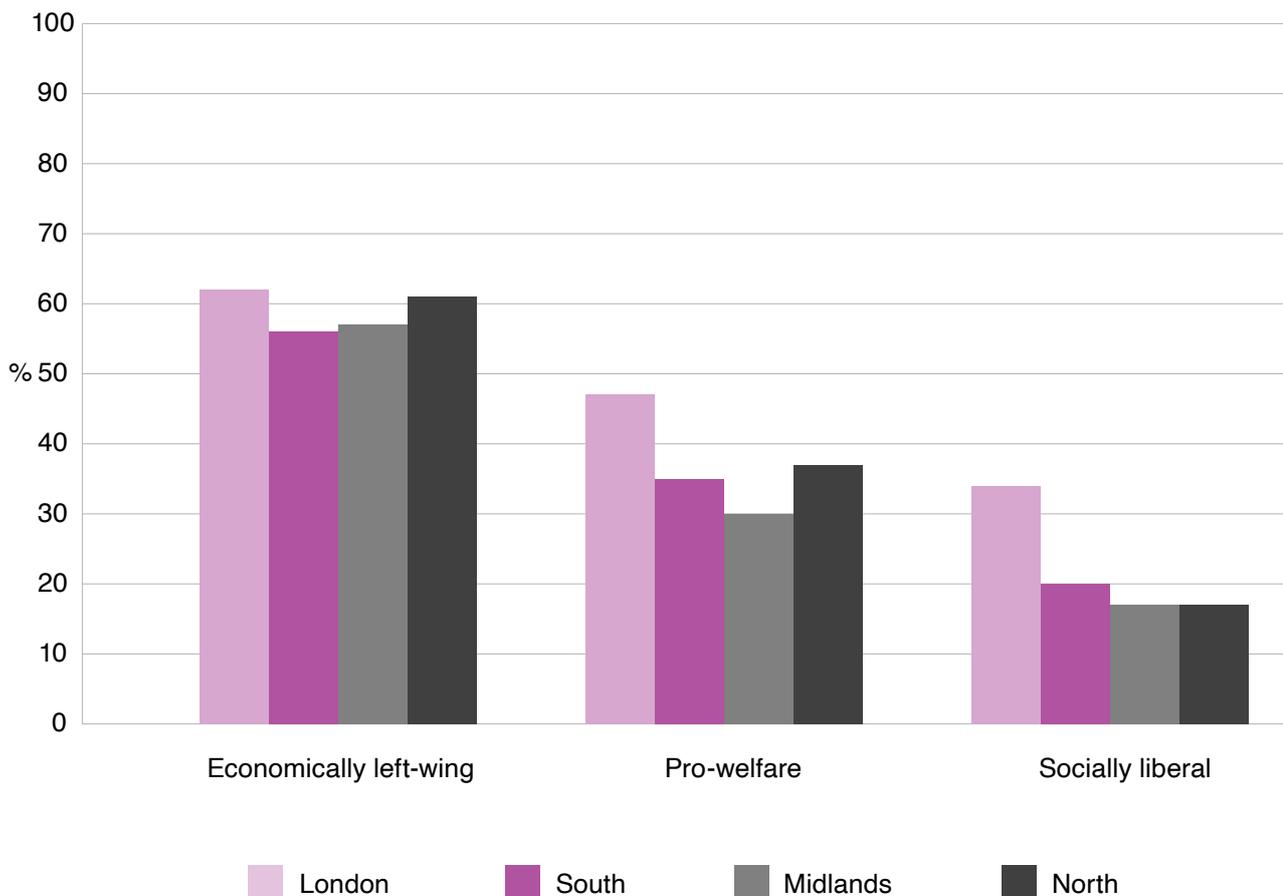


Regional differences in values in England

North vs South or London vs the rest?

The 2016 Brexit referendum and the government's subsequent levelling up agenda have highlighted the significant economic and demographic differences between England's regions. This chapter analyses the extent to which these differences contribute to regional differences in people's underlying social and political values and what, if any, the implications of regional differences in values might be for England's two main political parties.

How do values compare across England's regions?



Source: British Social Attitudes 2021

Overview

People in the North and South share similar economic values

Despite people in the South tending to be better off than those in the North, there is little evidence of differences in economic values between people living in the two regions.

- 61% people in the North can be classified as left-wing (tending to believe that economic resources are unequally distributed and favouring their redistribution to the less well-off), compared with 56% in the South.
 - 37% of people in the North can be classified as pro-welfare (believing that the state should offer a safety net for those in need), compared with 35% in the South.
 - The lack of a north-south gap in economic values contrasts with earlier analysis of BSA data which found people in the North to be more left-wing and more pro-welfare.
-

London is more pro-welfare and liberal than the rest of England

People living in London are more likely to be pro-welfare and pro-liberal, even after taking account of the fact that the capital's population is younger, better educated and more cosmopolitan, compared with other regions.

- 47% of people in London can be classified as pro-welfare, compared with 30%-37% in other English regions.
 - 34% of Londoners can be classified as liberal (that is supporting the right to individual freedom over conformity to common rules and practices), compared with 20% in the South and 17% in the North.
 - 47% of 18-34 year olds in London can be classed as liberal, compared with 30% of this age group in the rest of the country.
 - 19% of people living in urban areas outside London can be classified as liberal (compared with 34% in London).
-

Labour likely to continue to dominate London, but may be vulnerable in the North

People who are left-wing, pro-welfare and liberal are more likely to support Labour, while people who are right-wing, anti-welfare and authoritarian are more likely to support the Conservatives.

- 43% of people classed as left-wing and 52% classed as liberal identify with Labour. Only 20% classed as left-wing and 8% classed as liberal identify with the Conservatives.
- 40% of Londoners, who are more likely to be liberal, are Labour Party identifiers compared with 33% in England as whole
- 37% in the North identify with the Labour Party, compared with 26% in the South, likely reflecting past differences in values. However, the present lack of a north-south gap in economic values may provide an opportunity for the Conservatives to make headway in previous Labour strongholds.

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Introduction

As highlighted by the government's Levelling Up White Paper (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022) there are significant regional differences to be found on a range of economic and social outcomes, especially between the north and south of England (Agrawal and Phillips, 2020; Webb et al., 2022). Economic productivity as measured by Gross Value Added (GVA) per person is highest in London, 1.8 times the UK average in 2018 and 2.5 times the GVA per person in the North-East, the region with the lowest GVA (Agrawal and Phillips, 2020). In the first quarter of 2021, average weekly earnings were 24% higher in London and 10% higher in the South-East compared with the national average. In the North-East they were 15% lower (Office for National Statistics, 2022a). Differences in wealth are even more marked, with data from the Wealth and Assets Survey showing median household wealth in the period 2018-2020 was 60% higher than the national average in the South-East and 47% lower in the North-East (ONS, 2022b). Education outcomes, at both early years and GCSE, are lower in the North compared with the South (Webb et al., 2022) while life expectancy for both men and women is highest in London and lowest in the North-East (ONS, 2021a),

The country is also divided politically. Traditionally, political divisions have been along similar north-south lines as economic performance, with the economically less well-off and more working class North voting Labour and the richer, more middle-class South voting Conservative (Curtice, 1989). The 2016 Brexit referendum brought another political divide, that between London and the rest of England, to the fore. Whereas a majority of people in England (53%) voted to leave the European Union in May 2016, 60% of Londoners voted to remain. London's exceptionalism does not only apply to voting in the referendum, however. Labour has dominated the capital in recent elections, winning 48% of the vote at the 2019 General Election compared with 34% across England as a whole. Many of the same factors which underpinned London's pro-Brexit position, including a population which is younger and more highly educated than the rest of the country and contains a high proportion of non-UK nationals (Dunatchik and Smith, 2018), are also likely to influence attitudes and voting on domestic issues and potentially favour those parties advocating more left-wing, liberal positions.

The aim of this chapter is to examine whether these regional differences in economic outcomes and the demographic profile of residents result in regional differences in social and political values. The focus is on regional differences in England only. British Social Attitudes (BSA) can and has been used to analyse differences in political attitudes between England and the devolved nations, particularly Scotland (see, for example, Curtice and Ormston, 2011; Curtice and Montagu, 2018 as well as the chapter by Deeming in this report). However, sub-national regional differences have so far received less

attention. Two main possibilities for regional differences in values are explored. First, does the fact that the north of England continues to underperform economically relative to the south of England lead to regional differences in economic values? Are people in the North, who have lower incomes and are more likely to be dependent on state benefits, and who therefore have most to gain from income redistribution and social spending, more left-wing and more pro-welfare than people in the South? Second, do the regional differences observed in attitudes towards Brexit also apply to other issues? Analysis of attitudes at the individual level points to an association between voting to remain in the Brexit referendum and holding more liberal social attitudes (Surridge, 2021) and being more pro-welfare (Swales, 2016) – a trend which we explore in greater detail in our chapter on Culture Wars in this volume. Do we, therefore, also find that pro-Brexit London is more liberal and pro-welfare, compared with the rest of the country?

The chapter will first consider how and why we might expect such values to vary by region, given what we know about what determines values at the individual level. Having established where regional differences in attitudes are observed – and whether these are primarily to be found between the North and the South and/or between London and other regions – the chapter goes on to consider whether these differences are solely a function of the different social composition of the regions or whether, even after controlling for differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of the individuals who live in each region, area-based differences in attitudes persist. The final section of the chapter analyses the association between values and party identification and considers the implications of the regional differences in values observed for the fortunes of England's two main political parties.

Defining regions and regional effects

For the purposes of this chapter, England is divided into four high-level regions: London, the South of England (comprising NUTS1 regions South-East, South-West, and East of England), the Midlands (comprising NUTS1 regions East Midlands and West Midlands) and the North of England (comprising NUTS1 regions Yorkshire and Humber, the North-East, and the North-West). The 2021 BSA survey is particularly well-suited to conducting regional comparisons. One of the challenges of using BSA to conduct regional-level analysis in previous years has been its sample size. Typically, BSA collects data from around 3,000 respondents across Britain. The fact that the 2021 survey was conducted online made it possible to increase the sample size to 6,250 (5,455 in England), leading to a minimum regional sample size of 695 (in London). Conducting the survey online also removed the need for respondents to be clustered geographically, to make face-to-face fieldwork more efficient, and ensures an even spread of respondents within each region. While BSA 2021 provides sufficient cases for the headline analysis presented in this chapter, when it comes to exploring

the interrelationship between region, individual characteristics and attitudes, the sample sizes analysed here are further boosted by combining data from across the 2020 and 2021 surveys.¹

One of the aims of this chapter is to determine the extent to which any regional differences in values observed are the result of differences in the social make-up of the regions or whether the differences extend beyond that. A key reason we would expect to observe differences in attitudes between regions is because of differences in the types of people who live in an area. We know, for example, that people on lower incomes are more likely to hold more left-wing attitudes (see Table 1). Therefore, to the extent that Region A contains a higher proportion of people on low incomes than Region B, and people on low incomes in each region exhibit left-wing views, we would anticipate Region A as a whole to be more left-wing (a composition effect). However, we may also observe differences in attitudes between regions, even after taking account of the fact that Region A has a higher proportion of people on low incomes. This would be the case if, overall, people in Region A, not only those on low incomes but also those on middle or high incomes, were more likely than people in Region B to be left-wing (a contextual effect). There are several reasons why this might be. For example, people on middle and high incomes in Region A may develop more left-wing attitudes through a process of socialisation, that is because they are more likely than their counterparts in other areas to interact with and learn from the views of those on low incomes. Alternatively, people with particular attitudes may choose to live in an area where their attitudes predominate, regardless of their personal circumstances. Another possibility is that, by virtue of living in a more economically deprived area, those on middle or high incomes recognise the potential benefits to their local area of greater redistribution or more public spending, regardless of their own personal circumstances. A detailed exploration of the relative importance of composition vs. contextual effects in explaining any regional differences in attitudes observed is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, multivariate analysis will be used to isolate the independent impact of region on attitudes, after controlling for the characteristics of the people living there, to determine the extent to which there truly is a specific regional dimension to attitudes.

It is important to recognise the limitations of high-level regional analysis such as will be presented here and to be alert to the fact that regional comparisons can tell only part of the story about how where people live may affect their attitudes and behaviour. There are notable differences between individual regions within the South or North (the South-East for example outperforms the South-West economically). Perhaps most importantly it is necessary to recognise the importance of intra-region

¹ While there were some shifts in attitudes between 2020 and 2021 (across England as a whole, for example, fewer people (37%) were pro-welfare in 2021 compared with 2020 (42%)) the important point for the analysis in this chapter is that there is no evidence to suggest that the nature of any regional differences in attitudes changed between the two years.

differences (with London experiencing particularly high differences in economic outcomes across the region (Agrawal and Phillips 2020) and the fact that other geographic factors – such as whether an area is urban or rural, a coastal town or a central city – may be just as important as administrative boundaries, if not more so (Neal et al, 2021). Nevertheless, given the continued salience of high-level regions and terms such as the ‘north-south divide’ in political and popular discourse, it is of interest to examine how far regional differences matter.

Attitudes towards economic inequality

Whether someone is on the left or right economically – that is, the extent to which they believe that economic resources are unequally distributed and favour the redistribution of resources from the well-off to the less well-off, has long been an important cleavage in British political and social life and continues to be an important – though by no means the only – driver of support for the two main political parties (Curtice and Simpson, 2018). Traditionally, left-wing attitudes have been more prevalent among the ‘have nots’ within society, that is, those benefiting the least from the status quo of a free market economy and who stand to gain most from redistribution (Curtice, 1989, 1992). On BSA, left-right ideology is measured using a five-point additive scale based on responses to five agree-disagree items, including whether the respondent thinks the government should redistribute income to the better off, whether ordinary working people get their fair share of the nation’s wealth and whether there is one law for the rich and one for the poor (see Technical details for a full explanation of how the scale is derived). Individuals scoring less than 2.5 on the five-point scale (where most left-wing=1 and most right-wing=5) are judged to be on the left, those scoring between 2.5 and 3.5 are neither left nor right, and those scoring more than 3.5 are judged to be on the right.² Table 1 shows the proportion of respondents assigned to be left, right and neither on the scale, broken down by three measures of economic position: occupational class, self-reported income and housing tenure. It suggests that differences between groups should not be overstated; a majority of the public is judged to be on the left regardless of their personal circumstances. Nevertheless, those on lower incomes, in routine manual jobs and who do not own their own homes, are more likely to be on the left ideologically. For example, 64% of renters are on the left in 2021, compared with 56% of owner-occupiers.

² This chapter categorises respondents as left/right, pro-welfare/anti-welfare and so on, based on their score on the relevant attitude scales and compares the proportion of respondents in each category across regions. The alternative, comparing the mean score on each of the three attitude scales across regions, produces similar findings.

Table 1 Position on left-right scale by socio-economic characteristics

		Left (score <2.5 on left-right scale)	Neither (score 2.5 to 3.5 on left-right scale)	Right (score >3.5 on left-right scale)	<i>Unweighted base</i>
All	%	58	31	10	5455
Managerial/ professional occupations	%	58	31	11	3351
(semi)-routine manual occupations	%	64	29	6	946
Renters	%	64	30	5	1568
Home owners	%	56	31	13	3887
Household income > £4,351 per month	%	56	29	15	1237
Household income < £1,410 per month	%	65	29	5	799

To the extent that economic prosperity varies not only between individuals but also across regions, we might similarly expect to see regional differences in attitudes, with people in the less affluent North – who stand to benefit more from a redistribution of the nation’s wealth – more likely to be on the left ideologically compared with the more affluent South. Previous analysis of BSA data from the 1980s found such a pattern, with clear regional differences in attitudes along the left-right dimension, consistent with the differing economic fortunes of the regions (Curtice 1989, 1992). The introduction to this chapter discussed how the South, and London in particular, continues to outperform the North economically. Drawing on data from sources external to BSA, the figures in Table 2 demonstrate that household incomes are lower in the North compared with the South, the North has a lower proportion of people in managerial and professional occupations (32% versus 40%) and a lower proportion of owner occupiers (64% versus 70%). Do we, therefore, continue to see a north-south divide in left-right attitudes consistent with these socio-economic differences?

Table 2 Socio-economic composition of the population, by region

	London	South	Midlands	North	All
Proportion managerial/professional occupations+	44%	40%	32%	32%	37%
Proportion owner occupiers (2020/21)++	50%	70%	66%	64%	65%
Annual gross disposable household income+++	£30,256	£23,092	£18,478	£18,114	£21,978
Proportion 16-64 year olds educated to NVQ Level 4 or above+	59%	43%	37%	38%	43%

+Source: Annual Population Survey, 2021 (ONS 2022c)

++Source: English Housing Survey 2019/20 (DLUHC, 2021)

+++Source: ONS (2021b)

Table 3 shows how the proportion of respondents on the left and right ideologically varies across England by region. There is some evidence of a north-south divide in attitudes with, for example, 61% of people in the North on the left of the scale compared with 56% of people in the South (and 57% in the Midlands). However, the extent of the north-south gap in attitudes should not be overstated; a majority of people in every region in England are on the left and all regions have a similar proportion of people on the right of the ideological spectrum (between 9% and 11%). The north-south divide in attitudes also appears to have narrowed since the last time BSA examined regional differences in attitudes in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Curtice (1992), for example, found that, over the period 1989-1991, 71% of people in the North agreed with the statement, “Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation’s wealth”, compared with 59% in the South, a 12 percentage point north-south gap. In 2021, the equivalent figures are 68% in the North and 64% in the South, a four-point gap. Exploring the reasons behind the narrowing of the north-south gap in left-right attitudes is beyond the scope of this chapter, but one important factor is likely to be the shift to the right which occurred among Labour Party supporters (who are disproportionately to be found in the north of England) after New Labour came to power in 1997 (see, for example, Curtice, 2010).

Table 3 also shows that London is just as left-wing as the north, with a similar gap in attitudes between London (62% left) and the rest of the South, compared with the North versus the South. Why is London more left-wing than the rest of the south of England? One possible explanation lies in the fact that, while productivity and incomes are higher in London, the capital does not outperform the rest of the country on all measures of economic security. In particular, the capital contains a relatively low proportion of home owners (50%, compared with 65% in England overall) and, as Table 1 demonstrated, renters tend to be more left-wing. Another possible explanation for London being more in favour of redistribution than we might otherwise expect, given that region’s strong economic performance, is the higher

proportion of people in the capital with higher education. As shown in Table 2, over half of Londoners (59%) are qualified to at least NVQ Level 4 (at least some higher education beyond A-level or their equivalent). Higher education is, in turn, associated with left-wing attitudes; in 2021, 62% of those educated to degree level or above were on the left of the left-right scale, compared with 57% of non-graduates. Given that London has a higher proportion of graduates, it therefore makes sense that a higher proportion of people in the capital are classed as left-wing.

Table 3 Position on left-right scale, by region

	London	South	Midlands	North	All
Position on left-right scale	%	%	%	%	%
Left (score <2.5)	62	56	57	61	58
Neither (score 2.5 – 3.5)	28	33	32	29	31
Right (score > 3.5)	9	11	10	9	10
<i>Unweighted base</i>	695	2198	1063	1499	5455

Having established some, albeit relatively small, regional differences in left-right attitudes, the next step is to understand whether these differences are driven solely, or primarily, by differences in the regions' socio-economic composition, that is, the higher proportion of high earners and home owners in the South, the higher proportion of manual workers in the North, and the higher proportion of people with higher education in London. Multivariate analysis was used to isolate the impact of region on attitudes from the effect of socio-demographic characteristics. Table 4 presents the odds ratio for someone in the south being on the left, compared with someone in London, the Midlands or the North, that is how many times higher the odds of someone in each of these regions being left-wing are, compared with the odds of someone in the South being left-wing. The first row in the table shows these odds ratios before controlling for the differences in the demographic composition of the regions and confirms the finding in Table 3 that people in the North and London have higher odds than people in the South of being on the left (around 1.2 times higher). The second line in the table shows the odds ratios after controlling for socio-economic position (occupational class, household income, tenure, employment status and education (see the appendix to this chapter for the full results from this model)). Once these characteristics are controlled for, regional differences in left-right attitudes are no longer statistically significant; the relatively small regional attitude gap on the left-right dimension is largely explained by differences in the socio-economic composition of the regions.

Table 4 Independent impact of region on proportion of respondents classed as left-wing: odds ratios from logistic regression where left=1 neither/right=0+

	London vs South	Midlands vs South	North vs South
No socio-demographic controls	1.24*	1.00	1.20*
With socio-demographic controls	1.15	0.95	1.15
<i>Unweighted base</i>	7123	7123	7123

*=significant at 95% level

+The full regression model is available in the appendix to this chapter

Attitudes towards welfare spending

Another important attitudinal dimension captured by BSA is support for welfare spending. Social support, including pensions, is one of the largest items of government expenditure – accounting for £302 billion in 2020/21 (HM Treasury, 2021) – and is likely to become an increasingly salient policy issue for a government facing the twin economic pressures of low growth and rising living costs. Welfarism is measured using a five-point additive scale based on responses to eight agree-disagree items including whether the respondent thinks the government should spend more on welfare and whether they think welfare spending discourages people from standing on their own two feet (see Technical details for a full explanation of how the scale is derived). Individuals scoring less than 2.5 on the five-point scale (where 1=most pro-welfare) are judged to be pro-welfare, those scoring between 2.5 and 3.5 are judged to be neither pro nor anti and those scoring above 3.5 are classed as anti-welfare.

Support for welfarism is expected to vary by region in similar ways to left-right values, with support for welfare spending higher in the north of England and London. We might expect the North, which stands to gain the most from welfare spending due to being less affluent than the South, to be more pro-welfare for reasons of self-interest. Between 19% and 21% of household income in the North comes from state support compared with between 11% and 15% in southern regions (DWP, 2022). In September 2021, the claimant count (an indicator of the proportion of the working-age population claiming benefits for unemployment) was 5.5% in the north of England (and 6.4% in London, compared with 3.9% in the South (ONS, 2022d). Table 5 shows that, at the individual level, people are a little less likely to be anti-welfare if they are currently in receipt of state benefits, compared with if they are not (39% vs 35%).³ Households with the

³ Anti-welfare attitudes, as captured in the welfarism scale, usually centre around means-tested benefits for the working-age population. Ideally, therefore we would look at people's position on the welfarism scale by whether they are in receipt of any of these specific benefits. The BSA question on benefit receipt asks whether the respondent is in receipt of any of a wide range of state benefits including the state pension and Pension Credit but does not record which specific benefits are received. However, if analysis is restricted to the working age population, who will not be in receipt of the state pension, then the findings are very similar to those presented above. 40% of those under 65 in receipt of state benefits are pro-welfare, compared with 35% of those not in receipt of benefits.

lowest income are also the least likely to be anti-welfare and the most likely to be pro-welfare. Thirteen per cent of households earning less than £1,410 per month are anti-welfare, compared with 20% of households earning more than £4,135 per month.

Table 5 Position on welfarism scale by socio-demographic characteristics

		Pro-welfare	Neither	Anti-welfare	
		(score <2.5 on welfarism scale)	(score 2.5 – 3.5 on welfarism scale)	(score >3.5 on welfarism scale)	<i>Unweighted base</i>
All	%	37	44	18	5455
In receipt of benefits	%	39	45	14	2299
Not in receipt of benefits	%	35	43	21	3099
Household income < £1,410 per month	%	40	46	13	799
Household income > £4,351 per month	%	42	37	20	1237
18-24	%	48	40	10	304
25-34	%	37	42	21	862
35-54	%	32	43	23	1751
55+	%	37	47	15	2530
Degree	%	51	35	13	2569
No degree	%	29	49	21	2886

That said, Table 5 also shows that economic circumstances appear to make less of a difference to attitudes to welfare than other factors such as age and education, however. Support for welfarism is lowest among the 35-55 age group (the age group least likely to be dependent on benefits) while young people aged 18-24 are especially likely to be pro-welfare (48%). Education appears to have a particularly important influence on attitudes; around half of people educated to degree level or above (51%) are pro-welfare, compared with just over a quarter (29%) of those without a degree. This, in turn, provides a reason to expect London to be more pro-welfare than other regions. As shown in Table 2, the population in London is better qualified than elsewhere in England. It is also younger with 20% of its population aged 20-29, compared with 16% across England as a whole (ONS, 2022e).

Table 6 confirms that, as expected, London is more pro-welfare than the rest of the country. Forty-seven per cent of people in London are pro-welfare, compared with 37% in England overall. However, there is no clear evidence of a north-south gap in attitudes to welfare; 37% of those in the North are classed as pro-welfare, compared with 35% in the South. In fact, it is people in the Midlands who appear to be the least pro-welfare (30%), something that warrants further investigation.

The fact that the North is not more pro-welfare, despite being the region which stands to gain most from social spending, lends support to other research on attitudes to welfarism which suggests that personal economic circumstances and self-interest may be less important than ideology in explaining attitudes to welfare (Sefton, 2005; Clery, 2016).

As with left-right attitudes, the attitude gap between North and South has narrowed from what was observed the last time regional differences in attitudes were examined using BSA data. Although the difference in attitudes to welfare was less marked than the north-south gap in left-right attitudes, examining data from 1989-91, Curtice (1989) found evidence that people in the North were somewhat more pro-welfare than those in the South. For example, 31% in the South agreed that, “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would stand on their own two feet”, compared with 26% in the North. People in both regions are now more likely than they were to agree with this statement (40% in the South and 38% in the North – a difference that is no longer statistically significant), with attitudes in the North having shifted further towards being anti-welfare so that they are now closer to attitudes in the South.

Table 6 Position on welfarism scale, by region

	London	South	Midlands	North	All
Position on welfarism scale	%	%	%	%	%
Pro-welfare (score <2.5)	47	35	30	37	37
Neither (score 2.5 – 3.5)	36	46	49	43	44
Anti-welfare (score > 3.5)	15	18	21	18	18
<i>Unweighted base</i>	695	2198	1063	1499	5455

It might be that the relatively pro-welfare attitudes in London can be explained by differences in the educational composition of its population, compared with those of other regions. The findings in Table 7, which show the breakdown of attitudes by region and education, suggest this is not the case. The attitude gap between London and other regions is not as large once education is taken into account but it is still present. Regardless of their education, people in London are more likely to be pro-welfare (58% of graduates and 34% of non-graduates), compared with the rest of the country (49% and 28%).

Table 7 Proportion pro-welfare, by education and region

	London	Rest of England	All
% pro-welfare			
Degree	58	49	51
<i>Unweighted base</i>	461	2108	2569
No degree	34	28	29
<i>Unweighted base</i>	234	2652	2886
All	47	35	37
<i>Unweighted base</i>	695	4760	5455

Multivariate analysis confirms that the pro-welfare bias in London persists after controlling for differences in the socio-demographic composition of the regions (education, age, benefit receipt and income). The odds of someone in London being pro-welfare remain significantly higher than the equivalent person living elsewhere in the country (1.4 times higher).⁴ There are several reasons why this might be the case, though testing these explanations is beyond the scope of this chapter. There may be a process of socialisation at work whereby the more pro-welfare attitudes of London's high concentration of graduates come to be passed on to and shared by non-graduates. It is also possible that the relatively high levels of within-region inequality in London (Agrawal and Phillips, 2020) mean that the population in London is aware of and supportive of the demand for social support, regardless of their own personal circumstances. A third possibility is that the greater geographic mobility of the population in the capital, which results in people not living so close to family-based support networks, may make them more supportive of state support.

Liberal-authoritarian attitudes

Moving away from a focus on regional differences in economic values, the chapter now turns to consider differences in attitudes along the other main value dimension in British politics, liberal-authoritarianism (Evans et al., 1996). This value dimension captures support for traditional values and law and order. BSA measures attitudes on the liberal-authoritarian dimension using a five-point additive scale based on responses to six agree-disagree items, including whether people who break the law should be given stiffer sentences and whether young people today don't have enough respect for traditional values. Individuals scoring less than 2.5 on the five-point scale (where 1 =

⁴ Given the headline findings point to the main regional difference being between London vs. the rest of England, only the findings for that model are presented here (see chapter Appendix). Although the results are not shown, multivariate analysis was also run to test whether a 'welfare gap' opened up between North and South after controlling for other factors. There was no evidence of this.

most liberal) are judged to be liberal, individuals scoring between 2.5 and 3.5 classed as neither liberal nor authoritarian and those scoring more than 3.5 classed as authoritarian.

There is evidence of an association, at the individual level, between attitudes to Europe and attitudes on the liberal-authoritarian dimension, with Leavers tending towards the more authoritarian end of the value scale and Remainers towards the more liberal end (SurrIDGE, 2021) – a pattern which we consider in greater detail in our chapter on Culture Wars in this volume. We might, therefore, expect to observe similar regional differences in attitudes along the liberal-authoritarian dimension as was observed during the Brexit referendum. In particular, we might anticipate that pro-Brexit London is more liberal compared with the rest of the country. North-south differences in liberal-authoritarian attitudes are perhaps less likely but, to the extent that the North continues to be somewhat more pro-Brexit than the South (50% in the North say they would vote remain if the EU referendum were held today, compared with 55% in the South), we might also expect to find that the north of England is more authoritarian than the south.

One explanation for London being more pro-European, and a reason to expect it to be more liberal than the rest of the country, is that, as shown in the discussion on welfarism above, the capital's population is younger and better educated. Table 8 shows that, while people in all demographic groups are more likely to be classed as authoritarian rather than liberal, the proportion of people with liberal views is higher among younger age groups and among those with a university degree. Around twice as many 18-34 year olds as those aged 55+ are classed as liberal (33% versus 15%), while 36% of people with a degree are classed as liberal, compared with just 13% of those without a degree. Table 8 also demonstrates an association between national identity and liberal attitudes, with 45% of people who gave their national identity as European classed as liberal, compared with 17% of those who gave their identity as British (or one of its constituent nations).^{5,6} London, in turn, has a far higher proportion of, potentially more liberal, residents born outside of the UK (43%) compared with England as a whole (18%) (ONS, 2022c).

5 BSA does not ask respondents for their country of birth or citizenship, only self-reported identity. It is possible that some people who were born outside of the UK may consider themselves British whilst some people born in the UK and/or with British citizenship may have chosen to give their identity as European. This question is therefore not a direct corollary of the objective statistics which show that more people in London were born outside of the UK. The BSA data do show a lower proportion of people self-identifying as British in London compared with the rest of England.

6 People who gave their identity as English are somewhat less likely to be liberal (12%) compared with people who gave their identity as British (19%) but the main difference is between people who identify as British/English and those who identify as European.

Table 8 Position on liberal-authoritarian scale by socio-demographic characteristics

		Liberal	Neither	Authoritarian	<i>Unweighted base</i>
		(score <2.5 on lib-auth scale)	(score 2.5 - 3.5 on lib-auth scale)	(score > 3.5 on lib-auth scale)	
All	%	21	40	39	5455
Degree	%	36	42	21	2569
No degree	%	13	38	48	2886
18-34	%	33	43	23	1166
35-54	%	18	39	43	1751
55+	%	15	39	46	2530
British	%	17	40	43	4429
European	%	45	38	16	618
Non-European	%	32	46	22	338

Based on its socio-demographic composition, we would therefore expect London to be more liberal than the rest of England. Table 9 confirms that this is indeed the case. Around a third (34%) of Londoners are classed as liberal, compared with around one in five (21%) people in England overall. However, is the liberal bias of the capital solely the result of its socio-demographic composition or, as we found with attitudes towards welfarism, could the 'London effect' on attitudes extend beyond differences in the make-up of its population? Table 10 suggests that there is more at work than just London's population being younger or better educated. The attitude gap between London and other regions is found among all age groups and among people with and without a degree. Forty-seven per cent of 18-34 year olds in London are classed as liberal, compared with 30% in the rest of England. Older people are generally less liberal than younger people but are more likely to be liberal in London; 25% of Londoners aged 55+ are classed as liberal, compared with 13% of this age group elsewhere. Multivariate analysis confirms that the pro-liberal bias in London persists after controlling for differences in the socio-demographic composition of the regions (education, age, national identity). The odds of someone in London being classed as liberal remain significantly higher than an equivalent person living elsewhere in the country (1.7 times higher).

Could it be that we are not observing a 'London effect' per se but rather the fact that people living in urban areas are, in general, more liberal than those in rural areas? Whereas other regions have a mix of

urban and rural areas, Greater London is predominantly urban. Table 11 suggests that London is different from other urban areas, however.⁷ Only around one in five people in other urban areas are classed as liberal, compared with around a third in London. There are several reasons why this might be the case. It may be that living in the capital, surrounded by young, educated people from a range of countries, leads to Londoners having a more liberal outlook regardless of their own personal characteristics. There may also be a self-selection effect at work, with people with more liberal attitudes drawn to live in London by virtue of its diversity and liberal attitudes.

Table 9 Position on liberal-authoritarian scale, by region

	London	South	Midlands	North	All
Position on liberal-authoritarian scale	%	%	%	%	%
Liberal (score <2.5)	34	20	17	17	21
Neither (score 2.5 – 3.5)	36	41	39	40	40
Authoritarian (score > 3.5)	28	38	43	43	39
<i>Unweighted base</i>	695	2198	1063	1499	5455

Table 10 Proportion liberal, by education, age, nationality and region

	London	Rest of England	All
% liberal			
Degree	45	33	36
No degree	21	12	13
18-34	47	30	33
35-54	30	15	18
55+	25	13	15
British	31	15	17
European	48	44	45
Non-European	30	33	32
All	34	18	21

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

⁷ Urban areas are defined as those with populations of 10,000 or greater, per the classification schemes used by the ONS.

Table 11 Position on liberal-authoritarian scale, by urban rural

	London	Other urban	Rural
Position on liberal-authoritarian scale	%	%	%
Liberal (score <2.5)	34	19	17
Neither (score 2.5 – 3.5)	36	40	44
Authoritarian (score > 3.5)	28	41	39
<i>Unweighted base</i>	695	3618	1142

Meanwhile, Table 9 also demonstrates that there are no significant differences between regions other than London in the proportions of people who are classed as liberal. There is, however, some evidence of a north-south gap in the proportion of people who are classed as authoritarian, with 43% of people in the North classed as authoritarian, compared with 38% in the South. Furthermore, unlike the north-south gap in left-right attitudes, the authoritarian attitude gap between the North and the South persists after controlling for background characteristics (age, education, national identity and socio-economic circumstances). This suggests that there may be other factors, beyond differences in socio-demographics, behind the tendency for people in the North to hold more authoritarian attitudes. Further work would be needed to understand what these might be. However, given the association between attitudes to Brexit and libertarian-authoritarian values, one place to start would be to explore some of the factors posited to be behind the Brexit vote, including attitudes to immigration and wider economic discontent.

Regional differences in attitudes and party support

Having analysed the extent to which social values vary by region, the final section of this chapter considers the possible implications of these regional differences in values (or lack thereof) for the future fortunes of political parties in England. We consider the relationship between region, values and party identification, that is, the party to which the individual feels closest. Party identification provides a more stable measure of individual underlying affiliation with or loyalty to a political party, independent of how one may have voted in any one election. It allows us to explore, for example, whether some people's decision to switch from Labour to Conservative in 'red wall' constituencies in the 2019 general election might potentially lead to a longer term transfer of allegiance.

Table 12 illustrates that values continue to be important in determining support for the main political parties, with people who are left-wing, pro-welfare and/or liberal more likely to identify with the Labour Party and those who are not on the left, not pro-welfare and/or who are

authoritarian more likely to identify with the Conservative Party. For example, only 20% of people classed as being left-wing identify with the Conservative Party, compared with 71% of those classed as right-wing. Forty-eight percent of people classed as authoritarian identify with the Conservatives, compared with only eight per cent of those classed as liberal.

Table 12 Party identification, by ideological values

		Conservative	Labour	<i>Unweighted base</i>
All	%	32	33	5447
Left (score <2.5)	%	20	43	3166
Neither (score 2.5 – 3.5)	%	42	21	1664
Right (score > 3.5)	%	71	7	587
Pro-welfare (score <2.5)	%	14	52	2173
Neither (score 2.5 – 3.5)	%	40	25	2351
Anti-welfare (score >3.5)	%	49	14	887
Liberal (score <2.5)	%	8	52	1267
Neither (score 2.5 – 3.5)	%	30	33	2215
Authoritarian (score > 3.5)	%	48	22	1945

The strong association between values and party support and the evidence of a clear attitude gap between London and the rest of the country points to one reason why Labour has come to dominate elections in the capital. It also suggests that this is likely to remain the case, unless there is a significant shift in the parties' relative positions on the various value dimensions. At the same time, the weaker and cross-cutting evidence with regards to a north-south gap in attitudes (with the North being slightly more left-wing but also potentially more authoritarian and showing no difference from the South on welfarism) suggests that neither of the two main parties has the edge on values in those regions. This may go some way to explaining why the Conservatives were able to make some headway in traditional Labour 'red wall' seats in the 2019 election and may offer the possibility of further gains in the future.

Table 13 Party identification, by region

	London	South	Midlands	North	All
Party identification	%	%	%	%	%
Conservative	24	36	35	29	32
Labour	40	26	33	37	33
Liberal Democrat	9	10	5	5	8
Other	14	11	9	11	11
None	12	14	15	15	14
<i>Unweighted base</i>	695	2196	1060	1496	5447

A note of caution is needed, however. While the evidence for a north-south divide in attitudes is mixed, there remains stronger evidence of a north-south gap in party identification; underlying support for Labour is stronger in the North and support for the Conservatives correspondingly weaker (Table 13). Thirty-seven percent of people in the north of England identify with Labour, compared with 29% who regard themselves as Conservative. The position of the parties in the South is broadly reversed; 26% identify with Labour and 36% with the Conservatives. People in the North (and London) are less likely than those in the South who share their value positions, to identify with the Conservative Party (Table 14). For example, 18% of people in the North classed as left-wing identify with the Conservatives, compared with 24% of people in the South. Most notably, only 43% of people in the North classed as authoritarian support the Conservatives, well below the 53% figure in the South.

The greater tendency of people in the North to identify with Labour, despite their current values, suggests that party identification is sticky and slower to change than vote choice. Today's voters may have 'inherited' their party identification from their parents or formed the attachment early in their political lives at a time when, as Curtice's (1992) analysis of BSA in the late 1980s showed, the predominant values in the North were more left-wing and distinct from those in the South. The absence now of a strong ideological divide between the North and the South provides an opportunity for the Conservatives to make inroads with voters in the North. Gradually, as younger voters in the North come of political age at a time when the North is not so left-wing and pro-welfare as previously, they may start to form different party attachments. However, the Conservatives have not yet won the longer-term loyalty of former Labour voters in the North. If the party fails to deliver on economic and other electoral promise, voters may revert back to more traditional voting patterns at the next election.

Table 14 Conservative party identification by values and region

% Conservative identifiers	London	South	Midlands	North	England
Left	15	24	22	18	20
Right	68	69	75	72	71
Pro-welfare	11	15	19	12	14
Anti-welfare	41	53	48	49	49
Liberal	7	9	12	3	8
Authoritarian	44	53	47	43	48
All	24	36	35	29	32

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

Conclusions

Where you live in England matters. Economic fortunes vary across the regions, particularly between the North and the South, and people in different parts of the country experience different health, educational and other outcomes. The demographics of the local population also varies across regions, with London in particular standing out as younger, better educated and more diverse than the rest of the country. This chapter has examined the consequences of these economic and demographic differences for people's underlying social and political values – and whether these values also vary across regions. The answer, it turns out, is both yes and no depending on which parts of the country are compared.

Despite the continued economic divide between the north and south of England, which we had anticipated might lead to people in the North being more in favour of income redistribution and social support, there is little evidence from our latest survey of big differences in economic values between the two regions. People in the North are slightly more left-wing than people in the south of the country. However, the attitude gap is only five percentage points and is largely explained by differences in the socio-economic make-up of the two regions. People in the North do not appear to be inherently more left-wing than people the South. There is no significant difference between the two regions in the proportion of people who are pro-welfare. This lack of a north-south divide in economic values marks a significant shift from the situation in the 1980s and 1990s, when previous analysis of BSA data found clear evidence to suggest that people in the North were more left-wing. The shift to the right among Labour Party supporters (many of whom are located in the North) that occurred under New Labour during the 1990s and 2000s may provide some explanation for why values in the North are now closer to those in the South.

Some regional differences in attitudes do persist, however. Most notably London looks very different from the rest of the country. The

capital is both more pro-welfare and more liberal. This finding is consistent with other research showing an association between attitudes towards Brexit, on which Londoners voted differently from the majority of the country, and people's position on the liberal-authoritarian dimension. People in favour of remaining in Europe tend to be more liberal and pro-welfare. The attitude gap between London and other regions remains, even after controlling for the capital's demographic profile – irrespective of age, education or nationality, people in London are more liberal and pro-welfare than people in the rest of the country. London's pro-liberal bias is not simply capturing an urban-rural divide; it is significantly more liberal than other urban areas. There may be something about being a Londoner, either through choice or a process of socialisation, which leads people to hold different attitudes.

Both the lack of a north-south gap in economic values, coupled with the existence of a London vs the rest of England value divide, has potential implications for the regional fortunes of the two main political parties in England. There is a clear association between values and party identification with Labour identifiers tending to be more left-wing, pro-welfare and liberal and the reverse being the case for Conservative identifiers. Given London's distinctive stance on these dimensions, Labour's dominance in the capital in recent elections is likely to continue, unless there is a significant shift in the parties' relative positions on the main value dimensions. At the same time, the relative lack of a north-south gap in attitudes means that Labour's long-standing dominance in the north of England may not necessarily continue. At the moment, the North continues to identify more strongly with the Labour Party. However, that may well change if, in the absence of a clear ideological reason to continue choosing Labour, voters can be encouraged to shift allegiances and form new party identities. However, such a shift will take time. For the Conservative Party, delivering on its promise to level up the North may not be necessary to shift the underlying values of northern voters in its favour (this shift already being underway). In the short term though, they are likely to need to deliver on that commitment, along with other electoral promises, in order to gain and/or retain the support of previous northern Labour voters.

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Appendix

Table A.1 Unweighted bases for Table 10 - Proportion liberal, by education, age, nationality and region

	London	Rest of England	All
Degree	234	2652	2886
No degree	461	2108	2569
18-34	200	966	1166
35-55	259	1492	1751
55+	234	2296	2530
British	449	449	4429
European	144	144	618
Non-European	94	94	338
All	695	4760	5455

Table A.2 – Bases for Table 14 - Conservative Party identification by values and region

	London	South	Midlands	North	England
Left	433	1232	601	900	3166
Right	58	264	110	155	587
Pro-welfare	355	859	357	602	2173
Anti-welfare	85	354	194	254	887
Liberal	259	512	202	294	1267
Authoritarian	167	766	423	589	1945
All	695	2196	1060	1496	5447

Table A.3 Whether left-wing on left-right scale: Logistic regression

	Coefficient	Standard error	Odds Ratio	p value
Region (South)				
London	0.14	0.08	1.15	0.08
North	0.14	0.10	1.15	0.17
Midlands	-0.05	0.08	0.95	0.52
Education (no degree)				
Degree	**0.37	0.07	1.45	0.00
Tenure (Renter)				
Owner occupier	** -0.37	0.08	0.69	0.00
Employment status (not in paid work)				
In paid work	**0.16	0.06	1.17	0.01
Occupational class (routine manual)				
Managerial/professionals	** -0.29	0.09	0.75	0.00
Intermediate/small employers	** -0.34	0.10	0.71	0.00
Household income (>£4,351 per month)				
< £1,410 per month	**0.56	0.11	1.76	0.00
£1,411 to £2,150 per month	**0.38	0.09	1.47	0.00
£2,151 to £4,350 per month	**0.27	0.08	1.32	0.00
Constant	0.43			
R2 (adjusted)	0.04			
<i>Weighted base:</i>	<i>6,713</i>			
<i>Unweighted base:</i>	<i>7,123</i>			

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

Table A.4 Whether pro-welfare on welfarism scale: Logistic regression

	Coefficient	Standard error	Odds Ratio	p value
Region (Rest of England)				
London	**0.36	0.10	1.44	0.000
Education (no degree)				
Degree	**1.07	0.07	0.34	0.000
Age (55+)				
18-34	-0.10	0.09	0.91	0.268
35-54	** -0.38	0.07	0.68	0.000
Benefit status (not receiving benefits)				
Receiving state benefits	**0.32	0.07	1.38	0.000
Household income (>£4,351 per month)				
< £1,410 per month	0.01	0.11	1.01	0.916
£1,411 to £2,150 per month	*-0.22	0.09	0.80	0.014
£2,151 to £4,350 per month	** -0.22	0.08	0.81	0.008
Constant	0.64			
R2 (adjusted)	0.10			
<i>Weighted base:</i>	6,713			
<i>Unweighted base:</i>	7,123			

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

Table A.5 Whether liberal on liberal-authoritarianism scale: Logistic regression

	Coefficient	Standard error	Odds Ratio	p value
Region (Rest of England)				
London	**0.54	0.11	1.71	0.00
Education (no degree)				
Degree	**1.34	0.08	3.83	0.00
Age (55+)				
18-34	**0.81	0.10	2.25	0.00
35-54	-0.01	0.08	0.99	0.93
National identity (British)				
Other	**0.47	0.18	1.59	0.01
European	**1.08	0.11	2.94	0.00
Constant	-0.60			
R2 (adjusted)	0.21			
<i>Weighted base:</i>	<i>6,713</i>			
<i>Unweighted base:</i>	<i>7,123</i>			

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

Publication details

Butt, S., Clery, E. and Curtice, J.(eds.) (2022), British Social Attitudes: The 39th Report. London: National Centre for Social Research

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First published 2022

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