

Key time series

Public attitudes in the context of COVID-19 and Brexit

Since the National Centre for Social Research's British Social Attitudes survey began in 1983, it has regularly asked a representative sample of people their views about a wide range of topics. Some issues are addressed almost every year, and, as a result, the survey has built up a unique body of robust evidence on how Britain's social and political mood has evolved during the last four decades – and in so doing provided some vital clues as to the events and social developments that have brought about changes in what Britain thinks. In this chapter, we examine some of the key trends in how people have answered some of our longstanding, regular questions.

We do so at a time when Britain is experiencing unprecedented social and political change. Most obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed a major challenge to public health and the country's economy. As a result, there have been huge demands on the public purse. The government response to the pandemic has included support for jobs via the furlough scheme, additional NHS funding, and business grants. The National Audit Office estimated that this would cost £210bn for the first six months of the crisis (National Audit Office, 2020), and 9.6m jobs have been furloughed, from 1.2m different employers (HMRC, 2020). Meanwhile, far from being a short-term shock, it is now apparent that the country is going to have to live with the disease and its consequences for some time to come.

At the same time, Britain is in the midst of leaving the European Union. Having formally left the institution at the beginning of 2020 it is now scheduled to leave its single market and customs union at the end of the year. The decision, instigated by the outcome of a referendum held in 2016, represents one of the most significant public policy decisions the country has made since 1945 – and one which will also have an impact on the lives of its citizens for years to come.

We cannot of course be sure how either COVID-19 or Brexit will eventually affect the public mood. Indeed, our most recent survey, undertaken in the second half of 2019, was not only conducted before it was even certain that Britain would leave the EU, but also before anyone had even heard of COVID-19. However, by looking at how attitudes towards public spending and welfare have evolved during the course of the last 36 years we can ascertain whether the dramatic expansion in public spending, including not least on welfare, is likely to prove at odds or be aligned with voters' expectations of what their government should do. Meanwhile, by looking at developments in people's sense of identity and immigration we can investigate the long-term strength of some of the forces that are thought to have given rise to the Brexit decision.

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Taxation and spending

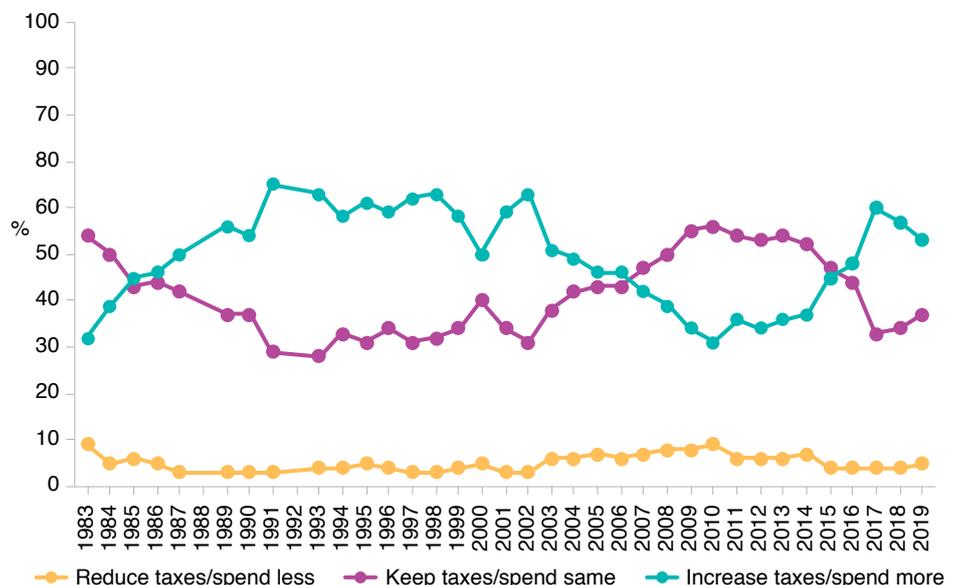
There are two rather different ways in which the public might react to the recent expansion of public spending in general and to the increase in support in particular for those whose jobs are at risk or have been lost. One possibility is that even before the pandemic voters have felt that the government was not spending enough on public services and was providing inadequate support to those reliant on welfare payments. After all, until recently at least the government had been intent on responding to the fiscal challenge posed by the financial crash of 2008/9 by cutting many areas of public spending in general and welfare for those of working age in particular. On the other hand, it may be that voters feel uncomfortable about the elevated levels of spending on which the government has now embarked. Certainly, previous research has suggested that voters react like a thermostat to changes in public spending and soon lose whatever enthusiasm they may have had for higher taxes and spending once the public expenditure taps have been turned on (Curtice, 2010; Wlezien, 1995).

Since 1983 BSA has regularly investigated the British public’s attitude to government spending by asking:

Suppose the government had to choose between the three options on this card. Which do you think it should choose?

- *Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits*
- *Keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now*
- *Increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits*

Figure 1 Attitudes towards taxation and spending on health, education and social benefits, 1983-2019



As Figure 1 shows, relatively few people ever volunteer for less public spending. The proportion choosing that option has never been more than 9%. However, the balance between those wanting to keep taxes and spending as they are now and those who would like to see public spending and taxation increased has changed substantially over time. In 1983, four years into Margaret Thatcher's Conservative premiership, around a third of people (32%) thought that tax and spending should be increased, while over half (54%) believed they should be kept as they were. Mrs Thatcher's government endeavoured to reduce public spending, but gradually public opinion moved in the opposite direction. By 1991, just after John Major became Prime Minister, the proportion who said they wanted more tax and spend was, at 65%, double the figure recorded eight years previously. For the most part, support remained at more or less that level not only during the remaining years of Conservative government (that ended in 1997), but also into the early years of the New Labour administration under Tony Blair, which initially kept to the trajectory on public spending that it had inherited from John Major. However, the new government eventually changed tack and embarked on a significant increase in public spending – to which the public gradually reacted by expressing gradually diminishing support for more taxation and spending, such that by 2007 (when Tony Blair resigned as Prime Minister) those saying that taxes and spending should be kept at their current level once again outnumbered those who felt they should be increased.

In short, even before the financial crash of 2008/9 had threatened to cause a fiscal crisis, the trend in attitudes towards taxation and spending largely fitted the expectations of the suggestion that voters react thermostatically to changes in public spending. And it meant that by the time that Gordon Brown's Labour government had lost office in 2010, the balance of public opinion on tax and spend was more or less back to where it had been in 1983, with 31% saying they wanted more but 56% indicating that they things should be kept as they were. It was a mood that seemed to match the determination of the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition under David Cameron to reduce the fiscal deficit, and to do so primarily by curbing public expenditure.

Yet this policy also seems eventually to have instigated its own reaction. After initially changing little, by 2017 support for increased taxation and spending had returned to 60%, in line with what it had been for much of the period between 1990 and 2002. Since 2017 support has dropped slightly, but increased tax and spending is still backed in our latest survey by just over half (53%), above the level it has been for most of the last two decades.

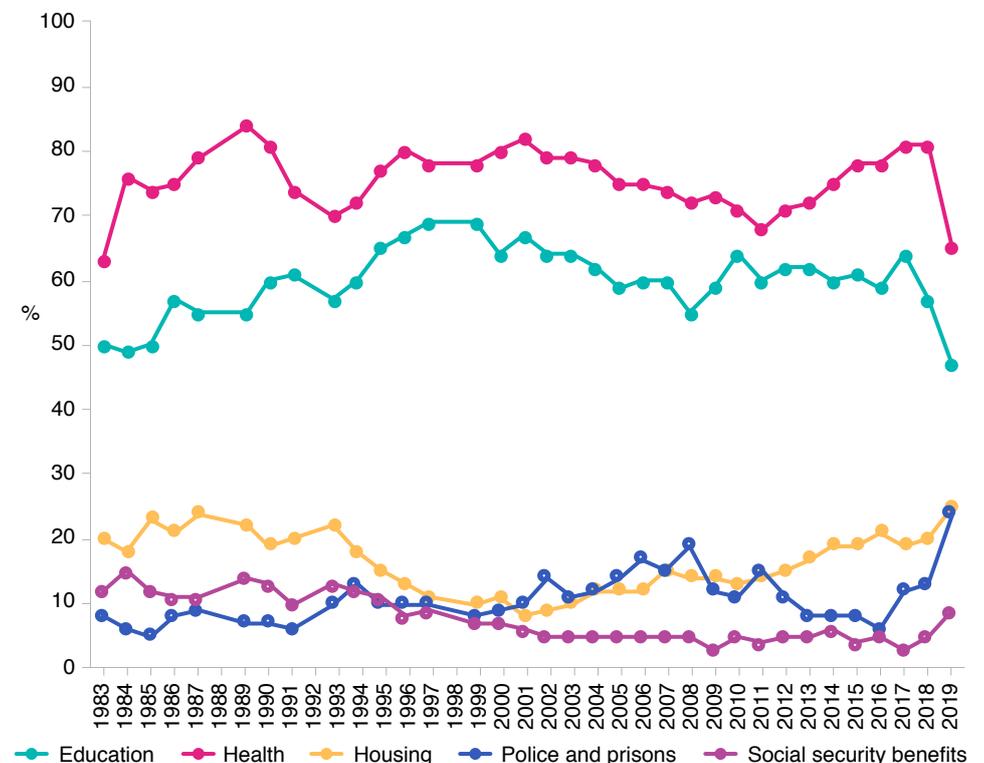
In short, just before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, the British public seemed to be ready for a reversal of the squeeze on much public spending in recent years. To that extent, it might regard the increased spending that has been incurred since the pandemic as welcome. However, the experience of the previous Labour

government suggests that the public tends eventually to react against large increases in public expenditure. So, unless the public health crisis has persuaded voters to reset the level of their tax and spend thermostat, it may well be the case that there will eventually be a reaction against the increased spending – and, most likely the increased taxes to follow – on which the country has currently found itself obliged to embark.

But what are the public’s priorities when the decision is made to spend more?

Every year BSA has presented its respondents with a list of ten items of government spending, and asked them which public services would be their first and second priority for extra spending.

Figure 2 First or second priority for extra government spending (selected response options), 1983-2019



Note: The proportions choosing one of five other possible answers, all relatively unpopular, are not shown

As Figure 2 shows, health has always been the most popular choice, with a majority in every year (65% in 2019) saying additional spending on health services would be either their first or their second priority. Equally, education has consistently been the second most popular choice, selected by close to half (47%) in 2019. No other area of public spending has ever been anything like as popular as these two.

In the last two years though there has been a decline in the proportion who prioritise more spending on health and on education. The proportion picking health as a priority fell from 81% in both 2017

and 2018 to 65% in 2019. Similarly, the proportion who would prioritise education slipped from 64% in 2017 to 57% in 2018 and in our most recent survey has fallen back further to 47%. In contrast, there have been increases in the proportion prioritising more spending on police and prisons (from 6% in 2016 to 24% in 2019) and housing (from 19% in 2017 to 25% in 2019). Support for additional spending on these two areas now stands at the highest level ever recorded in BSA.

Spending on health was protected (relatively at least) during the era of fiscal consolidation after 2010, and indeed, received a well-publicised boost on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the NHS in 2018 (HM Treasury 2020). Education was spared the toughest cuts. In contrast there have been sharp reductions in spending on police and on housing, while the difficulties facing younger people in finding somewhere affordable to live (let alone buy) has moved up the political agenda. Here, perhaps, is another indication of how the public's priorities are inclined to react against changes in the level of public spending – though, of course, it would not be surprising if the COVID-19 public health crisis were to result in a reversal of the decline in the priority given to health.

We might note that recently there has also been a discernible increase in the proportion saying that spending on social security benefits should be increased, from 3% in 2017 to 9% in our most recent survey – the highest figure it has been since 1997. While social security spending has never been a high priority for most people, its popularity fell away noticeably in the mid-1990s, a decline that only now is showing the first signs of being reversed. This suggests that perhaps we should look more closely at trends in attitudes to welfare. The pandemic has already created significant pressures on the budget for welfare and seems likely to do so further in future in the wake of rising levels of unemployment.

Welfare

Since 1987 BSA has regularly asked a series of questions that between them are intended to ascertain people's attitudes towards welfare in general. Between them they are intended to address whether welfare benefits provide necessary support to those that receive them or whether their payment is often undeserved and sometimes undesirable. One such question that addresses this theme asks the following:

How much do you agree or disagree that if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet?

Figure 3 Proportion who agree/disagree that 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet', 1987-2019

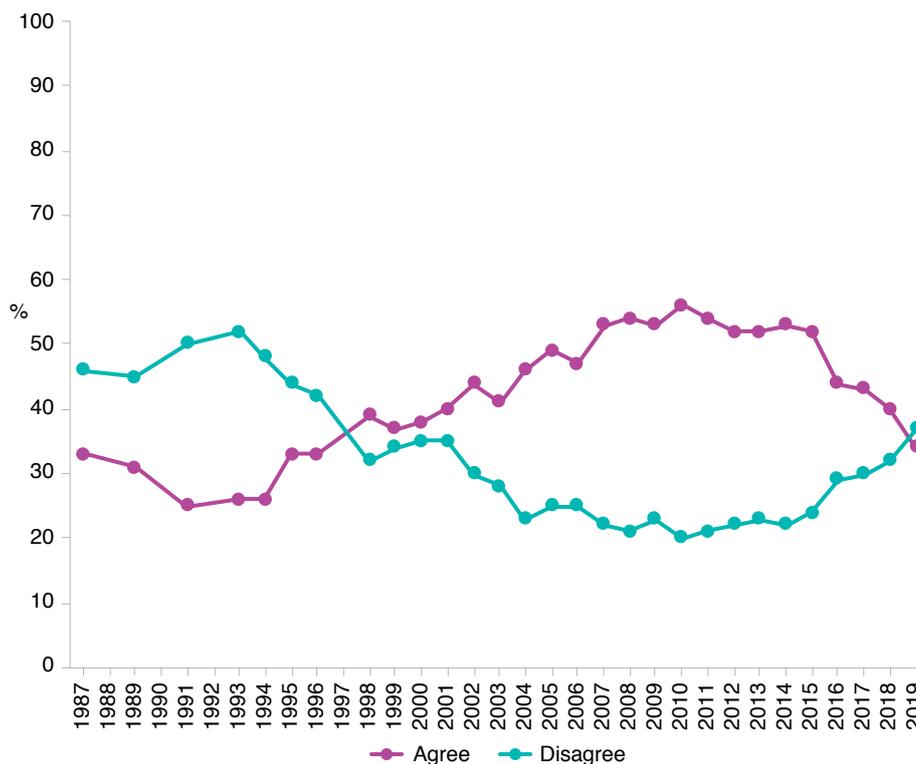
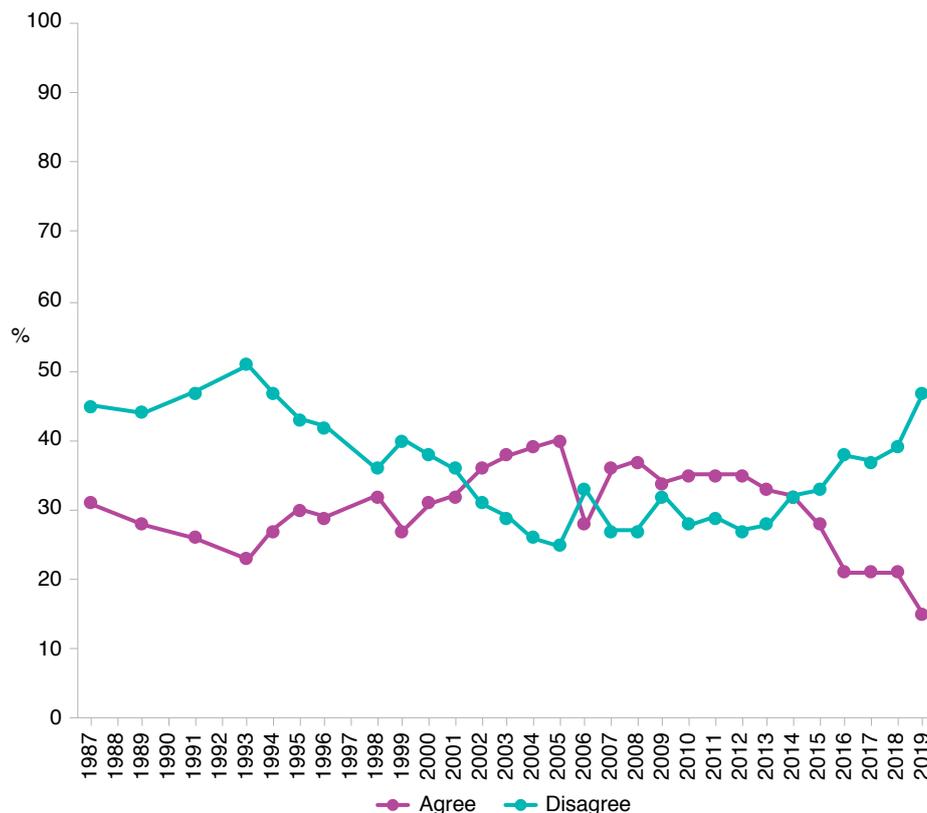


Figure 3 reveals a striking pattern. Throughout the years when Margaret Thatcher and John Major were in power, more people disagreed with this statement than agreed, albeit that the gap between them appeared to be narrowing gradually during the 1990s. But after New Labour came to power the position was reversed in the wake of an especially sharp drop (from 42% to 32%) between 1996 and 1998 in the proportion who disagreed. This less liberal mood became increasingly prevalent during New Labour's term of office, such that by 2008 as many as 54% agreed and only 21% disagreed, a position that largely continued to prevail throughout the years of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. However, over the last four years, attitudes have changed once again, and in our most recent survey those who disagree (37%) outnumber those who agree (34%) for the first time since 1996.

This pattern of the onset of a less liberal outlook in the late 1990s followed more recently by its apparent reversal is consistent across a range of questions that BSA has asked on a regular basis. For example, it is evident in a similar trend in the following question that BSA has also asked regularly since 1987:

How much do you agree or disagree that many people who receive social security don't really deserve any help?

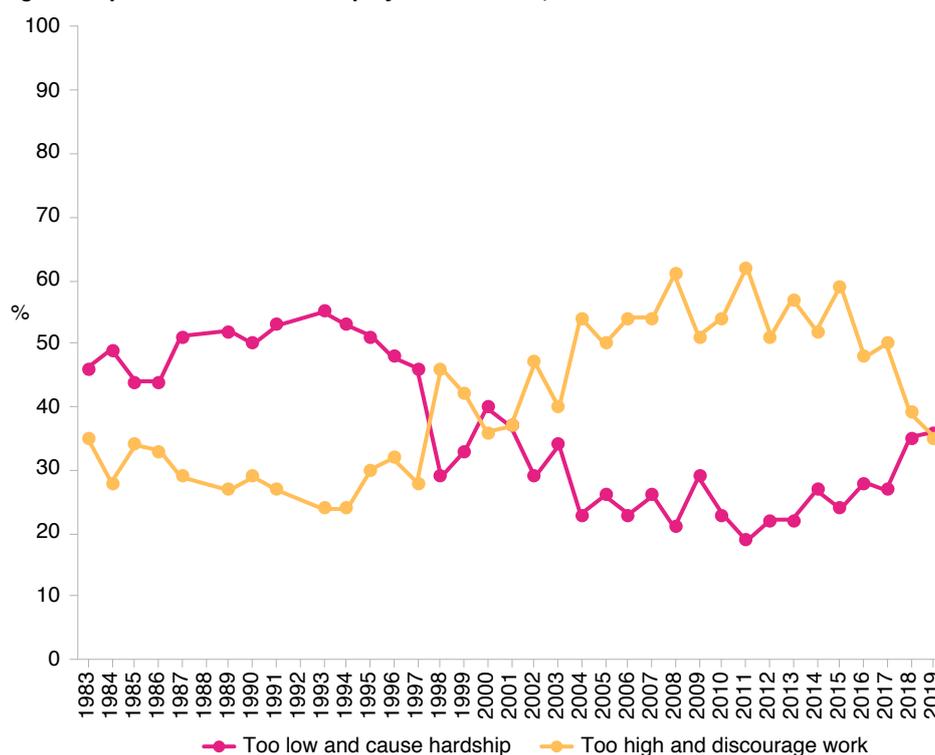
Figure 4 Proportion who agree/disagree that people who receive social security don't really deserve help, 1987-2019



Until 1998, the proportion who disagreed with this statement substantially outnumbered those who agreed. However, at that point the lead showed signs of narrowing and then in 2002 those who agreed were for the first time more numerous than those who disagreed. Apart from one year (2006) this then remained the case through to 2014. Now, however, the proportion in our latest survey who agree is, at 15%, at a record low, while the proportion who disagree (47%) is as high as it was at times in the mid-1980s. It seems that concern about welfare ‘scroungers’ and ‘shirkers’ is much less widespread than it was no more than half a decade ago.

Meanwhile, attitudes towards the benefits for the unemployed in particular have been charted regularly by BSA since 1983 by asking respondents whether they think that benefits for unemployed people are “too low and cause hardship” or “too high and discourage them from finding jobs”. That pattern of responses each year is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Opinion on level of unemployment benefits, 1983-2019



We observe what is, by now, a familiar picture. Between 1983 and 1997 respondents were more likely to say that benefits for unemployed people were too low than that they were too high. After the election of the Labour government in 1997, however, the proportion who felt that benefits were too high and discouraged work increased, from 28% in 1997 to 46% in 1998. There was some fluctuation in the level of agreement with the two statements between 1999 and 2002, but between 2002 and 2018, people were consistently more likely to say that unemployment benefits were too low and caused hardship than they were to say that they were too high and discouraged work. However, the gap had been closing over the previous five years, and for the first time since 2001, the British public are in our latest survey as likely to think that benefits are too low as they are to think that benefits are too high.

Two developments probably account for the less liberal outlook towards welfare that we have seen was in evidence from the late 1990s until relatively recently. The first is the much lower level of unemployment that prevailed from the late 1990s onwards, a contrast with the position in the 1980s that even the financial crash of 2008/9 did not do much to disturb. The second is the distinctive stance of the New Labour government towards welfare for those of working age. This emphasised the belief that welfare should be designed to help get people back into work as soon as possible and was critical of the levels of expenditure on welfare for the long-term unemployed incurred by Margaret Thatcher's government. At the same time, however, New Labour presided over a substantial real term increase

in the value of the old age pension – and this distinction between welfare for those of working age and pensions was continued by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, which further increased the real value of the old age pension while reducing welfare payments for other recipients.

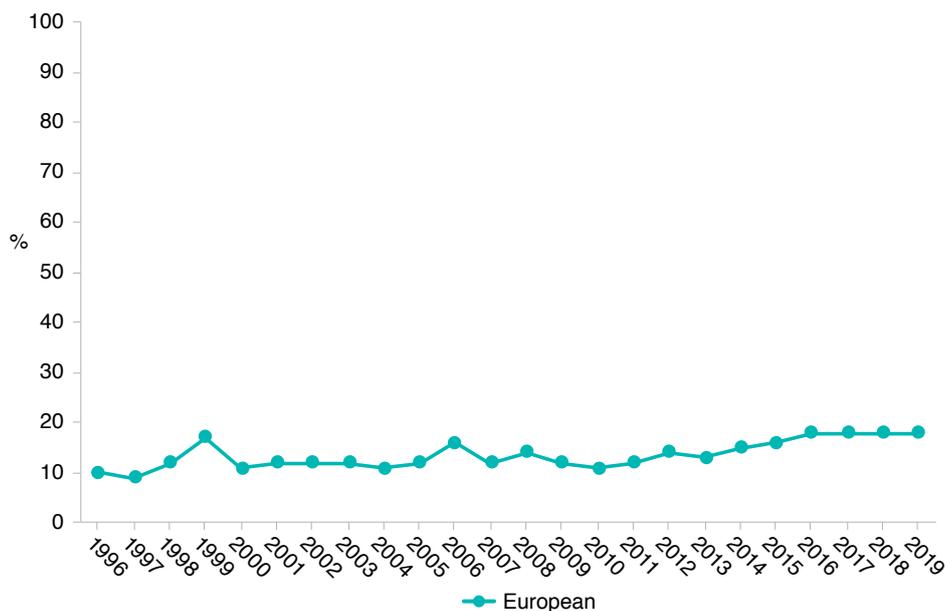
This differential treatment of pensioners and other recipients has, however, come under increasing criticism – and our evidence suggests that this criticism has come to be reflected to some degree in public attitudes, which, though still not necessarily as liberal as they were in the 1980s, are now consistently more so than they have been for most of the last twenty years. It looks as though the pandemic has occurred at a time when there was already more empathy with the circumstances of the low paid and unemployed of working age – and that voters may therefore be looking to the government to make adequate provision for those whose livelihoods are threatened by the pandemic. At the same time, the experience of the 1980s suggests any significant rise in unemployment in the wake of the pandemic could well reinforce that mood, and perhaps especially so if, in contrast to New Labour, this perceived requirement is pressed by the Labour opposition.

Identity

In part, the choice put before voters in the EU referendum concerned the interrelated issues of sovereignty and identity. People are more willing to accept the authority of a set of governing arrangements if they are consistent with their sense of identity. Thus, in the case of the debate about Britain's membership of the EU, we might anticipate that those who feel 'European' would be more likely than those who do not to have voted to Remain in the EU, as indeed was the case.¹ Consequently, the extent to which people do or do not feel European is likely to have implications for the strength of Britain's long-term relationship with the EU.

Since 1996 BSA has routinely presented its respondents with a list of all of the national identities associated with the islands of Great Britain and Ireland, and invited them to select as many as they felt described themselves. Included in the list of options is European. Figure 6 charts how many people have picked that as at least one of the identities with which they feel an affinity.

¹ Indeed, among those who in our 2016 survey acknowledged a European identity, no less than 85% said that they voted Remain in EU referendum. In contrast, only 44% of those who did not regard themselves as European voted that way.

Figure 6 Proportion of people in Britain who describe themselves as 'European', 1996-2019

Note: 'European' was included in a list of options, the others are not shown here.

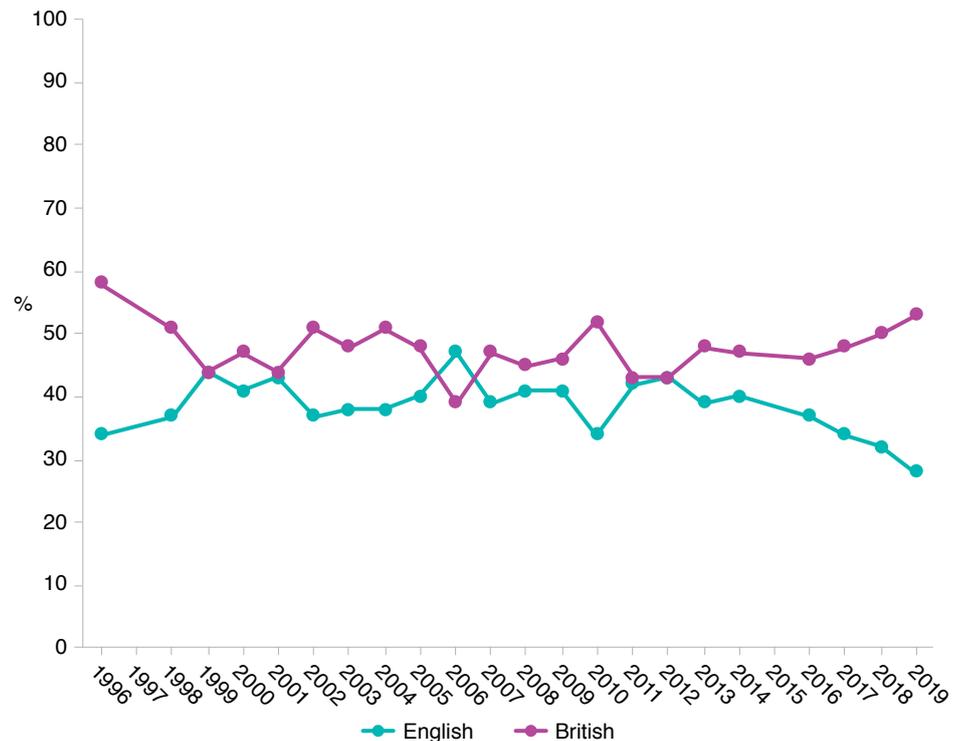
The figure reveals that relatively few people in Britain have ever felt a sense of European identity. For most of the twenty years leading up to the 2016 referendum, the proportion hovered at around no more than 12% or so, albeit it was perhaps beginning to edge up somewhat in the years leading up to the Brexit decision. However, in 2016 the figure reached 18% and has stayed there ever since. Perhaps the prospect of Britain leaving the EU served to kindle a sense of a previously unacknowledged European identity in some people's minds. That said, however, it seems that there are still too few people in Britain who feel that way for European identity to provide an underpinning of support for a close relationship between the UK and the EU in the near future. Indeed, the fact that most people in Britain do not readily acknowledge a European identity probably helps explain why a majority voted to leave the EU in the first place.

In contrast to feeling European, many are willing to acknowledge being British and/or English. And whether it was British or English seemed to affect their attitude towards EU membership too. Those who, when forced to choose, said that they were English were much more likely to vote Leave than were those who said they were British.² As a result, it has been argued that, within England at least, the outcome of the EU referendum was an indication of an increase in the prevalence of English identity.

² In our 2016 survey, 63% of those who, when forced to choose a single identity, said that they were English stated that they voted Leave, compared with just 44% of those who preferred to call themselves British.

In Figure 7 we show how many people in England have said that they are either English or British when they were presented with our list of identities and asked to choose just one. It suggests that far from becoming a more popular identity, fewer people now say that they are English than at any point since the late 1990s.

Figure 7 Trends in 'forced choice' national identity in England, 1996-2019



Note: 'English' and 'British' were included in a list of options, not all of which are shown here.

Feeling English did seem to become more popular in the immediate wake of the introduction in 1999 of devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales. In 1996, nearly three in five people (58%) said they were British, compared with around a third (34%) who said English. However, by 1999 just as many (44%) said they were English as stated that they were British. It looked as though the recognition of the distinctiveness of Scotland and Wales that devolution brought may have made some people in England more aware of their own particular national identity. Indeed, although thereafter it was usually the case that slightly more people said that they were British than indicated that they were English (with 2006 being a notable exception), the proportion who said that they were English was nearly always notably above the 34% who had done so in 1996. However, since 2014 the proportion who say they are English has fallen year on year from 40% to just 28% in our latest survey. Conversely, over the same period the proportion choosing British has increased from 47% to 53%.

A similar picture has emerged when BSA has asked a question (known as the ‘Moreno’ question after the Spanish political scientist who first popularised it) that invites people to say directly whether they feel more English or more British. It reads as follows:

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

English not British

More English than British

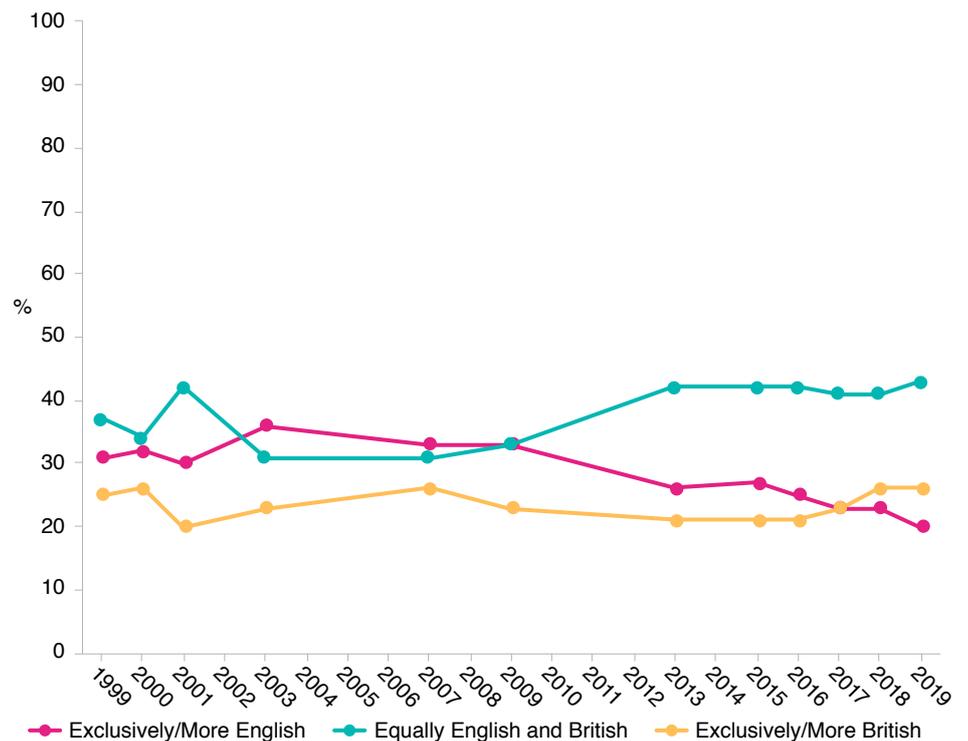
Equally English and British

More British than English

British not English

Figure 8 summarises respondents’ answers after combining those who gave either of the first two answers and those who replied by choosing either of the last two.

Figure 8 Trends in national identity in England, 1999-2019



Here we find that in most years the most common response has been ‘equally English and British’, suggesting that for many the two identities are largely interchangeable – much as the terms England and Britain often seem to be used synonymously. However, once respondents are presented with the opportunity to choose between them, in most years rather more have said that they are wholly or primarily English than have stated that they are wholly or primarily British. Thus, for example, when we first asked the question in 1999

(just as devolution began), while 37% said they were equally English and British, rather more (31%) indicated they prioritised their sense of being English than they did whatever feeling they had about being British (25%). Indeed, the proportion who identified more as English than as British remained at around a third or so throughout the next ten years. However, since then the figure has been in decline, and in our most recent survey it has, at 20%, even been below the quarter or so (26%) that continue to say that they are wholly or primarily British.

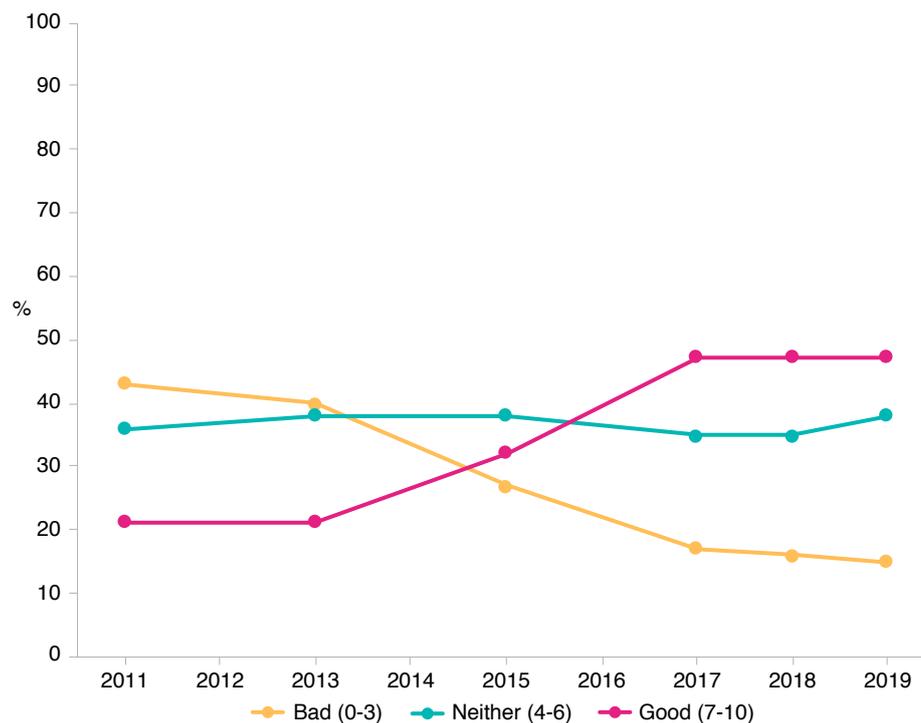
Our evidence indicates that, although those who feel English rather than British were more likely to vote Leave in an EU referendum that Leave won, this does not necessarily mean that more people now feel English. The increased political salience of a particular identity should not be confused with an increased prevalence. Instead, in an era in which Britain has often seemed to have become more polarised in the wake of Brexit, it appears that within England at least, British identity has become more widely shared.

Immigration

Not least of the reasons why whether people felt British or English made a difference to their chances of voting Leave or Remain is that those who prioritise their English identity are more likely to be concerned about immigration, an issue that was central in the EU referendum.³ This pattern may well reflect the fact that in England British identity has been framed and promoted as a multicultural identity, while English identity has largely been ignored.

In any event, given the outcome of the EU referendum and the UK's subsequent decision to end freedom of movement between the UK and the EU, we might anticipate that immigration has been a subject of increasing concern. Since 2011, BSA has asked respondents on a number of occasions to indicate on a scale from 0 (meaning extremely bad) to 10 (meaning extremely good) whether they think 'it is generally good for Britain's economy that migrants come to Britain from other countries'. The pattern of responses is shown in Figure 9, where we have grouped scores 0-3 as 'Bad', 4-6 as 'Neither' and 7-10 as 'Good'.

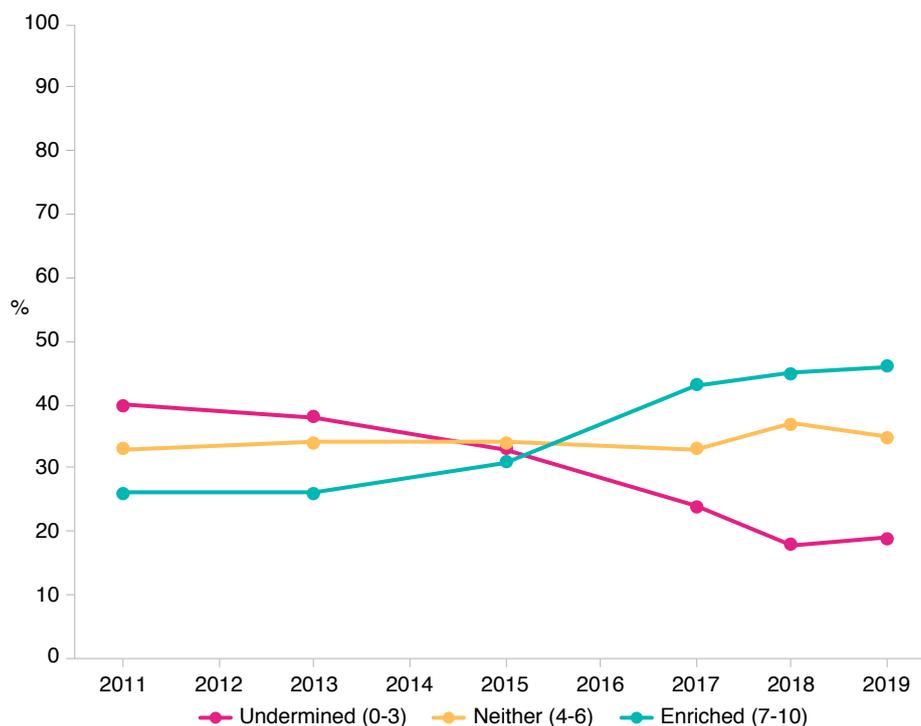
³ For example, in our 2011 survey, 53% of those who said they were English have a score of between 0-3 when they responded to the question on the cultural impact of immigration that is introduced below, compared with 36% of those who said they were British.

Figure 9 Proportion believing migration is good or bad for the economy, 2011-2019

When we first asked this question in 2011 it suggested that there were, indeed, widespread doubts about the economic benefits of immigration. Twice as many (43%) said that migration was bad for the economy as said that it was good (21%). However, opinion had already changed quite markedly by 2015, the year before the EU referendum; now slightly more said that immigration was good for the economy (32%) as said it was bad (27%), while the single most popular response was a more phlegmatic ‘neither’ (38%). By the time the referendum was over perceptions of the economic consequences had become even more positive. In 2017, nearly half (47%) rated migration as good for the economy, making ‘Good’ now the most commonly-held view. Conversely, the proportion who rated migration as bad for the economy fell to just 17%. The figures in our most recent survey are much the same.

This picture is confirmed by the pattern of responses to a second question on the cultural impact of migration. Once again, respondents were presented with a scale from 0 to 10, but were now asked to use it to indicate whether they thought that ‘Britain’s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by migrants coming to live here from other countries’, with 0 meaning it is undermined and 10 that it is enriched. Again, we have grouped scores 0-3 as ‘Undermined’, 4-6 as ‘Neither’ and 7-10 as ‘Enriched’ (Figure 10).

Figure 10 Proportion believing migration generally undermines or enriches British cultural life, 2011-2019



Once again, we discover that there was a relatively high level of concern when we first asked the question in 2011; 40% gave a score that indicated they thought that migration was undermining Britain's cultural life, whereas only 26% felt that it was enriched. However, by the time the referendum was over the position had sharply reversed and now, in our most recent survey, as many as 46% said that migration enriches cultural life while only 19% express the opposite view.

Here too, it seems that the pattern of public attitudes does not necessarily match what we might have anticipated given the outcome of the EU referendum. The public seems to have become markedly more favourable in its attitudes towards migration in recent years. This development perhaps raises questions as to whether the outcome of the referendum might have been different if it had been held a year or two later. However, perhaps it has been the prospect that Britain will have greater control over migration in the wake of the decision to leave that accounts for some of the shift in opinion. Either way, the current distribution of attitudes suggests that the public may be willing to accept a more liberal post-Brexit immigration regime than seemed likely just a few years ago.

Conclusion

Our examination of some of the key trends in public attitudes over the last four decades has provided us with some valuable clues and insights into the climate of public opinion with which the government will have to deal as it deals with the challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and endeavours to make the best of Britain's withdrawal from the EU. There is good reason to anticipate that the public will prove relatively sympathetic towards the provision of more generous welfare benefits for those who lose their jobs because of the pandemic – and especially so if there is a substantial increase in the level of unemployment. However, while voters might have entered the pandemic hoping that the 'austerity' of recent years would end, we cannot be sure as yet that they will necessarily be seeking an enhanced role for the state in the country's life in the long run. At the same time, we have discovered that now that the UK is about to gain control of immigration between it and the EU, voters may not be unsympathetic to a relatively liberal application of that control. Charting the long-term flows and eddies of public opinion as BSA has done since 1983 does not simply help us understand our history but also enables us understand where we are today. It is an endeavour that NatCen is committed to maintaining.

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Appendix

Table A.1 (Figure 1) Attitudes towards taxation and spending on health, education and social benefits, 1983-2019

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994
Which should the government choose..	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits	9	5	6	5	3	3	3	3	4	4
Keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now	54	50	43	44	42	37	37	29	28	33
Increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits	32	39	45	46	50	56	54	65	63	58
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1761	1675	1804	3100	2847	3029	2797	2918	2945	3469
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Which should the government choose..	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits	5	4	3	3	4	5	3	3	6	6
Keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now	31	34	31	32	34	40	34	31	38	42
Increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits	61	59	62	63	58	50	59	63	51	49
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3633	3620	1355	3146	3143	2292	3287	3435	3272	2146
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Which should the government choose..	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits	7	6	7	8	8	9	6	6	6	7
Keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now	43	43	47	50	55	56	54	53	54	52
Increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits	46	46	42	39	34	31	36	34	36	37
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2166	3240	3094	2229	1139	3297	3311	3248	3244	2878

Table A.1 continued

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Which should the government choose..	%	%	%	%	%
Reduce taxes and spend less on health, education and social benefits	4	4	4	4	5
Keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now	47	44	33	34	37
Increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits	45	48	60	57	53
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>3266</i>	<i>2942</i>	<i>2963</i>	<i>2884</i>	<i>3224</i>

Table A.2 (Figure 2) First or second priority for extra government spending (selected response options), 1983-2019

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Education	50	49	50	57	55	55	60	61	57	60
Health	63	76	74	75	79	84	81	74	70	72
Housing	20	18	23	21	24	22	19	20	22	18
Police and prisons	8	6	5	8	9	7	7	6	10	13
Social security benefits	12	15	12	11	11	14	13	10	13	12
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1761</i>	<i>1675</i>	<i>1804</i>	<i>3100</i>	<i>2847</i>	<i>3029</i>	<i>2797</i>	<i>2918</i>	<i>2945</i>	<i>1167</i>
	1995	1996	1997	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Education	65	67	69	69	64	67	64	64	62	59
Health	77	80	78	78	80	82	79	79	78	75
Housing	15	13	11	10	11	8	9	10	12	12
Police and prisons	10	10	10	8	9	10	14	11	12	14
Social security benefits	11	8	9	7	7	6	5	5	5	5
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1234</i>	<i>3620</i>	<i>1355</i>	<i>3143</i>	<i>2292</i>	<i>3287</i>	<i>3435</i>	<i>4432</i>	<i>3199</i>	<i>2166</i>

Table A.2 continued

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Education	60	60	55	59	64	60	62	62	60	61
Health	75	74	72	73	71	68	71	72	75	78
Housing	12	15	14	14	13	14	15	17	19	19
Police and prisons	17	15	19	12	11	15	11	8	8	8
Social security benefits	5	5	5	3	5	4	5	5	6	4
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>3240</i>	<i>3094</i>	<i>2229</i>	<i>3421</i>	<i>3297</i>	<i>3311</i>	<i>3248</i>	<i>3244</i>	<i>2878</i>	<i>3266</i>
	2016	2017	2018	2019						
	%	%	%	%						
Education	59	64	57	47						
Health	78	81	81	65						
Housing	21	19	20	25						
Police and prisons	6	12	13	24						
Social security benefits	5	3	5	9						
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>974</i>	<i>984</i>	<i>973</i>	<i>1075</i>						

Table A.3 (Figure 3) Proportion who agree/disagree that 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet', 1987-2019

	1987	1989	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996	1998
How much do you agree or disagree that if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly/Agree	33	31	25	26	26	33	33	39
Neither agree nor disagree	21	23	23	22	23	21	23	26
Disagree strongly/Disagree	46	45	50	52	48	44	42	32
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1281</i>	<i>2604</i>	<i>2481</i>	<i>2567</i>	<i>2929</i>	<i>3135</i>	<i>3085</i>	<i>2531</i>
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
How much do you agree or disagree that if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly/Agree	37	38	40	44	41	46	49	47
Neither agree nor disagree	27	25	24	24	27	27	24	26
Disagree strongly/Disagree	34	35	35	30	28	23	25	25
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>2450</i>	<i>2980</i>	<i>2795</i>	<i>2900</i>	<i>873</i>	<i>2609</i>	<i>2699</i>	<i>2822</i>

Table A.3 continued

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
How much do you agree or disagree that if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly/Agree	53	54	53	56	54	52	52	53
Neither agree nor disagree	22	24	23	23	23	23	22	23
Disagree strongly/Disagree	22	21	23	20	21	22	23	22
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2672	3000	967	2791	2845	2855	2832	2376
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019			
How much do you agree or disagree that if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet?	%	%	%	%	%			
Agree strongly/Agree	52	44	43	40	34			
Neither agree nor disagree	22	25	25	27	28			
Disagree strongly/Disagree	24	29	30	32	37			
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2781	2400	3258	3065	2636			

Table A.4 (Figure 4) Proportion who agree/disagree that people who receive social security don't really deserve help, 1987-2019

	1987	1989	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996	1998
How much do you agree or disagree that many people who receive social security don't really deserve any help?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly/Agree	31	28	26	23	27	30	29	32
Neither agree nor disagree	24	27	25	25	24	24	28	29
Disagree strongly/Disagree	45	44	47	51	47	43	42	36
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1281	2604	2481	2567	2929	3135	3085	2531
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
How much do you agree or disagree that many people who receive social security don't really deserve any help?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly/Agree	27	31	32	36	38	39	40	28
Neither agree nor disagree	31	30	30	31	30	33	33	37
Disagree strongly/Disagree	40	38	36	31	29	26	25	33
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2450	2980	2795	2900	873	2609	2699	2822

Table A.4 continued

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
How much do you agree or disagree that many people who receive social security don't really deserve any help?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly/Agree	36	37	34	35	35	35	33	32
Neither agree nor disagree	35	34	33	35	35	35	35	35
Disagree strongly/Disagree	27	27	32	28	29	27	28	32
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2672	3000	967	2791	2845	2855	2832	2376
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019			
How much do you agree or disagree that many people who receive social security don't really deserve any help?	%	%	%	%	%			
Agree strongly/Agree	28	21	21	21	15			
Neither agree nor disagree	37	39	39	38	37			
Disagree strongly/Disagree	33	38	37	39	47			
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2781	2400	3258	3065	2636			

Table A.5 (Figure 5) Opinion on level of unemployment benefits, 1983-2019

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994
Benefits for unemployed people are..	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Too low and cause hardship	46	49	44	44	51	52	50	53	55	53
Too high and discourage them from finding jobs	35	28	34	33	29	27	29	27	24	24
Neither	13	8	7	6	6	8	8	7	11	14
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1761	1675	1804	3100	2847	3029	2797	2918	2945	3469
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Benefits for unemployed people are..	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Too low and cause hardship	51	48	46	29	33	40	37	29	34	23
Too high and discourage them from finding jobs	30	32	28	46	42	36	37	47	40	54
Neither	11	14	15	17	18	15	16	17	17	16
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1234	3620	1355	3146	3143	3426	3287	3435	3272	3199

Table A.5 continued

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Benefits for unemployed people are..	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Too low and cause hardship	26	23	26	21	29	23	19	22	22	27
Too high and discourage them from finding jobs	50	54	54	61	51	54	62	51	57	52
Neither	16	16	14	13	12	14	14	17	15	15
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3193	3240	3094	3358	1139	3297	3311	3248	3244	2878
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019					
Benefits for unemployed people are..	%	%	%	%	%					
Too low and cause hardship	24	28	27	35	36					
Too high and discourage them from finding jobs	59	48	50	39	35					
Neither	14	17	17	19	21					
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3266	2942	2963	2884	3224					

Table A.6 (Figure 6) Proportion of people in Britain who describe themselves as 'European', 1996-2019

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Which, if any, of these describe the way you think of yourself?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
European	10	9	12	17	11	12	12	12	11	12
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1180	1355	3146	3143	3246	3287	3435	4432	3199	4268
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Which, if any, of these describe the way you think of yourself?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
European	16	12	14	12	11	12	14	13	15	16
<i>Unweighted base</i>	4290	4124	4486	3421	3297	3311	3248	3244	2878	4328
	2016	2017	2018	2019						
Which, if any, of these describe the way you think of yourself?	%	%	%	%						
European	18	18	18	18						
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2942	3988	3879	3224						

Note: 'European' was included in a list of options, others are not shown.

Table A.7 (Figure 7) Trends in 'forced choice' national identity in England, 1996-2019

	1996	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Which one of these best describes the way you think of yourself?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
English	34	37	44	41	43	37	38	38	40	47
British	58	51	44	47	44	51	48	51	48	39
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1019	2695	2718	2887	2761	2897	3709	2684	3643	3666
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2016	2017
Which one of these best describes the way you think of yourself?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
English	39	41	41	34	42	43	39	40	37	34
British	47	45	46	52	43	43	48	47	46	48
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3517	3880	2917	2795	2859	2800	2799	2448	2525	3478
	2018	2019								
Which one of these best describes the way you think of yourself?	%	%								
English	32	28								
British	50	53								
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3356	2783								

Note: 'English' and 'British' were included in a list of options, not all of which are shown here.

Table A.8 (Figure 8) Trends in national identity in England, 1999-2019

	1999	2000	2001	2003	2007	2009	2013	2015	2016	2017
Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
English not British/ More English than British	31	32	30	36	33	33	26	27	25	23
Equally English and British	37	34	42	31	31	33	42	42	42	41
British not English/ More British than English	25	26	20	23	26	23	21	21	21	23
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2718	1928	2761	1917	859	1940	2799	3778	2525	3478

Table A.8 continued

	2018	2019
Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?	%	%
English not British/ More English than British	23	20
Equally English and British	41	43
British not English/ More British than English	26	26
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>3356</i>	<i>934</i>

Table A.9 (Figure 9) Proportion believing migration is good or bad for the economy, 2011-2019

	2011	2013	2015	2017	2018	2019
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Bad (0-3)	43	40	27	17	16	15
Neither (4-6)	36	38	38	35	35	38
Good (7-10)	21	21	32	47	47	47
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>3311</i>	<i>3244</i>	<i>2167</i>	<i>1025</i>	<i>958</i>	<i>3224</i>

Table A.10 (Figure 10) Proportion believing migration undermines or enriches British cultural life, 2011-2019

	2011	2013	2015	2017	2018	2019
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Undermined (0-3)	40	38	33	24	18	19
Neither (4-6)	33	34	34	33	37	35
Enriched (7-10)	26	26	31	43	45	46
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>3311</i>	<i>3244</i>	<i>2167</i>	<i>1025</i>	<i>958</i>	<i>3224</i>

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