

Government spending and welfare

Changing attitudes towards the role of the state

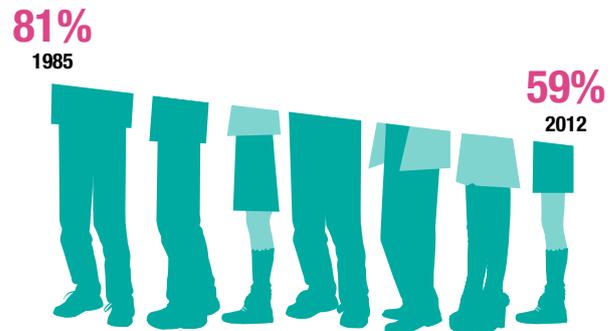
It is often argued that changes in Britain over the last 30 years have led to the public becoming more individualistic, resulting in a decline in ‘collectivist’ attitudes – with the public becoming less supportive of the role of government in social protection. On the other hand, attitudes to government 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.



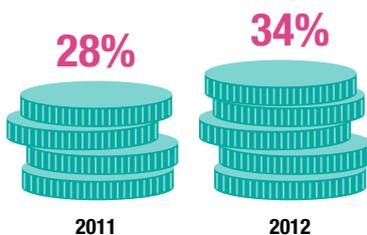
Consistently high proportions say it should be the **government’s responsibility to provide a decent standard of living** for the old (96%), and to provide health care for the sick (97%).



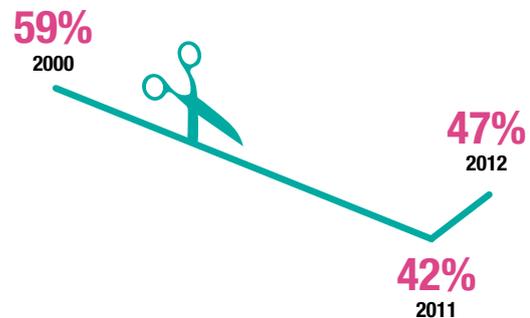
But there has been a decrease in the proportion believing it is the government’s responsibility to provide a **decent standard of living for the unemployed**, with 59% saying this down from 81% in 1985. Much of this change occurred during Labour’s time in power.

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

Authors

Nick Pearce and Eleanor Taylor

Nick Pearce is director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). Eleanor Taylor is a Senior Researcher at NatCen Social Research, and Co-Director of the British Social Attitudes survey series

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.



Last year's British Social Attitudes report found little evidence of increased sympathy towards benefit recipients despite the depth and longevity of the economic crisis

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*

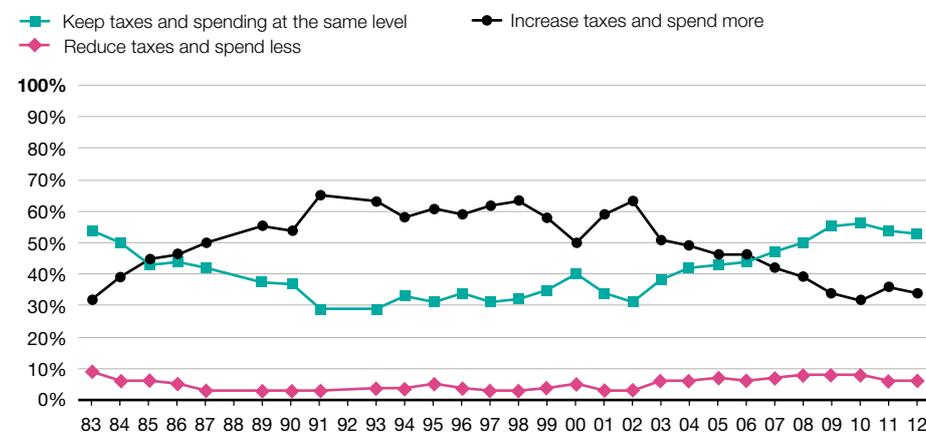
*Keep taxes and spending on these services at the **same** level as now*

*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.



We see near universal 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

Table 2.1 Views on government responsibilities, 1985–2012

% saying it should be the government's responsibility to ...	85	89	90	96	00	02	06	12
... reduce income differences between the rich and the poor	69	72	71	63	n/a	n/a	63	69
... provide a job for everyone who wants one	68	62	60	65	76	72	52	62
... provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed	81	83	77	73	n/a	n/a	50	59
... provide decent housing for those who can't afford it	n/a	n/a	90	84	n/a	n/a	81	81
... provide health care for the sick	98	98	98	97	98	96	95	97
... provide a decent standard of living for the old	97	98	97	95	97	95	94	96
... keep prices under control	91	89	87	82	95	91	80	89
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>1502</i>	<i>1315</i>	<i>1163</i>	<i>993</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>1928</i>	<i>932</i>	<i>950</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1530</i>	<i>1321</i>	<i>1197</i>	<i>989</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>930</i>	<i>956</i>

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).



Only one in twenty now support increased spending on social security benefits

Table 2.2 Highest and second highest priority for extra government spending, 1983–2012

	83	87	90	93	97	00	03	06	08	09	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Health	63	78	81	70	78	81	79	75	72	73	71	68	71
Education	50	55	63	57	70	64	63	61	55	59	64	61	61
Help for industry	29	11	6	14	8	5	4	4	5	11	10	12	15
Housing	20	24	20	22	11	11	10	12	14	14	13	14	15
Police and prisons	8	8	7	11	10	10	12	17	19	12	11	15	10
Defence	8	4	2	3	3	3	3	6	8	9	8	10	8
Public transport	3	1	6	4	6	10	13	11	11	8	7	6	7
Roads	5	3	4	4	3	6	6	5	7	6	7	6	5
Social security benefits	12	12	13	13	9	7	6	5	5	4	5	4	5
<i>Weighted base</i>	1719	2766	2698	2945	1355	2292	4432	3240	2229	3421	3297	3311	3248
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1761	2847	2797	2945	1355	2302	4432	3228	2184	3421	3297	3311	3248

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



We see markedly reduced support for the government's role in providing support for certain disadvantaged groups, particularly the unemployed

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 support for these groups in general, alongside the related issues of income inequality and income redistribution.

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:

8 in 10
say the income gap
is too large

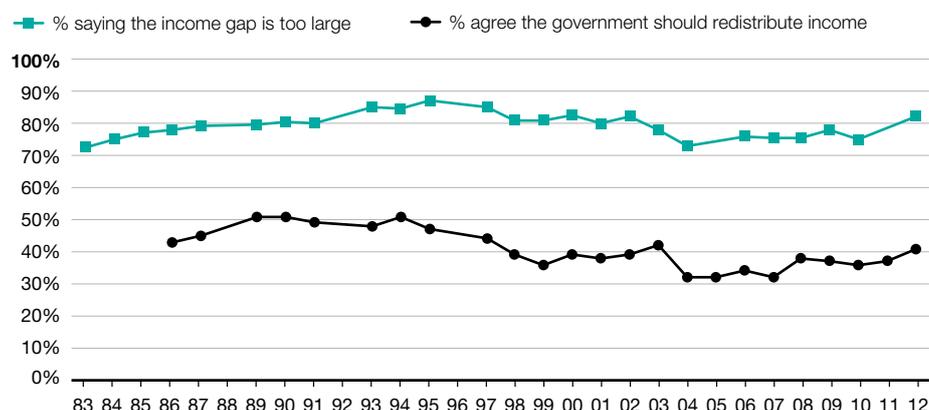
The government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off

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

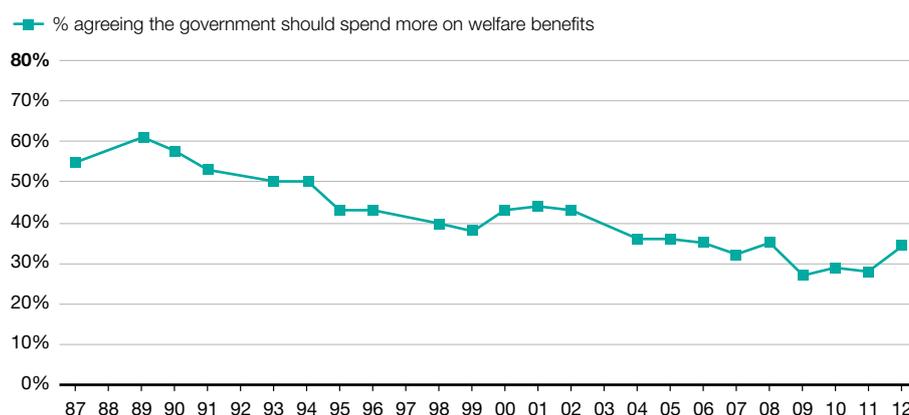
We first consider public attitudes to welfare spending. As shown in Table 2.2, the public is less likely now to identify spending on "social security benefits" as one of its top two priorities for extra government spending, with 12 per cent selecting this option in 1983 compared with just five per cent 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 around one third 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.



In 2012 we see another change of direction, with 34 per cent of people supporting extra spending

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).



While one third of the public in 1983 prioritised benefits for the unemployed for extra spending, one in ten do so now

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

	83	84	85	86	87	89	90	91	93	94
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Retirement pensions	64	66	64	65	68	67	65	63	63	64
Child benefits	20	22	23	23	24	30	32	35	31	34
Benefits for the unemployed	32	35	31	33	33	25	21	22	32	26
Benefits for disabled people	58	55	58	58	54	60	59	58	51	57
Benefits for single parents	21	16	18	18	16	17	18	19	18	14
None of these	1	1	1	*	1	*	1	*	1	1
<i>Weighted base</i>	1719	1645	1769	3066	2766	2930	2698	2836	2945	1187
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1761	1675	1804	3100	2847	3029	2797	2918	2945	1167
		95	96	00	01	03	05	07	10	12
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Retirement pensions		68	71	74	76	79	80	78	72	72
Child benefits		33	30	33	35	38	39	42	42	35
Benefits for the unemployed		25	26	13	12	10	8	7	11	12
Benefits for disabled people		58	54	61	57	54	53	54	53	59
Benefits for single parents		12	12	15	14	16	15	15	14	14
None of these		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
<i>Weighted base</i>		1199	3620	3426	3287	3276	3210	3082	3297	3248
<i>Unweighted base</i>		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



Nearly half agree that cutting benefits would “damage too many people’s lives”

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

	87	89	91	93	94	95	96	98	99	00	01
% agree cutting benefits would damage too many people's lives	n/a	59	58								
% agree many people who get social security don't really deserve any help	31	28	26	24	26	30	28	32	27	31	32
% agree around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one	41	52	38	27	32	38	39	54	56	60	63
% agree most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another	32	31	28	31	34	33	35	28	36	40	35
% agree large numbers of people these days falsely claim benefits	67	65	69	n/a	72	n/a	n/a	83	84	77	79
<i>Weighted base</i>	1243	2529	2428	2595	2957	3145	3085	3000	2478	2991	2821
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1281	2604	2481	2567	2929	3135	3103	3000	2450	2980	2795
	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
% agree cutting benefits would damage too many people's lives	53	54	48	47	47	44	45	47	42	42	47
% agree many people who get social security don't really deserve any help	36	38	39	40	29	36	37	34	35	35	35
% agree around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one	65	66	69	69	67	67	68	55	54	56	54
% agree most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another	38	39	41	39	32	39	36	34	35	37	37
% agree large numbers of people these days falsely claim benefits	81	78	84	n/a	83	n/a	82	n/a	84	n/a	81
<i>Weighted base</i>	2929	881	2610	2697	2813	2663	2956	963	2791	2845	2867
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2900	873	2609	2699	2822	2672	3000	967	2810	2841	2855

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,

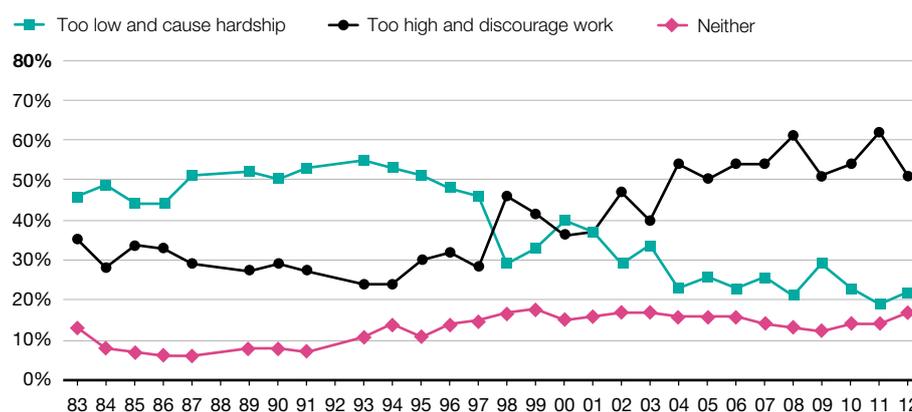
and continued until 2008. Previous analyses of British Social Attitudes data have interpreted this trend as evidence that the views of the public, and of Labour Party supporters in particular, have moved in line with the tougher stance adopted by the Labour Party from the mid-1990s towards out-of-work 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.



The proportion saying that benefits for the unemployed are “too high and discourage work” fell by 11 percentage points to 51 per cent

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



The data on which Figure 2.4 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

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.



The difference between the views of Conservative and Labour Party supporters has reduced since the 1980s

Table 2.5 The income gap is “too large”, by demographic group, 1987–2012[2]

% saying income gap is too large	1987	1995	2003	2007	2012	Change 1987–2012
Age						
18–34	81	87	74	71	76	-5
35–54	81	89	81	76	84	+3
55–64	77	84	83	81	86	+9
65+	72	86	76	77	85	+13
Occupational class						
Professional/managerial	76	88	80	77	83	+7
Intermediate (white-collar)	81	86	78	76	82	+1
Independent	74	84	67	73	80	+6
Intermediate (blue-collar)	78	94	78	80	80	+2
Working class	80	88	80	75	84	+4
Party affiliation						
Conservative	67	79	72	67	76	+9
Labour	88	91	82	81	88	0
Liberal Democrat	87	95	83	86	85	-2
All	79	87	78	76	82	+3

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



Support for redistribution among Labour Party supporters has declined by 17 percentage points

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^[3]

% agreeing that government should redistribute income	1987	1995	2003	2007	2012	Change 1987–2012
Age						
18–34	50	43	38	30	41	-9
35–54	42	50	42	31	39	-4
55–64	43	46	46	34	43	0
65+	42	50	42	34	44	+2
Occupational class						
Professional/managerial	40	44	41	32	38	-1
Intermediate (white-collar)	37	42	40	31	40	+3
Independent	36	38	36	33	37	+1
Intermediate (blue-collar)	40	51	46	32	40	0
Working class	54	56	44	31	46	-8
Party affiliation						
Conservative	21	25	27	18	25	+4
Labour	69	60	52	38	53	-17
Liberal Democrat	54	49	44	41	54	0
All	45	47	42	32	41	-4



The public appears more united in its attitudes to these issues than it did three decades ago

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.



The view that unemployment benefits are too high has increased by 31 percentage points among the youngest age group

Table 2.7 Support for more government spending on welfare benefits for the poor, by demographic group, 1987–2012^[4]

% agreeing the government should spend more money on welfare benefits	1987	1995	2000	2003	2007	2011	2012	Change	Change
								1987–2012	2011–2012
Age									
18–34	48	43	30	31	23	19	28	-20	+9
35–54	57	51	36	45	27	25	30	-26	+5
55–64	60	52	48	46	38	35	41	-19	+6
65+	59	55	47	55	44	39	42	-17	+4
Occupational class									
Professional/managerial	55	49	38	45	29	25	34	-21	+8
Intermediate (white-collar)	49	44	35	41	31	20	32	-17	+12
Independent	45	46	31	40	36	31	26	-19	-5
Intermediate (blue-collar)	51	56	39	48	31	32	34	-17	+2
Working class	61	53	42	41	34	33	37	-25	+3
Party affiliation									
Conservative	38	32	27	30	23	17	20	-18	+3
Labour	73	61	45	58	37	36	44	-29	+8
Liberal Democrat	64	52	46	47	35	32	38	-25	+6
All	55	50	38	43	32	28	34	-21	+6

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

% saying unemployment benefits are too high	1987	1995	2000	2003	2007	2011	2012	Change	Change
								1987–2012	2011–2012
Age									
18–34	23	25	33	41	52	66	54	+31	-12
35–54	29	31	33	37	52	61	48	+19	-13
55–64	32	31	38	43	52	59	45	+13	-14
65+	41	34	46	45	63	62	58	+17	-4
Occupational class									
Professional/managerial	30	31	35	40	55	65	54	+24	-11
Intermediate (white-collar)	31	34	41	40	53	63	51	+20	-12
Independent	49	30	40	45	61	71	51	+2	-20
Intermediate (blue-collar)	29	41	39	42	54	65	53	+24	-12
Working class	26	24	33	39	51	57	47	+21	-10
Party affiliation									
Conservative	43	47	52	56	67	77	67	+24	-10
Labour	16	18	28	36	49	55	43	+27	-12
Liberal Democrat	25	36	36	36	51	55	47	+22	-9
All	29	30	36	40	54	62	51	+22	-11

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 who are believed to have worked hard all their lives to contribute to collective provision are seen as most deserving of their social security, while the unemployed are least likely to be considered meretricious of support (other than the position of migrants, whom we have not addressed in this chapter).

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



The public operates a 'hierarchy of desert', in which pensioners are seen as most deserving of their social security

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.



Whether these shifts mark the beginning of a long-term trend or simply a temporary blip 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:

Agreement that the income gap is “too large”, by demographic group, 1987–2012

	1987		1995		2003	
	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>
Age						
18–34	903	885	399	371	324	289
35–54	980	1024	413	411	422	417
55–64	425	451	147	151	151	151
65+	454	482	240	300	230	276
Occupational class						
Professional/managerial	653	675	332	341	410	403
Intermediate (white-collar)	604	633	241	252	203	209
Independent	206	216	98	97	71	72
Intermediate (blue-collar)	127	133	99	101	167	171
Working class	1002	1026	380	389	236	241
Party affiliation						
Conservative	1051	1095	306	319	275	269
Labour	804	824	544	561	419	420
Liberal Democrat	381	392	158	160	123	124
All	2766	2847	1199	1234	1127	1133
<hr/>						
	2007		2012			
	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>		
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

	1987		1995		2003	
	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>
Age						
18–34	798	781	993	936	947	863
35–54	874	917	1146	1093	1366	1320
55–64	378	398	425	408	616	597
65+	371	394	578	693	705	840
Occupational class						
Professional/managerial	596	619	914	922	1418	1377
Intermediate (white-collar)	545	573	706	691	608	610
Independent	174	181	274	264	241	242
Intermediate (blue-collar)	119	122	233	224	527	524
Working class	850	869	893	907	723	751
Party affiliation						
Conservative	947	986	839	837	979	962
Labour	683	699	1378	1371	1329	1322
Liberal Democrat	344	352	422	424	408	417
All	2424	2493	3145	3135	3634	3621
<hr/>						
	2007		2012			
	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>		
Age						
18–34			962	755	803	539
35–54			1302	1323	1017	976
55–64			572	611	441	480
65+			738	887	602	856
Occupational class						
Professional/managerial			1392	1411	1171	1151
Intermediate (white-collar)			597	613	401	439
Independent			308	305	242	234
Intermediate (blue-collar)			462	452	359	358
Working class			689	697	552	570
Party affiliation						
Conservative			913	961	760	788
Labour			1210	1225	971	956
Liberal Democrat			340	346	180	186
All			3576	3578	2867	2855

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**

	1987		1995		2000		2003	
	Weighted base	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Unweighted base
Age								
18–34	412	399	993	936	835	766	239	213
35–54	454	478	1146	1093	1140	1102	335	328
55–64	181	195	425	408	467	452	136	132
65+	195	207	578	693	545	656	171	200
Occupational class								
Professional/ managerial	304	320	914	922	947	933	349	335
Intermediate (white-collar)	276	291	706	691	686	672	159	163
Independent	91	95	274	264	192	186	53	56
Intermediate (blue-collar)	63	64	233	224	239	242	120	120
Working class	432	443	893	907	842	861	175	178
Party affiliation								
Conservative	482	506	839	837	844	840	234	227
Labour	331	337	1378	1371	1205	1220	330	321
Liberal Democrat	176	183	422	424	323	305	102	104
All	1243	1281	3145	3135	2991	2980	881	873
<hr/>								
	2007		2011		2012			
	Weighted base	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Unweighted base
Age								
18–34			692	541	799	640	803	539
35–54			980	994	1015	1006	1017	976
55–64			421	454	445	488	441	480
65+			568	681	580	710	602	856
Occupational class								
Professional/ managerial			1079	1090	1143	1153	1171	1151
Intermediate (white-collar)			428	435	420	430	401	439
Independent			241	240	214	219	242	234
Intermediate (blue-collar)			322	315	319	330	359	358
Working class			500	516	591	578	552	570
Party affiliation								
Conservative			696	739	783	822	760	788
Labour			911	911	893	881	971	956
Liberal Democrat			249	263	224	227	180	186
All			2663	2672	2841	2845	2867	2855

5. The bases for Table 2.8 are as follows:

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

	1987		1995		2000		2003	
	Weighted base	Unweighted base						
Age								
18–34	903	885	399	371	970	891	895	807
35–54	980	1024	413	411	1282	1236	1249	1213
55–64	425	451	147	151	517	501	490	482
65+	454	482	240	300	651	791	641	770
Occupational class								
Professional/managerial	653	675	332	341	1063	1046	1207	1182
Intermediate (white-collar)	604	633	241	252	769	752	545	549
Independent	206	216	98	97	239	228	228	224
Intermediate (blue-collar)	127	133	99	101	271	275	485	489
Working class	1002	1026	380	389	968	1008	688	711
Party affiliation								
Conservative	1051	1095	306	319	943	937	814	806
Labour	804	824	544	561	1379	1394	1200	1203
Liberal Democrat	381	392	158	160	353	341	365	368
All	2766	2847	1199	1234	3426	3426	3276	3272
<hr/>								
	2007		2011		2012			
	Weighted base	Unweighted base						
Age								
18–34			863	683	948	752	935	635
35–54			1111	1128	1171	1159	1147	1108
55–64			456	494	496	541	486	532
65+			651	786	693	856	674	967
Occupational class								
Professional/managerial			1200	1216	1277	1289	1311	1280
Intermediate (white-collar)			500	505	494	500	440	489
Independent			283	279	261	261	283	274
Intermediate (blue-collar)			393	377	366	380	400	400
Working class			589	617	686	685	640	667
Party affiliation								
Conservative			773	819	881	926	830	866
Labour			1052	1058	1062	1039	1102	1090
Liberal Democrat			282	293	247	253	195	200
All			3082	3094	3311	3311	3248	3248

References

- Bartels, L. (2008), *Unequal Democracy: the Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Clery, E. (2012), 'Are tough times affecting attitudes to welfare?', in Park, A., Clery, E., Curtice, J., Phillips, M. and Utting, D. (eds.) (2012), *British Social Attitudes: the 29th Report*, London: NatCen Social Research, available at: www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk
- Clery, E., Lee L. and Kunz S. (2013), *Public attitudes to poverty and welfare, 1983–2011: analysis using British Social Attitudes data*, NatCen Social Research, available at: www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1106142/poverty%20and%20welfare.pdf
- Curtice, J. (2010), 'Thermostat or weathervane? Public reactions to spending and redistribution under New Labour', in Park, A., Curtice, J., Thomson, K., Phillips, M., Clery, E. and Butt, S. (eds.), *British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report*, London: Sage
- Cusack, T., Iversen, T. and Rehm, P. (2005), *Risks at Work: The Demand and Supply Sides of Government Redistribution*, (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 791305), Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network
- Jaeger, M. (2009), 'United But Divided: Welfare Regimes and the Level and Variance in Public Support for Redistribution', *European Sociological Review*, **25(6)**: 723–37
- Kulin, J. and Svallfors, S. (2011), 'Class, Values, and Attitudes Towards Redistribution: A European Comparison', *European Sociological Review*, **29(2)**: 155–167
- Petersen, M., Slothuus, R., Stubager, R. and Togeby, L. (2010), 'Deservingness versus values in public opinion on welfare: The automaticity of the deservingness heuristic', *European Journal of Political Research*, **50(1)**: 24–52
- Petersen, M., Sznycer, D., Cosmides, L. and Tooby, J. (2012), 'Who Deserves Help? Evolutionary Psychology, Social Emotions, and Public Opinion about Welfare', *Political Psychology*, **33(3)**: 395–418
- Reeskens, T. and Van Oorschot, W. (2013), 'Equity, equality, or need? A study of popular preferences for welfare redistribution principles across 24 European countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, **20(8)**, 1174–1195
- Rowlingson, K., Orton, M. and Taylor, E. (2010), 'Do we still care about inequality?', in Park, A., Curtice, J., Clery, E. and Bryson, C. (eds.) (2010), *British Social Attitudes – the 27th Report: Exploring Labour's Legacy*, London: Sage
- Van Oorschot, W. (2006), 'Making the difference in social Europe: deservingness perceptions among citizens of European welfare states', *Journal of European Social Policy*, **16(1)**: 23–42
- Van Oorschot, W., Reeskens, T. and Meuleman, B. (2012), 'Popular perceptions of welfare state consequences: A multilevel, cross-national analysis of 25 European countries', *Journal of European Social Policy*, **22(2)**: 181–197

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 A.1 Taxation and spending, 1983–2012

	83	84	85	86	87	89	90	91	93	94	95	96	97	98
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Increase taxes/ spend more	32	39	45	46	50	56	54	65	63	58	61	59	62	63
Keep taxes/ spend same	54	50	43	44	42	37	37	29	29	33	31	34	31	32
Reduce taxes/ spend less	9	6	6	5	3	3	3	3	4	4	5	4	3	3
<i>Weighted base</i>	1716	1642	1767	3062	2762	2928	2692	2833	2941	3469	3633	3619	1352	3143
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1757	1671	1802	3096	2843	3027	2791	2914	2941	3469	3633	3619	1353	3142

	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Increase taxes/ spend more	58	50	59	63	51	49	46	46	42	39	34	31	36	34
Keep taxes/ spend same	35	40	34	31	38	42	43	44	47	50	55	56	54	53
Reduce taxes/ spend less	4	5	3	3	6	6	7	6	7	8	8	8	6	6
<i>Weighted base</i>	3142	2302	3287	3434	3274	2130	2167	3227	3082	2184	1134	3296	3311	3248
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3142	2292	3287	3434	3271	2146	2166	3239	3094	2229	1139	3295	3311	3248

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

Table A.2 Attitudes towards income inequality and redistribution, 1983–2012

	83	84	85	86	87	89	90	91	93	94	95	97	98	99
% saying the income gap is too large		72	75	77	78	79	80	81	80	85	85	87	85	81
% agreeing the government should redistribute income	n/a	n/a	n/a	43	45	51	51	49	48	51	47	44	39	36
<i>Weighted base</i>		1719	1645	1769	1315	2424	2529	2349	2644	1327	2957	3145	3103	2546
<i>Unweighted base</i>		1761	1675	1804	1321	2493	2604	2430	2702	1306	2929	3135	3085	2531

	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
% saying the income gap is too large		82	80	82	78	73	n/a	76	76	75	78	75	n/a
% agreeing the government should redistribute income		39	38	39	42	32	32	34	32	38	37	36	37
<i>Weighted base</i>		2991	2821	2929	3634	2610	3539	3744	3576	3963	2951	2810	2841
<i>Unweighted base</i>		2980	2795	2900	3621	2609	3559	3748	3578	3990	2942	2791	2845

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

	87	89	91	93	94	95	96	98	99	00	01
% agree government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor	55	61	58	53	50	49	43	43	40	38	43
<i>Weighted base</i>	1243	2529	2428	2595	2957	3145	3103	2546	2478	2991	2821
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1281	2604	2481	2567	2929	3135	3085	2531	2450	2980	2795
	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
% agree government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor	44	43	36	36	35	32	35	27	29	28	34
<i>Weighted base</i>	2929	873	2610	2697	2813	2663	2956	963	2810	2845	2867
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2900	881	2609	2699	2822	2672	3000	967	2791	2841	2855

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

	83	84	85	86	87	89	90	91	93	94	95	96	97	98
Benefits for unemployed people are ...	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
... too low and cause hardship	46	49	44	44	51	52	50	53	55	53	51	48	46	29
... too high and discourage work	35	28	34	33	29	27	29	27	24	24	30	32	28	46
... Neither	13	8	7	6	6	8	8	7	11	14	11	14	15	17
<i>Weighted base</i>	1761	1645	1769	3066	2766	2930	2698	2836	2945	3469	1199	3620	1355	3146
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1719	1675	1804	3100	2847	3029	2797	2918	2945	3469	1234	3620	1355	3146
	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
Benefits for unemployed people are ...	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
... too low and cause hardship	33	40	37	29	34	23	26	23	26	21	29	23	19	22
... too high and discourage work	42	36	37	47	40	54	50	54	54	61	51	54	62	51
... Neither	18	15	16	17	17	16	16	16	14	13	12	14	14	17
<i>Weighted base</i>	3143	3426	3287	3435	3272	3199	3210	3228	3082	3333	1134	3297	3311	3248
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3143	3426	3287	3435	3276	3199	3139	3240	3094	3258	1139	3297	3311	3248

At **NatCen Social Research** we believe that social research has the power to make life better. By really understanding the complexity of people's lives and what they think about the issues that affect them, we give the public a powerful and influential role in shaping decisions and services that can make a difference to everyone. And as an independent, not for profit organisation we're able to focus our time and energy on meeting our clients' needs and delivering social research that works for society.

Publication details

Park, A., Bryson, C., Clery, E., Curtice, J. and Phillips, M. (eds.) (2013), *British Social Attitudes: the 30th Report*, London: NatCen Social Research, available online at: www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk

© NatCen Social Research 2013
First published 2013

You may print out, download and save this publication for your non-commercial use. Otherwise, and apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to NatCen Social Research.

NatCen Social Research

35 Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0AX

info@natcen.ac.uk

ISBN 978-1-907236-28-0