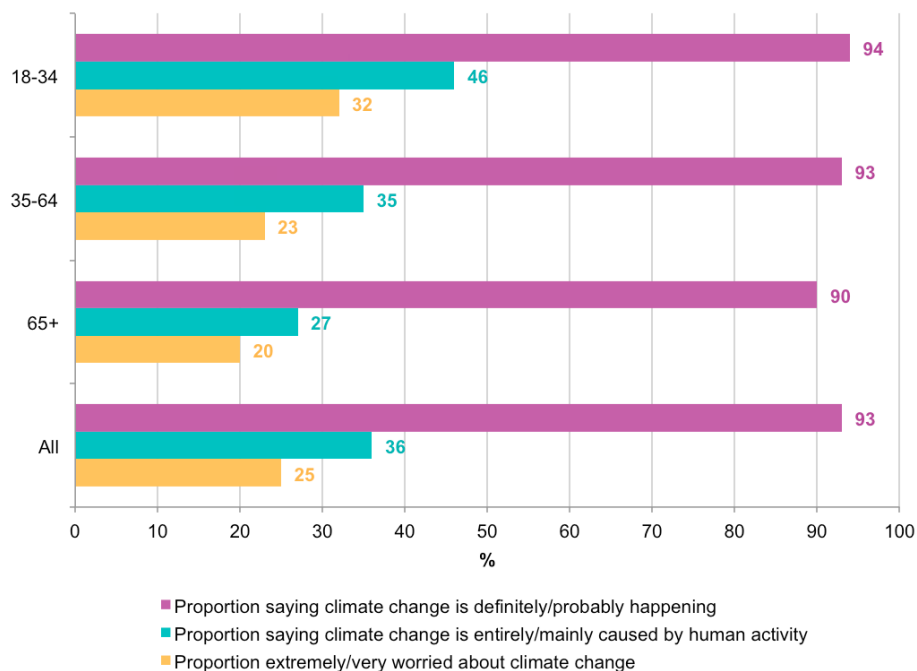
While scientists and economists worry about the scale of disruption both issues could bring about, the British public appears slightly more relaxed:

- Only 25% of people are very or extremely worried about climate change. 45% are just somewhat worried, and 28% are either “not very” or “not at all worried” about it.
- Just 10% of workers are “very” or “quite” worried that machines or computer programmes will replace their job, while 81% are “not very” or “not at all” concerned that they might lose their jobs.

Despite the comparably low levels of public concern about climate change, we find that on average people are not particularly optimistic that governments or individuals will take sufficient action to reduce their energy use.

¹ Data on attitudes to climate change comes from the UK data from the European Social Survey. The UK fieldwork was conducted by NatCen using a high quality random probability sample methodology similar to the BSA.

Views on existence, causes and consequences of climate change, by age



Work is about more than just the money it brings in

Some of the debate about future challenges to the labour market focuses solely on the financial implications of losing a job. For most of the British public, however, work has wider benefits:

- The vast majority of people believe that work is good for mental (90%) and physical (83%) health.
- It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that 59% of the public agree, and just 16% disagree, that “I would enjoy having a paid job even if I did not need the money”.
- Likewise, 50% of people disagree (and only 28% agree) with the statement that “a job is just a way of earning money – no more”.

Rapid technological advancement often heralds people who speculate and hope that in the near future we will see the ‘end of jobs’ and a dramatic increase in leisure time. Today is no exception (Beckett, 2018). The failure of previous similar predications to materialise urges caution about reaching for them now, and the BSA provides another reason. The strength of people’s support for work suggests that if technology is to take a large number of jobs, many people will want those jobs replaced with others in some form or other.

The Challenge: The public have undoubtedly received the message that climate change is happening and the ‘robots are coming’, but they do not share the concern of experts about the impact of these forces. This should worry policymakers. Preventing or mitigating climate change will require significant changes to how people live their lives. Technology-driven labour market change is likely to require people to re-train for, and seek pride in, very different kinds of jobs. So far, politicians and others have failed to prepare the public for these levels of disruption.

In the case of climate change this will mean rising to the complex communications challenge created by a need to match growing public concern about the problem with greater optimism that it can be fixed. Securing that optimism will be crucial in overcoming people’s fear that it might be fruitless or naïve to restrict their own energy use when there are no guarantees of other people doing the same. In the case of technology replacing jobs, politicians will also need both to stimulate concern about how our labour market will change while giving people the confidence and financial security needed for them to embrace new ways of working.

Social cohesion challenges: age and education divide us politically, but we trust each other more

All societies are based on shared bonds and accommodations between their constituent parts. By stereotype, Britain is said to be one of the better countries at quiet compromise. However, recent events have left many wondering whether the country now faces unbridgeable internal divides. News headlines proclaim that we have: ‘*Generations at war*’ and a ‘*yawning money gap between have and have nots*’ (Clark, 2017; Hiscott, 2014). Others say that our ‘*Towns and Cities Are Divided*’; that ‘*Britain is more divided than ever*’ when it comes to social mobility; and, that ‘*Culture wars [have] cross[ed] the Atlantic to coarsen British politics*’ (Brett, 2017; Sculthorpe, 2017; Lewis, 2018). Meanwhile, populists from left and right declare that the most important divide is between ‘the people’ and an out of touch establishment.

The challenge among all the noise is to understand the degree to which these tensions truly are real and how they should be managed. BSA cannot speak to all of the above issues, but its breadth and extensive time series data does provide a particularly useful insight into many of them.

The political divide by age and education is stark

This year’s BSA confirms that there is a stark age and education divide in political views. This is perhaps not surprising given that much of the media discussion about whether Britain is divided stems

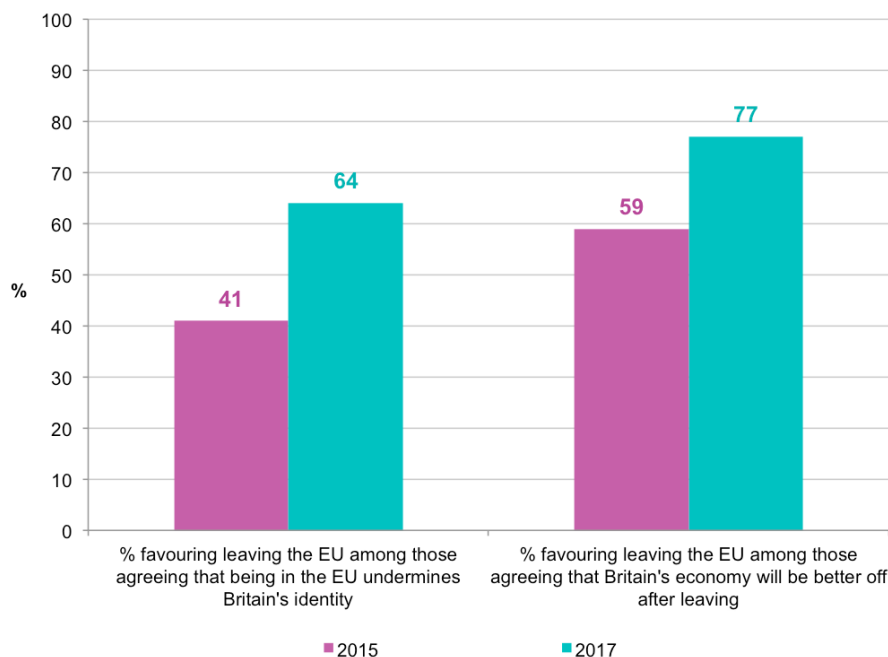
from the evidence of demographic divisions in how people voted in the EU referendum and the 2017 General Election (such as the British Election Study, 2018). Our report provides authoritative confirmation of that picture:

- There was an age and education divide in views on Britain's membership of the EU before the referendum, but the vote and subsequent debate has deepened both. Older people (aged 55+, 49%) and those with no formal qualifications (54%) are much more likely than young people (aged 18-34 years, 23%) and graduates (19%) to want to leave the EU.
- Age was the primary demographic dividing line at the 2017 General Election. While Labour secured 62% of the votes of 18-34 year-olds (versus 22% for the Conservatives), the Conservatives won 55% of over-65 voters (compared with 30% for Labour). The educational divide was not as pronounced, but for the first time Labour was more popular among graduates than those with no formal qualifications.

The chapter in this year's BSA report on voting shows that the age and education divides on party politics, in no small part, stem from the same divides on Brexit. These in turn relate to the politicisation of immigration; an issue where Britain has previously been shown to have the largest age and education attitudes divide in Europe (Ford & Lymperopoulou, 2017).

Despite these divides in attitudes and vote choice, there was no great narrowing in the general election of the differences in the level of turnout by age. BSA data released earlier in the year (Curtice & Simpson, 2018) showed that while turnout among 18-24 year-olds increased by 5 points, this was broadly in line with the increase in the rest of the population (a four point increase among 45-54 year-olds, and a 3 point increase among those aged 65 and over). Therefore, suggestions that the 2017 election led to dramatic rise in voting among young people are wide of the mark.

Support for leaving the EU, by attitudes towards the EU



These two divides also show up elsewhere

As they are associated with different vote choices, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that age and education are associated with different views on a range of other issues covered in this report:

- The proportion of those “very” or “extremely” worried about climate change is higher among those aged 18-34 years (31%) and those with degrees (35%), than it is among those aged 65 years and over (19%) and those with no or few formal qualifications (20%). However, those workers with fewer qualifications and a low income are more worried than those with degrees about the prospect that technology will threaten their job.
- People aged 18-34 years (75%) and graduates (82%) are more likely than those aged 65-74 (67%), over-75 (47%), and those with no formal qualifications (55%), to disagree that “a man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family”.
- An age divide is also present in views on the acceptability of a man commenting that a woman he doesn’t know “looks gorgeous today”. Sixty-one per cent of people under 35, compared with 49% of people over 65, think this behaviour is wrong.
- Support is higher among those aged 18 to 25 (67%) than those over 65 (46%) for the government topping up the incomes of low wage working parents.

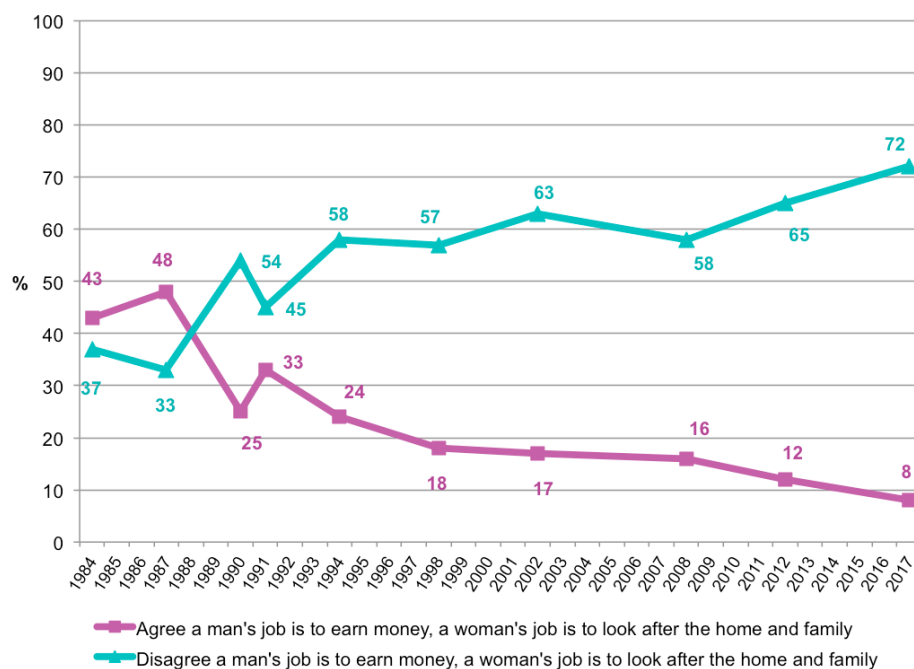
But in important ways differences in attitudes by age and education are narrowing...

Despite the importance of these differences in opinion by age and education, they are not growing on all issues. In many instances the opposite is the case. For example, last year's BSA report (Swales and Attar Taylor, 2017) showed that on issues of sex before marriage, same-sex relationships and abortion, the gap between different age groups (and thus generations) was narrowing at an accelerating rate. In this report we find something similar in respect of views on whether in a different-sex couple it is the woman's job to look after the home and family, and the man's to work. While there is still a difference of view by age, the gap is much smaller than in recent decades:

- The difference between the proportions of 18-34 year olds who disagree that "a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family" and the proportion of those aged 75 and over who think the same has dropped from 46 points in 2012 to 27 points in 2017.
- The gap between the same younger group and those aged 65-74 will soon disappear if trends continue, as it has narrowed from 27 points in 2012 to just 8 in 2017.

So while there are important divides by age and education, we should be careful not to assume they are present everywhere or even necessarily always getting bigger. In fact, social issues like attitudes to the role of women provide interesting case studies for how attitudes across the generations can be bridged. This then leads to an interesting question: why is it that age and education have become starker political dividing lines, when on many social questions, young and old, and graduates and school leavers, are closer in their views than ever before?

Views on traditional gender roles, 1984-2017



...And our trust in one another is as high as it has ever been

In a result that might surprise people given the divides we have analysed, we find that our trust in one another is at the highest level BSA has measured in nearly 20 years:

- 54% of people in Britain say that, generally speaking, people can be trusted². This is up from 47% in 2014 and is at the highest level since we first asked the question in 1998.

But we're divided on the trust question too

While the overall increased level of trust cautions us against believing the country irrevocably divided, we nonetheless find divides on the question:

- 42% of people prefer the statement that you “cannot be too careful dealing with people”, over the idea that most people can be trusted.
- People with degrees (64%) and in a managerial or professional occupation (63%) are more likely than those with few or no formal qualifications (42%), or in a routine job (41%), to say that generally speaking they think other people can be trusted.

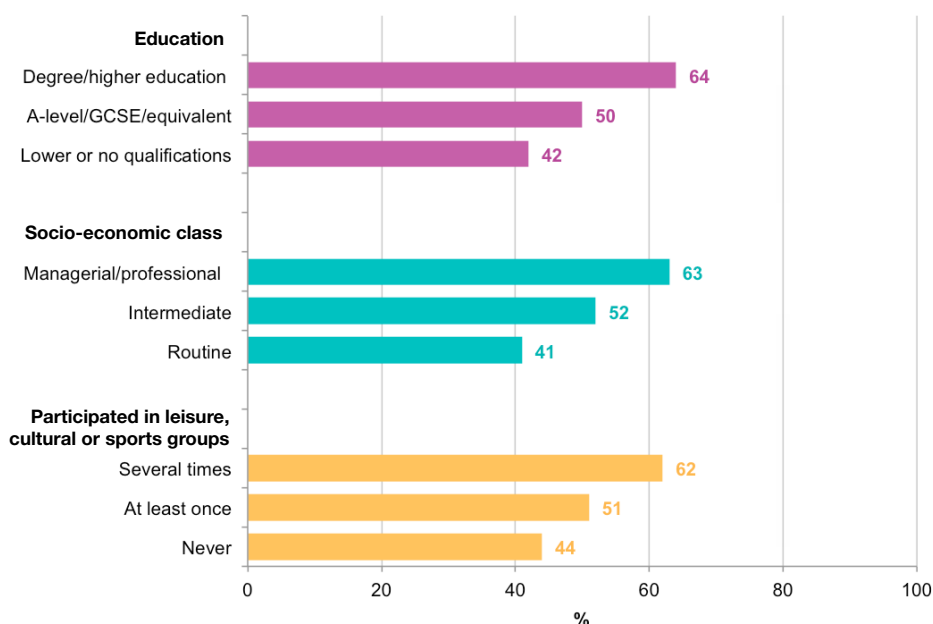
This difference might be explained by the greater security that typically comes with having a better job or education. This security

² People were asked “Generally speaking, would you say that people can be trusted?” and able to choose the following responses: “People can almost always be trusted / People can usually be trusted / You usually can’t be too careful in dealing with people / You almost always can’t be too careful in dealing with people / Can’t choose.”

perhaps allows someone to have a more optimistic worldview. The chapter in this report on social trust also analyses the degree to which it varies according to people's level of participation in community activities and the nature of their social networks:

- Using both a 'Position Generator' approach³ and regression analysis, the authors find that higher social trust is associated with age, higher social class, further education and having a larger and higher-status social network.
- Greater involvement in sports, leisure and cultural activities are also associated with greater social trust. By contrast, involvement in charity work, volunteering, or political and religious activities seems to make little difference to people's levels of trust.

Social trust, by education, socio-economic class, and participation in leisure, cultural and sports groups



The Challenge: attitudes to immigration are divided and have been highly politicised by the EU referendum, which itself is creating new divides in politics. However, on many social questions a new consensus has emerged and our political divides do not seem to have harmed our trust in one another. This contrast of divides and growing unity should caution against overly-simplistic or sweeping proclamations of 'culture wars'.

This year's BSA report does highlight that it will be a major social cohesion challenge to bridge the views of young and more formally-educated people with those of older people and those with few qualifications. However, BSA data also points to some of the

³ Developed by Lin (Lin, 2001), this involves asking people whether they personally know someone in a series of professions. This allows us to calculate a measure for the extent of someone's social network and the social status of those in it.

potential solutions. Those keen to bridge attitudes gaps would do well to examine how this has happened with many social issues and to explore ways to further grow social trust through greater involvement in sports, leisure and cultural activities.

Economic challenges: time for a new settlement with employers and on public spending?

The global financial crisis, among many other things, triggered a prolonged debate about the balance of power between market, state and worker that is unabated a decade on from the crash. In the UK in recent months this debate has particularly focused on the feasibility of easing government spending restraint (Whittaker, 2017), and the best options for increasing sluggish productivity and median earnings growth (Cribb et al., 2018). Data in this year's BSA report helps us chart how the public view many of the country's important economic questions.

People feel work is plentiful but for a minority it is not very secure

The rise in the insecure 'gig economy'⁴ and zero hour contracts is well documented (For example: Lapanjuuri et al., 2018), and the former is arguably an early symptom of the economic transformation discussed in the first section of this key findings. We are also living in a time of relatively high employment levels (Cribb et al., 2018) and this is reflected in this year's BSA results:

- Although 95% are confident they will be working in 12 months' time, as many as 26% of those in employment worry about losing their job. The figure is as much as 37% among those earning below £1,200 per month.
- A small but important 8% of workers, which rises to 15% for those earning below £1,200 a month, face the insecurity of having their working hours changed at short notice.

People expect the government and employers to ensure that work pays a decent wage

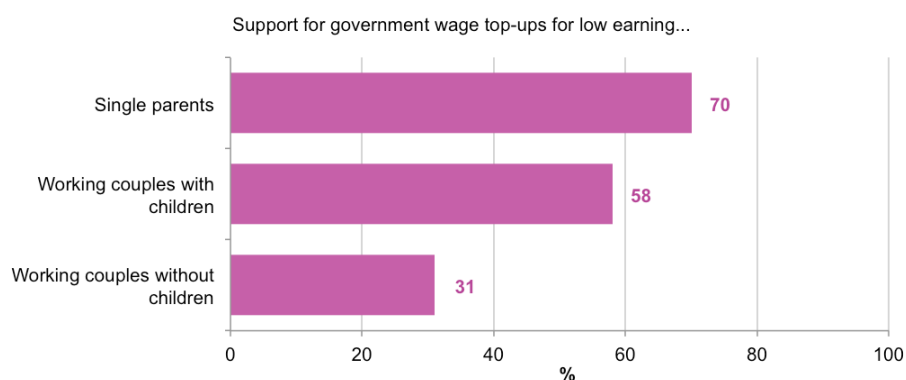
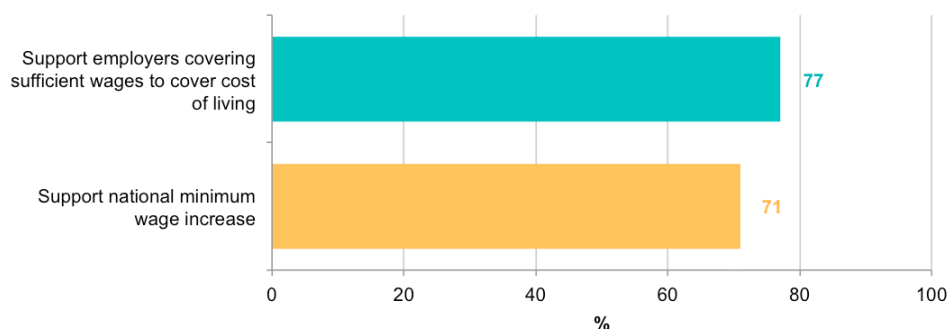
But what impact does this state of affairs have on attitudes towards what the government and employers should do? Interestingly, we find a high proportion of people want the minimum wage to be increased. This is despite the fact that the government has recently been raising the minimum wage level to meet its ambition that all workers aged 25 and above are paid a minimum of 60% of median hourly wages by

⁴ Wider NatCen research defines the gig economy as the "exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies via digital platforms that actively facilitate matching between providers and customers, on a short-term and payment by task basis" (Lapanjuuri et al., 2018).

2020 (OBR, 2018). Majorities also want the welfare system to top up low wages:

- 71% of people feel the minimum wage should be increased.
- Three-quarters (77%) of people feel that employers should pay a wage that covers the basic cost of living. Only a fifth (18%) say that workers themselves should be responsible for finding work that pays enough to cover the cost of living.
- 70% think the government should top up the wages of lone parents who find it hard to make ends meet on low wages, and 58% want the same for low-paid working-age couples with children. Support however drops to just 31% for low-paid childless couples.

Views of employers' and the government's responsibilities regarding wages



Attitudes to welfare are softening but a majority still think the unemployed could find work

A majority of the public feels confident about the prospects of anyone unemployed finding a job, perhaps because they themselves feel self-assured that they personally will still be working in 12 months' time. However, there is some indication that attitudes to spending on unemployment benefits are softening (from a low base), and fewer people think welfare is causing dependency:

- 56% of respondents feel that “most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one”, compared with just 17% who disagree.
- 20% of people now support higher benefits for the unemployed. While this is low it is the highest proportion since 2002.
- In 2001, 39% of people agreed that the generosity of welfare benefits creates dependence. This rose to 55% in 2010. After several years of stability, it has now dropped back to 43%.
- Over half of people (56%) now prefer to note that “cutting welfare benefits would damage too many people’s lives”.

So, clear majorities of people very much expect government and employers, in one form or another, to ensure that work pays. Furthermore, more people are taking a warmer attitude to welfare. This is perhaps a warning to employers and government that if either new technology or a downturn in the economy disrupts the labour market at some point in the future, most people are not expecting people to have to cope with any drop in real wages by themselves.

There is a growing public view that we need a new settlement on public spending

Advocating or repudiating austerity has been a defining left/right divide in politics this decade. However, in recent months, figures within the government have begun to ask whether the increased spending should be back on the table (Hope & Bodkin, 2018; Haynes & Elliott, 2018). Last year’s BSA report (Clery, et al., 2017) showed that the proportion of people wanting higher taxation to fund higher spending was at its highest since the financial crash and now greater than those who want things kept as they are. The updated figure for this year’s report won’t be available until the late summer / early autumn, and it will be fascinating to see whether that growth in demand for more spending has increased further.

Until that release we take a look at the overall spending question through the prism of the NHS, which after all is in-line with just under 10% of our national income (Stoye, 2017) and is this year celebrating its 70th anniversary.

The public has little doubt that the NHS has a funding crisis; the question is how to pay for it

BSA data released earlier in this year (Evans, 2018) shows that there is now a dominant view that the NHS is facing a funding crisis:

- 86% of people believe the NHS faces a “major” or “severe” funding problem, up 14 points since 2014.

Given the preponderance of this view, it is perhaps not surprising that since the release of these data the government has announced an increase in NHS funding (Triggle, 2018) from next year. The significant

level of additional NHS spending proposed marks a notable policy change from years of minimal real-term growth (Stoye, 2017). The Chancellor has suggested that this will partly have to be met through higher taxes (Hammond, 2018). He might therefore be reassured to know that a majority of the public would support them opting for higher taxation:

- 61% “would be prepared to accept” tax rises to increase NHS spending, up 21 points from 2014.

Regardless of whether austerity is deemed necessary or needless, it increasingly seems that the public is tiring of it. The challenge now for policymakers is finding the publicly acceptable means for paying for a new public spending settlement.

Many of us support shared parental leave, at least in theory

Another crucial feature of an economy and society in which most women with children go out to work is the settlement between government, employers and partners that ensures that parents can take time off work to look after new-born children. In the last two decades there has been increasing recognition that parents need greater rights and protections to make this possible. This culminated in legislation that, since 2015, has given parents the legal right to share up to 50 weeks of parental leave between them, with up to 37 of those weeks being paid by their employer. We find that there is widespread public support for the idea that different-sex couples should use this right to share parental leave:

- When asked how a different-sex full-time working couple should divide paid parental leave between them, only 15% of the public think the mother should take the entire allowance. 39% think that the mother should take most and the father some, and 30% think the parents should split the parental leave evenly.

An official estimate of take-up of shared parental leave is not yet available; however forecasted take-up is relatively low at 2%-8% (BEIS, 2018). If this is the case, the BSA supports wider research (For example: Newton et al., 2018) in finding that there is a notable gap between what the public thinks is desirable and what parents do in practice. As this wider research finds that traditional social norms are one of the important blockages to the higher take up of shared parent leave, it is an interesting question as to whether and how more liberal attitudes are translated into new norms.

The challenge: The picture that emerges is one of a country that is increasingly tired of austerity, softening on welfare and expecting action from employers on low wages. The challenge for politicians will be meeting increased public service spending or welfare demands within the constraints of an economy that is growing slowly and faces the prospect of Brexit-related turbulence and growing technological challenges. The challenge for employers will be

meeting the demand for higher wages for the lowest paid in a period of sluggish productivity growth. Ultimately, however, these challenges seem unavoidable when there are clear majorities of people expecting action on low pay, whether through wages or welfare. Meanwhile, the settlement for new parents has certainly improved in rights terms, but we confirm that other interventions will be required to make this more real in practice.

Brexit: can we unite behind a deal and can old political institutions survive in the Brexit vote's wake?

As attitudes coalesce on both sides, uniting the country behind a future settlement with the EU could prove difficult

The EU referendum and the subsequent debate about Brexit have resulted in a crystallisation of attitudes towards the EU. People's attitudes to staying or leaving are now more likely to reflect their sense of identity, their social values and what they think will be the consequences of leaving the EU than they were before the EU referendum campaign began:

- Between 2015 and 2017 there was a 22-point increase in support for leaving the EU among those who think membership has undermined Britain's sense of identity, compared with a 7 point rise among those who do not think the EU membership has affected Britain's identity
- Between 2015 and 2017, support for leaving the EU among those who think Brexit will make Britain's economy better-off rose by 18 points. Among those who reckoned Brexit would damage Britain's economy it only increased by 7 points.

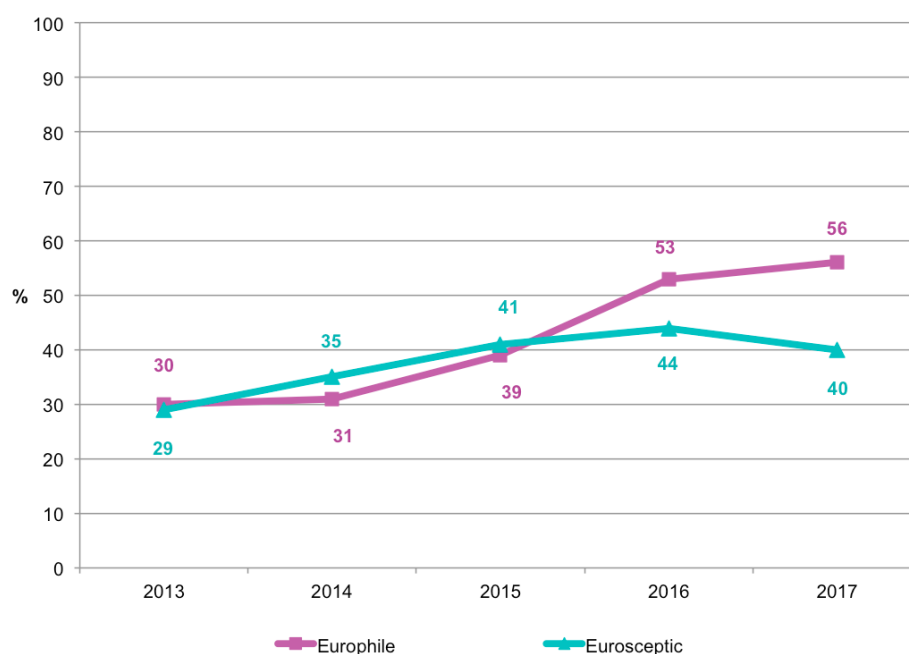
This development suggests that it has now probably become more difficult for politicians on either side of the Brexit debate to win people over from the opposing point of view. This could mean that it will be relatively difficult to secure clear public support for whatever relationship with the EU emerges from the Brexit negotiations.

Can the Union survive as views on Scottish independence become intertwined with Brexit?

Ever since it became clear that Scotland voted to remain in the EU, and England and Wales did not, there has been considerable speculation as to what this means for the Scottish independence debate. Evidently anticipating that the prospect of Scotland being 'forced' to leave the EU against its 'democratic wishes' would be unpopular, the First Minister and Scottish National Party (SNP) leader,

Nicola Sturgeon, suggested immediately after the EU referendum that leaving the EU would represent a sufficient change of circumstance to warrant a re-run of the 2014 Scottish independence ballot. Opponents of a new referendum, however, argue that the issue was settled by the 2014 vote and cite polling to suggest there is not sufficient Scottish public demand for another vote (Reported in BBC, 2017).

Support for Scottish independence, by attitude towards Britain's membership of the EU, 2013-2017



Champions of a second vote clearly hope to build on the 45% who voted for independence in 2014. But, at first glance, the 2017 General Election result in Scotland suggested this might not be easy. The main political champions of independence and another vote, the SNP, found their vote and seats cut from historic highs of 50% and 56 seats to 37% and 35.

However, analysis of the Scottish Social Attitudes survey (SSA)⁵ in this year's report finds that support for independence has not diminished in the wake of the EU vote – but equally it has not increased either. Instead, what has happened is that support for independence has come to be linked with a favourable attitude towards the EU in a way that it was not previously. At the same time, the SNP lost ground particularly heavily in the 2017 election among those who are sceptical about Europe.

⁵ Data specifically on attitudes in Scotland is drawn from NatCen Social Research's Scottish Social Attitudes survey, which uses the same high quality sampling approach as BSA.

- 56% of Europhiles in Scotland⁶, but only 40% of Eurosceptics⁷, support Scottish Independence.

It is clear that the Brexit vote has not led to the jump in support for Scottish independence that some of its advocates hoped. Instead, the coalition of voters that made up the 45% who voted for independence in 2014 has been unsettled, but that is not to say that it could not grow in future as the Brexit process evolves.

Many have speculated whether the Brexit vote was driven by a resurgence of English nationalism south of the border (for example: Cockburn, 2017). Here BSA data finds that although English identity is more closely associated with a leave vote, overall levels of English nationalism are down:

- Just 13% of people in England describe themselves as “English, not British”, the lowest level since 1997. The most popular category remains “Equally English and British”, which remains stable at 41%.

Can our old political parties survive Brexit?

Britain’s two largest political parties have traditionally reflected a division between the Conservatives’ right-leaning and middle-class appeal, and Labour’s left and working-class one. However, people’s views about Brexit reflect a different dimension, that is, whether they are ‘libertarian’ or ‘authoritarian’. Authoritarians prize order and tradition, and tend to be more negative towards immigration. By contrast, libertarians place greater weight on individual freedom and are more comfortable living in a diverse society. Consequently, if voters’ opinions about Brexit were reflected in how they voted in the 2017 election, this would likely disrupt some of the traditional patterns of support for the two largest parties.

How people voted in the election was influenced by their views about Brexit:

- Support for the Conservatives increased by 14 points between 2015 and 2017 among those who think the UK should leave the EU, but fell by seven points among those who think the EU should remain at least as powerful as at present.
- Labour’s vote rose by 16 points among those who think the EU’s powers should be undiminished but by only seven points among those who back leaving the EU.

This in turn ensured that how people voted was more clearly linked to whether they are a libertarian or an authoritarian than it has been at any other recent election:

⁶ People in Scotland saying they want to stay in the EU and see its powers remain the same or be increased.

⁷ People in Scotland wanting to leave the EU or stay but with the EU having with reduced powers.

- Support for the Conservatives increased between 2015 and 2017 by eight points among authoritarian voters, whereas it fell by 10 points among libertarians.
- Support for Labour rose by 19 points among libertarians but by only five points among authoritarians.

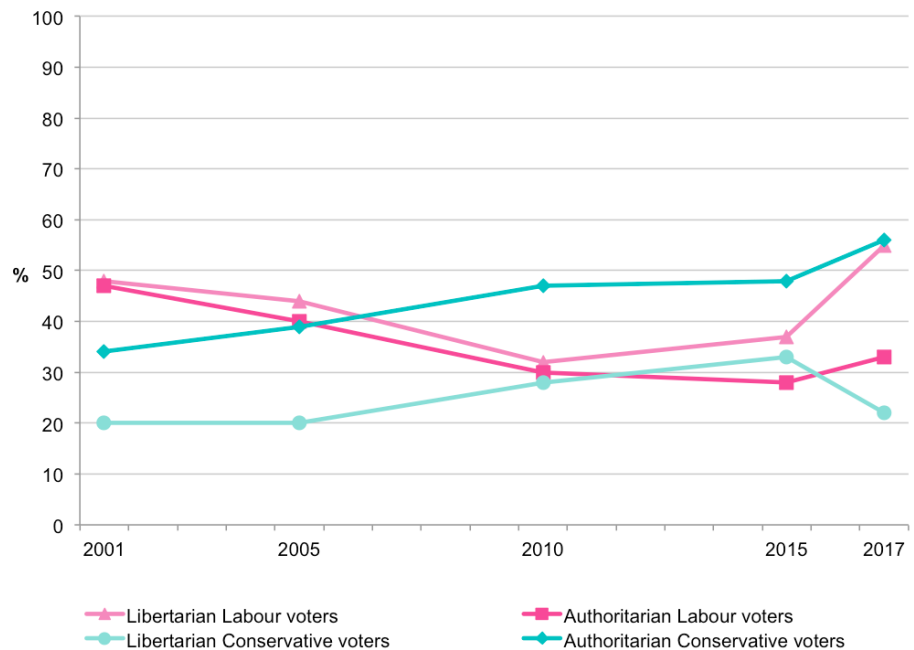
We also find that traditional voting differences by social class narrowed:

- The Conservatives gained 8 points from working-class people, but lost 3 points among the managerial and professional classes.
- Labour's vote share rose 5 points among the working classes but a much greater 12 points among the managerial and professional classes.

As a result, there are marked tensions within the coalitions that support the two largest parties. The Conservatives are traditionally regarded as the party of big business, but the pro-Leave views of many of its current voters are at odds with the preferences of those running large companies. Labour, meanwhile, regards itself as the party that represents the working-class but finds itself growing in popularity among socially-liberal middle-class graduates.

The Challenge: Politicians not only face the enormous challenge of managing Brexit but they also have to contend with a public that is divided into two evenly sized groups who have coalesced around opposing views of what the UK's relationship with the EU should be. As a result, they face an uphill struggle to deliver a post-referendum settlement that unites the country. At the same time, the EU referendum has disrupted some of the past patterns of electoral support, thereby leaving politicians with the difficult task of balancing their new coalitions of support with their traditional ones.

Labour and Conservative vote choice, by libertarian-authoritarian position, 2001-2017



Conclusion

We started by noting that it feels as if the early 21st century has posed a series of questions about the future of the country that will soon have to be answered. We have found in the four challenges examined that providing some of those answers will be difficult for four different reasons. However, there is at least one theme that connects them all: politicians and policymakers will need to be very adept at public communication if they are to successfully navigate the challenges of the near future.

With the global challenges we face, public concern arguably needs to increase. However, this will have to be done without also increasing pessimism that change is possible, and perhaps instead growing the idea that change can be embraced. The closing of the age and education divisions on some social issues points to it being possible to bridge our political divides. But that example also points to it taking a long time, unless some political leaders find a way to speak to young and old, and more and less formally-educated groups. We are, in contrast, more united on wanting a response to low pay and greater investment in public services. However, economic choices are rarely without opportunity costs and it will again take skilled communication to maintain this greater unity of thought when those trade-offs bite. Finally, the extent of our Brexit divide means that it will take truly excellent communication to develop widespread public support for a specific vision of our future relationship with the EU. It may even be impossible in the near future.

Successfully attempting to meet any or all of these public policy and communication challenges will require a sound understanding of the underlying currents of public attitudes. As is hopefully demonstrated in this report, BSA remains an indispensable tool for doing this.

Why the British Social Attitudes Survey is different

The BSA is different in some important respects to opinion polls on British attitudes:

- **It is long running** – BSA has been run since 1983 and many of its questions have been asked frequently since then. This provides unique time series data not available elsewhere. Dramatic shifts in public attitudes are often proclaimed; BSA helps us examine whether this is actually the case.
- **It uses a gold standard methodology** – most polls use a methodology where respondents opt in to completing surveys (for example, in response to an advert). respondents' views are then weighted according to population statistics to ensure the self-selected sample broadly matches. This approach has the benefit of creating large samples, and polls that can be completed very quickly and cheaply. However, they can also create biases towards those types of people more likely to volunteer to answer surveys (such as the more politically engaged).
- **The BSA is very different.** It uses a random probability sample, where people are picked at random and specifically asked to participate (you can't proactively volunteer). This is the approach the 2015 election polling inquiry encouraged more use of. In simplified terms, the BSA sample is selected by picking addresses at random from post code data. When a NatCen fieldworker then visits and gets an answer at the door, they ask how many adults live at the address. The fieldworker then uses a random number generator to select which individual they need to speak to. The fieldworker will visit an address up to 10 times to maximise the chance of getting a response and getting to speak to the chosen person. This process takes 4 months and is inevitably more costly than a poll.
- **New questions are piloted to ensure they accurately measure views** – new BSA question are typically piloted 1-2 times with a small sample of the public to ensure that they are well understood and are able to be answered easily.
- **It measures people by detailed demographics and values scales** – The BSA survey (which typically takes 1 hour to complete) asks people a series of detailed demographic questions, often in excess of that available in a typical poll. Since 1986 the BSA has also measured people on left/right, libertarian/authoritarian and, since 1987, welfare values scales. Where someone sits on those scales is determined by their answers to a series of questions.

While of each these elements are not unique to the BSA¹ in combination they create a powerful data set and explain why the BSA often receives more attention than regular polls. NatCen does not receive core funding for the BSA so organisations and academics are encouraged to fund BSA questions to benefit from its highly robust insights and ensure its long-term sustainability.

For more detailed information on the BSA methodology, please consult the technical appendix to the report available here. NatCen has also created an online and telephone Panel using the BSA sample to bring greater sample quality to faster, more affordable surveys. For more details on this Panel and how to commission questions on it see here: <http://natcen.ac.uk/our-expertise/methods-expertise/surveys/probability-panel/>

¹ For example, the European Social Survey uses a similar face-to-face random probability methodology, and the British Election Study uses the left-right and libertarian-authoritarian value scales.

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