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Key findings

Britain's shifting identities and attitudes

In this year's British Social Attitudes report (BSA), we see a continuation of one of the most important trends in post-war history: the steady decline in religion and belief among the British public. This decline is not simply a private matter for individuals and families, but rather a trend with profound implications for our social norms as well as our public institutions.

Today, following decades of secularisation and social change linked to industrialisation and the rise of liberal democracy, we can see clearly not only a shift away from religious worldviews, but also the strengthening of confidence in science and technology, which not only permeate our day-to-day lives in practical ways, but also provide an alternative way of interpreting and understanding the world (Wilson, 2016). While trust in religious institutions is waning, trust in science and scientists is high. If there is indeed a crisis of trust in Britain today, it is far from being in evidence everywhere.

Since the 1960s, this secularisation, along with the women's and LGBT movements has brought about fundamental changes in our moral framework for sex and relationships, as well as a decline in traditional, religiously informed understandings of the proper role of men and women in society (Brown, 2012). Marriage has been transformed on all levels, with the institution now open to same-sex couples and no longer the only socially validated form of sexual relationship. Sexual morality is almost unrecognisable from its post-war starting point, with homosexuality and sex outside of marriage viewed resolutely through a liberal lens and even older generations and the religious shifting their views.

So, are we now a nation of secular, liberal rationalists, with beliefs, attitudes and behaviours driven by empiricism and logic?

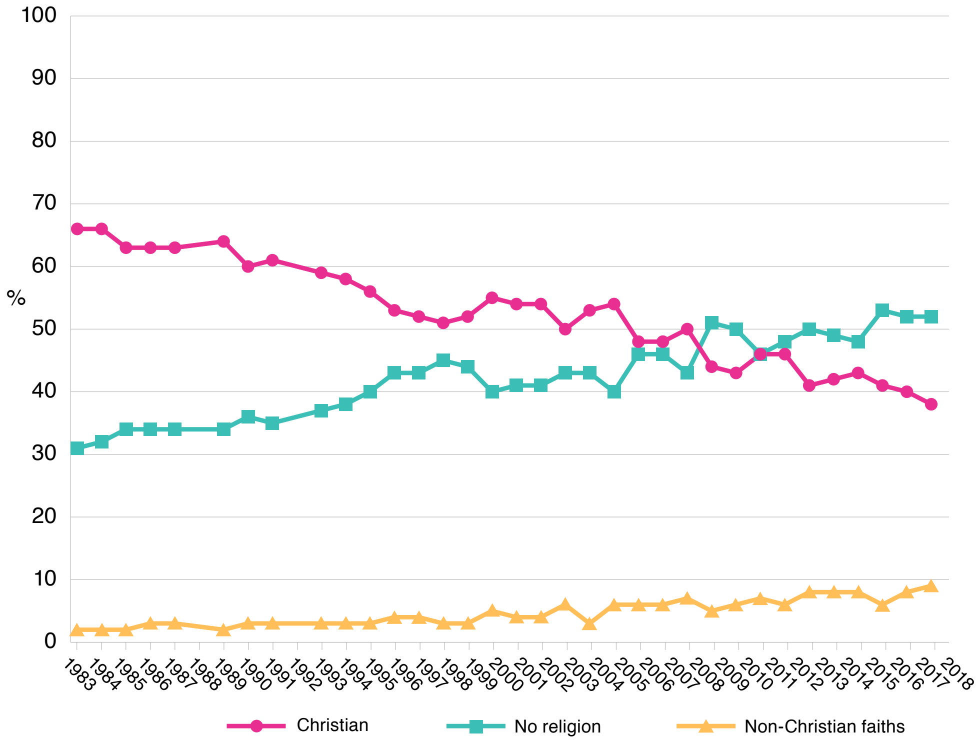
In 1983, when British Social Attitudes began measuring religious identity, two-thirds of the British public identified as Christian. This figure now stands at just over one third

Secularisation: a nation of non-believers?

Our report charts a continuation of a long-term decline in religious identity, religious observance, and religious belief in Britain.

In 1983, when British Social Attitudes began measuring religious identity, two-thirds of the British public identified as Christian. This figure now stands at just over one third (38%) with 52% of the public saying they do not regard themselves as belonging to any religion.

Figure 1 Religious identity, 1983–2018



This decline is generational – each successive cohort is less likely to identify as religious than the one before. Analysis by Voas and Crockett (2004) illustrates the mechanics of this decline: while two non-religious parents will successfully transmit their lack of religion to their children, two religious parents have just a 50/50 chance of passing on the faith.

Although, as our Religion chapter highlights, some minority faiths are growing, including non-Christian religions and Pentecostal Protestantism, this growth has been driven by migration from traditionally religious cultures in South Asia, West Africa and elsewhere. Even so, the British public as a whole is becoming steadily, perhaps inexorably, more secular.

Increasingly, the non-religious are confidently atheist, with a quarter of the public now stating "I do not believe in God" compared to just 10% in 1998

Today, more than half (52%) do not see themselves as belonging to any religion, and two-thirds never attend ordinary religious services. Increasingly, the non-religious are confidently atheist, with a quarter of the public now stating "I do not believe in God" compared to just 10% in 1998: the generational process of secularisation has continued 'past the point where people [just] stop identifying with a religion or going to church regularly' (see the Religion chapter in this report). There is also an element of polarisation; as it becomes more socially acceptable to be non-religious, so the centre ground disappears. Over the past two decades the proportion saying they are "very or extremely non-religious" has more than doubled (from 14% to 33%), while, at the same time, the proportion saying they are "very or extremely religious" has remained stable.

While we remain relatively tolerant of personal faith, in particular Christianity, we are sceptical about the role of religion in public life and wider society. Almost two-thirds (63%) agree with the idea that "looking around the world, religions bring more conflict than peace", while only 13% disagree.

Under half of us (46%) have some degree of confidence in Churches and religious organisations, while a fifth (21%) say they have "no confidence at all".

As our society has become more secular, the role of religious institutions and religious identities in determining our moral and social norms has weakened. Other worldviews, such as scientific rationalism, and liberal individualism now play a more significant part in British society, shaping how we understand the world, make decisions and relate to each other.

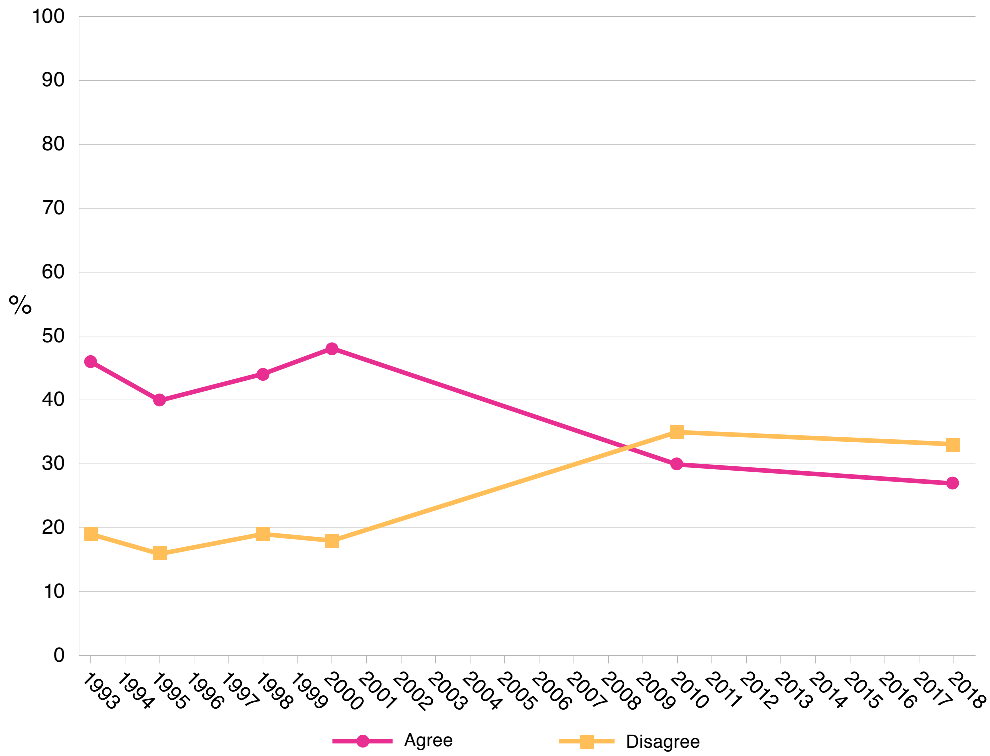
The rise of science and technology

The majority of the public believe that science and technology are a force for good both now and in the future

The majority of the public believe that science and technology are a force for good both now and in the future, and, in contrast to faith and religion, feel at ease with science and technology having an influence in both public and private spheres.

As we have become more secular and our lives have become increasingly interwoven with technology, the relative importance we place on science as a way of understanding the world has increased.

Figure 2 Agreement that "we believe too often in science, and not enough in feelings and faith", 1993-2018



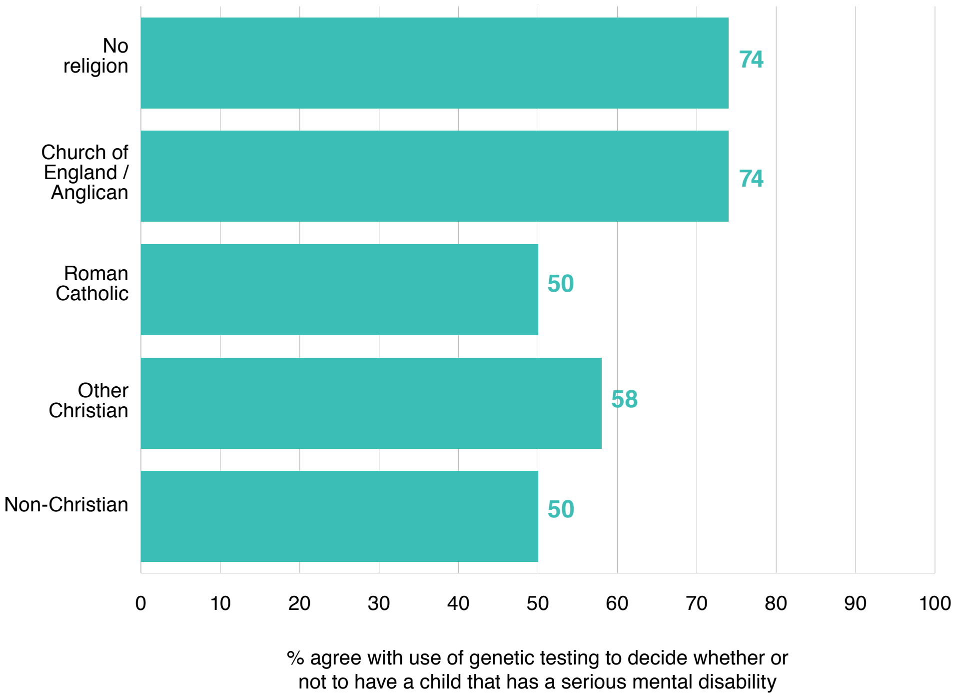
In 1993, just under half (46%) agreed that "we believe too often in science, and not enough in feelings and faith" while now just a quarter (27%) agree. This represents a significant strengthening of public support for science as a way of understanding and interpreting the world.

Trust in secular scientific institutions is very high, in sharp contrast with our low levels of confidence in churches and parliament. Eighty-five per cent trust university scientists "to do their work with the intention of benefitting the public", and 67% trust company scientists to do the same. Meanwhile, as we have seen, the majority view of the public is that "looking around the world, religion brings more conflict than peace". Science, in contrast, is seen far more positively. Three-quarters of the public (77%) agree that "science and technology are making our lives healthier, easier and more comfortable", while just a tenth (9%) disagree. Ninety-four per cent believe that medical research in particular will "lead to an improvement in the quality of life" over the coming decades. And while not everyone is confident that the benefits of science and technology are equally distributed, almost three-quarters (73%) believe medical research benefits everyone equally.

Where science and technology pose complex moral and ethical challenges, we see differences between the views of the religious and the non-religious

While our data clearly chart a trend of increasing secularisation and a high level of public support for scientific worldviews and institutions, religious identity remains relevant to public attitudes, including in the field of science and technology. As we have seen, although a majority either reject the idea that we believe too often in science as compared to feelings and faith (33%), or do not have a clear view either way (31% "neither agree nor disagree"), a substantial minority (27%) agree with this statement. Support is correlated with religious identity, and in particular religious attendance. Among people who attend religious services at least once a month, half (49%) agree that we place too much emphasis on science. And where science and technology pose complex moral and ethical challenges, we see differences between the views of the religious and the non-religious. For example, while the use of prenatal testing to identify serious conditions is widely supported, there are some significant differences associated with religious identity, albeit these are not always as marked as we might expect.

Figure 3 Agreement with parents' use of genetic tests, by religion



As Figure 3 shows, it is clear that faith influences the way in which many people respond to the ethics of pre-birth testing, something that is to be expected given the relationship between this procedure and abortion. With the exception of Anglicans, people who identify with a religion are less likely to say that parents should be allowed to use genetic testing to decide whether or not to have a child with a serious mental or physical disability. Even so, half of Roman Catholics support pre-birth testing, despite the Catholic Church's consistent and high-profile stance on abortion.

A high level of trust in and support for science and technology has characterised public attitudes to science in Britain for many years (Wellcome, 2009), and we can see that our sense of the relative social importance of science, feelings and faith is shifting in favour of a more scientific worldview. However, we should not assume a causal relationship: rather than a scientific worldview driving out religious ones, it seems likely that the rise of science in the post-war decades is a function of the increasing presence of science in our day-to-day lives. Moreover, we should not assume that a scientific worldview has become culturally dominant, given that 27% still feel we place too much emphasis on science over feelings and faith.

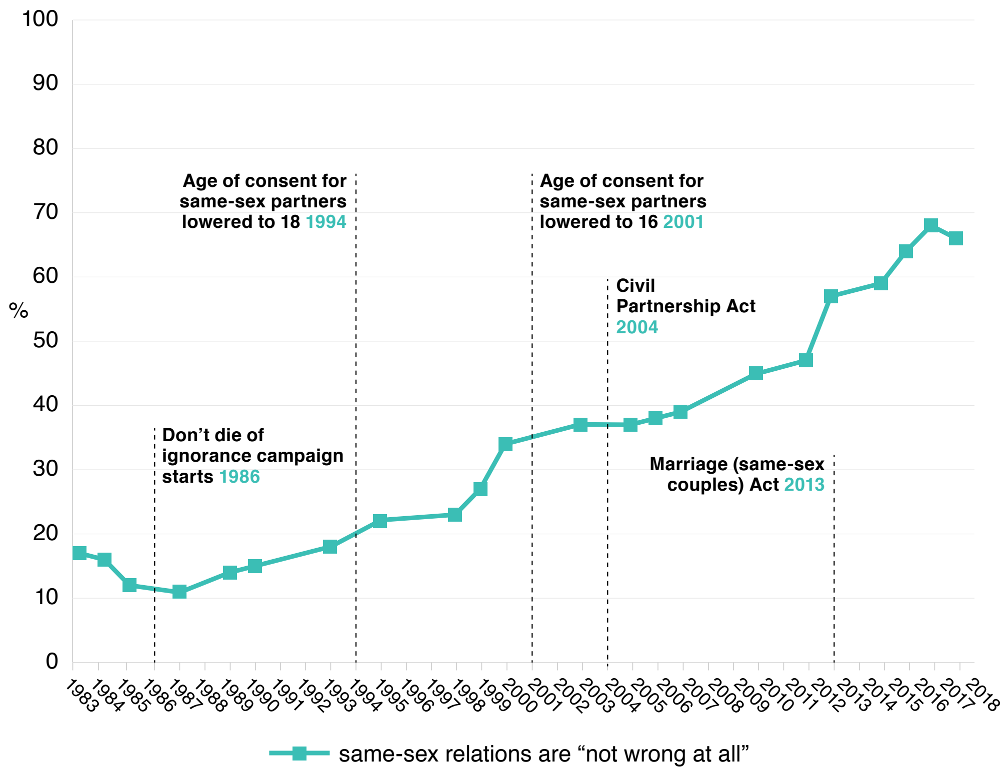
Since BSA began in 1983, we have tracked a marked liberalisation of attitudes to sex, sexuality and relationships, and gender identity

Sex, gender and relationships

Since BSA began in 1983, we have tracked a marked liberalisation of attitudes to sex, sexuality and relationships, and gender identity, all areas of personal and public morality that had long been dictated by religious, and in particular Christian worldviews.

The most striking example of this change is to be found in attitudes to homosexuality: two-thirds now say that sex between two adults of the same sex is "not wrong at all", an increase of almost 50 percentage points since the question was first asked in 1983.

Figure 4 Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are "not wrong at all", 1983-2018



This change in attitudes to homosexuality, and other areas of personal morality are not simply a consequence of younger generations with more liberal views replacing older, more religious generations as they die out: the views of both older generations and religious groups have also become more accepting.

As discussed in the Relationships and gender identity chapter of this report, the legal institution of marriage has been extended to include same-sex couples, while civil partnerships have been created and will soon be extended to opposite-sex couples. We are now actively discussing (or in the case of Scotland, implementing) legal protections for cohabiting couples of any sexual orientation. Religious marriage is now just one form of socially sanctioned and legally protected relationship, a position that would have been difficult to imagine in the 1950s.

Both public attitudes to and the law on sex and sexuality are now profoundly out of step with the doctrinal position of many established faiths in Britain

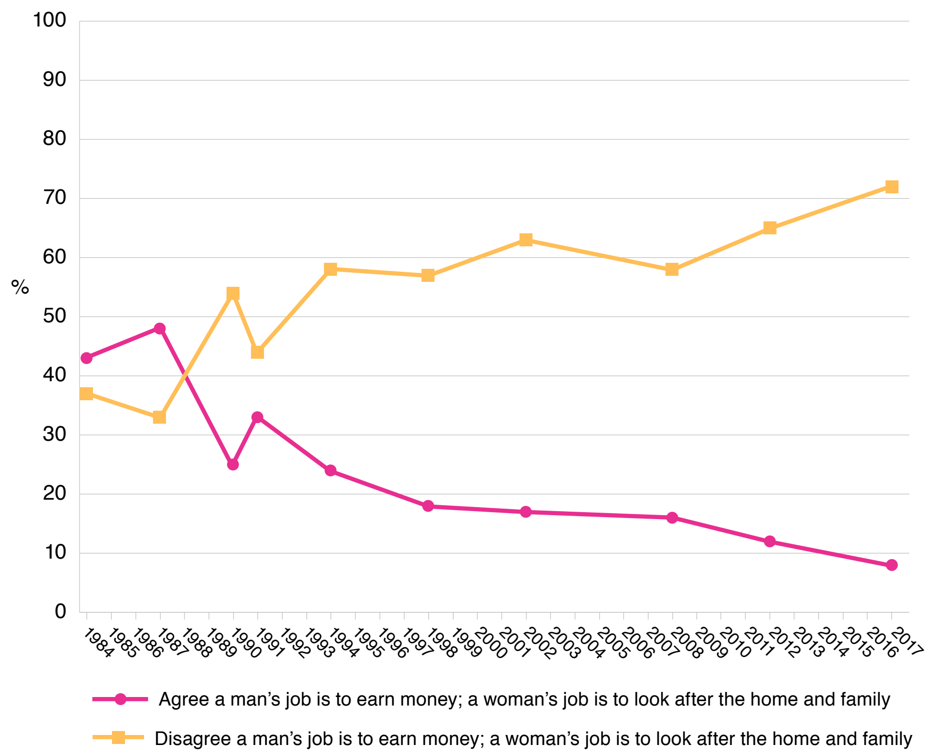
These changes mean that both public attitudes to and the law on sex and sexuality are now profoundly out of step with the doctrinal position of many established faiths in Britain, including that of most Christian denominations. For instance, the current position of the Church of England remains that 'abstinence is right for those that are not called to marriage', and 'homosexual practice [is] incompatible

Attitudes to gender roles have also changed significantly since the 1980s, three-quarters of the public reject the idea that women should be homemakers while men are breadwinners

with scripture' (Lambeth, 1998). In sharp contrast, we find that only 2% of those who identify as Anglican think premarital sex is "always wrong" and only one in ten believe sexual relations between adults of the same sex are "always wrong". Indeed, debate over doctrine on homosexuality in particular has threatened schism in the worldwide Anglican Communion for over two decades, an indication of the tension that can arise between social liberalism and traditional religiously-informed perspectives.

As well as attitudes to sexual relationships, attitudes to gender roles have also changed significantly since the 1980s. As highlighted by Attar Taylor and Scott in the 35th Report (2018), three-quarters of the public reject the idea that women should be homemakers while men are breadwinners (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Views on traditional gender roles, 1984-2017



Not only do we clearly see women as having a rightful place outside of the home, we are also unlikely to see particular roles as being men's or women's work. The majority of the public think that men and women are "equally suited" to working in a wide range of roles, including doctor, councillor, and MP, although engineering and primary school teaching are still seen as somewhat gendered: around two in ten (19%) consider men better suited to being an engineer while a similar proportion (18%) consider women better suited to primary school teaching.

As we have seen with public attitudes to science, it would be wrong to interpret this as simply a triumph of liberal individualism over religious worldviews. While religious identity and attendance is indeed declining, the views of the religious population remain distinct in important ways. For example, while almost three-quarters of the non-believing public (73%) support opposite-sex civil partnerships, religious people are less likely to feel supportive: just one third (34%) of those who identify as having a non-Christian faith agree with such partnerships, along with 67% of people who identify with the Church of England, 59% of Roman Catholics and 58% of 'other Christians'.

We may live in a world where public morality in the sphere of sex and relationships is no longer automatically linked to Christian teachings, but it is a mistake to assume this means that such questions are wholly settled. As we see from this year's data, both atheism and (to a lesser degree) some religious identities are becoming more concentrated, giving rise to the potential for significant contention. We can see this being played out in the current debate about the 'No Outsiders' equalities programme for primary age children which includes LGBT characters and has led to sustained and high profile protests by religious groups centred on Anderton Park School in Birmingham. Religious faith may have become less popular among the British public, but it would be a mistake to assume it will therefore be less prominent in our public conversations, particularly when it comes to matters of sex and relationships.

The role of political identity in shaping attitudes

While there has clearly been a decline in religious identity and an associated trend towards a more secular and socially liberal culture, we are not yet a nation of rational actors, weighing our every thought and choice through the lens of scientific and liberal principles. The identities that shape our views may be changing, but this does not imply that the relationship between identity and political and social attitudes is any less significant.

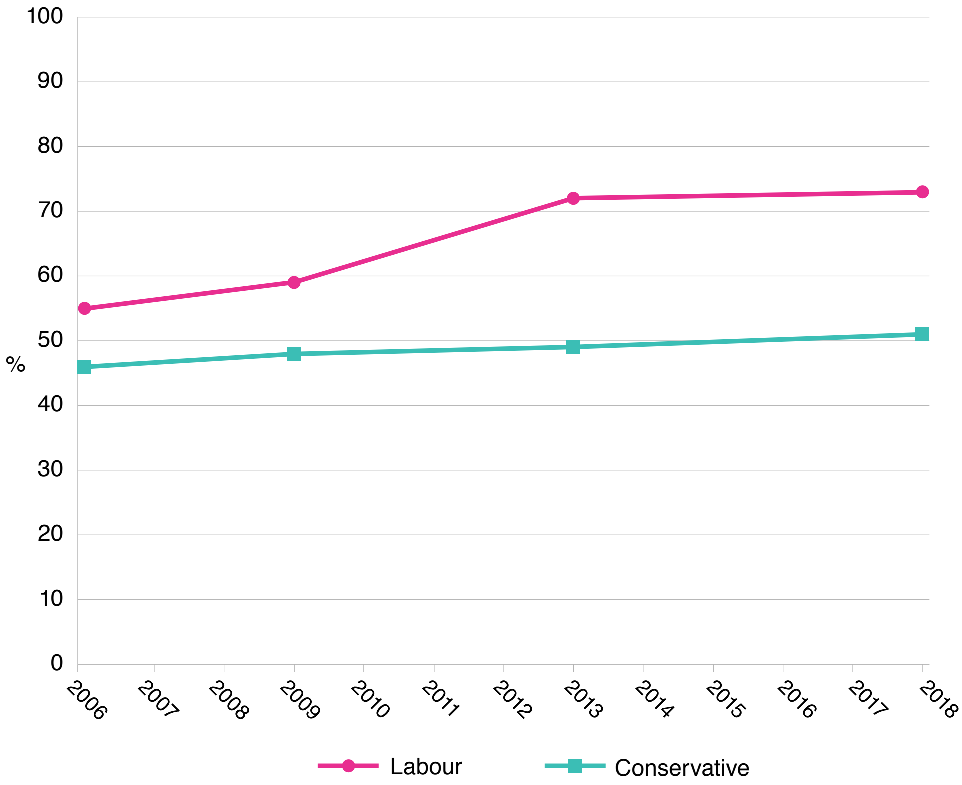
We have already seen that both religious and non-religious identities are related to attitudes. Given the increasing prevalence of confident atheism and the often sharp distinctions we observe between faith groups, it seems likely that a range of religious and non-religious worldviews will continue to have a considerable influence on public attitudes as well as public debate and policy for decades to come.

In this year's report we can also see the continuing relevance of political identity. Like religious belief, identification with traditional political parties has declined over recent decades. In 1987, when we first asked this question on BSA, 44% described themselves as a "fairly strong" or "very strong" identifier with a political party, while today just over a third (35%) identify in this way. The basis of party-political identification has also changed, with the relationship between social class and party weakening, and other factors such as age, education and degree of liberalism becoming more significant (Curtice and Simpson, 2018).

Party identification continues to have a strong relationship with a wide range of political and social attitudes

Nonetheless, party identification continues to have a strong relationship with a wide range of political and social attitudes, illustrated in this year's survey by attitudes to poverty. Since 2006, the view that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain has been rising. Labour Party supporters are significantly more likely than Conservative Party supporters to believe that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain (see Figure 6), as well as that the poverty level has been rising and will continue to rise in the future.

Figure 6 Perception that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain, by political party support, 2006-2018



The relationship between party identity and attitudes to poverty is not fixed. In the past Labour and Conservative supporters largely agreed about what constitutes poverty, but in this year's survey we can see a significant difference between the two groups. Labour supporters now are far more likely than Conservative supporters to take a broad view of poverty. More than one third (36%) of Labour supporters, but only one fifth (20%) of Conservatives, now support the idea that people are in poverty when they have "enough to buy the things they really need, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted". Most of the increase in support for this view among Labour party supporters occurred after 2013 and, while we cannot pinpoint the precise timing of the change, might be viewed as a consequence of the shift in policy and discourse after the election of Jeremy Corbyn in 2015. This suggests that party identity may indeed be capable of shaping wider social attitudes: as the 'voice' of the party shifts, so does the public debate, and ultimately the views of the party's supporters.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the power of identity in modern Britain has been the emergence of 'Leaver' and 'Remainer' as a new political and social fault line

Finally, perhaps the most striking illustration of the power of identity in modern Britain has been the emergence of 'Leaver' and 'Remainer' as a new political and social fault line. These identities, which did not exist prior to the 2016 referendum, now command significantly stronger allegiance than traditional political parties, with three-quarters of the public (74%) describing themselves as having a "fairly strong" (34%) or "very strong" (40%) identification with either Leave or Remain, and just 12% who do not identify with either.

Public attitudes towards the next steps in the Brexit process will not be determined by a rational weighing of data on the economic and social consequences of the different possible relationships that Britain might have with the EU. Rather, people will look at the options through the partisan prism of these new identities, and will be influenced by the ability of traditional political parties to speak to them, something that has been graphically illustrated by the emergence of the Brexit Party as a new and important force in politics. Led by former UKIP leader Nigel Farage and launched on April 12th 2019, just six weeks later the Brexit Party secured 32% of the vote in the European elections. This success, along with a resurgence of support for the Liberal Democrats and increased support for the Green Party has led to widespread discussion of the idea that we are seeing a more fundamental realignment of British politics (Curtice, 2019), driven by the strength of these new political identities.

Conclusions

Looking at this year's data on religion and belief, science, sex and gender, it is tempting to argue that we have become a secular nation, dominated by scientific rationalism and the principles of social liberalism. But as ever, BSA does not tell a singular or a simple story. Religion may be declining, but it is also diversifying and deepening, as some believers, like non-believers, become more committed to their worldviews. This means a world in which there may be significant tension between the political and social attitudes of the religious and non-religious, meaning faith is likely to remain an important part of our national conversation.

Meanwhile, it is clear that our identities continue to matter profoundly, and in some arenas, perhaps particularly the political, these identities are changing in rapid and unpredictable ways. Today we may be a more secular, liberal and scientifically-minded society than we were in 1983 when BSA began, but this is by no stretch of the imagination all that we are.

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Appendix

Table A.1 Views on premarital sexual relations and sexual relations between adults of the same sex, among those who belong to Church of England/ Anglican faith

	Sexual relations between adults of the same sex	Premarital sex
	%	%
Always wrong	10	2
Mostly wrong	7	5
Sometimes wrong	8	8
Rarely wrong	10	8
Not wrong at all	58	74
Unweighted base	*460*	*460*

Base: All respondents who say they belong to the Church of England/Anglican

Table A.2 Views of traditional gender roles, 1984–2017

	1984	1987	1990	1991	1994
A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	43	48	25	33	24
Disagree	37	33	54	44	58
Unweighted base	*1562*	*1281*	*2430*	*1257*	*984*

	1998	2002	2008	2012	2017
A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	18	17	16	12	8
Disagree	57	63	58	65	72
Unweighted base	*807*	*1960*	*1986*	*950*	*2474*

Acknowledgements

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The ESRC continued to support the participation of Britain in the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), a collaboration whereby surveys in 42 countries administer an identical module of questions in order to facilitate comparative research. Some of the results are described in our Religion chapter.

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

The BSA survey is a team effort. The report editors could not do their job without the invaluable editorial support provided by BSA Senior Researchers, Laura Arrowsmith, Pete Dangerfield and Ian Montagu. We also thank Ian Simpson and Peter Cornick for their work on the management of the 2018 survey, and Laura Arnold for her project management support. The survey is heavily dependent on staff who organise and monitor fieldwork and compile and distribute the survey's extensive documentation, for which we would pay particular thanks to our colleagues in the National Centre for Social Research's operations office in Brentwood. Thanks are also due to the regional managers, field performance managers and field interviewers who are responsible for all the interviewing, and without whose efforts the survey would not happen at all. We are also grateful to Sue Corbett in our computing department who expertly translates our questions into a computer-assisted questionnaire, and to Jackie Palmer who has the unenviable task of editing, checking and documenting the data.

Finally, we must praise all the people who anonymously gave up their time to take part in one of our surveys over the last thirty-five years, not least those who participated in 2018. They are the cornerstone of this enterprise. We hope that some of them might come across this report and read about themselves and the story they tell of modern Britain with interest.

Religion

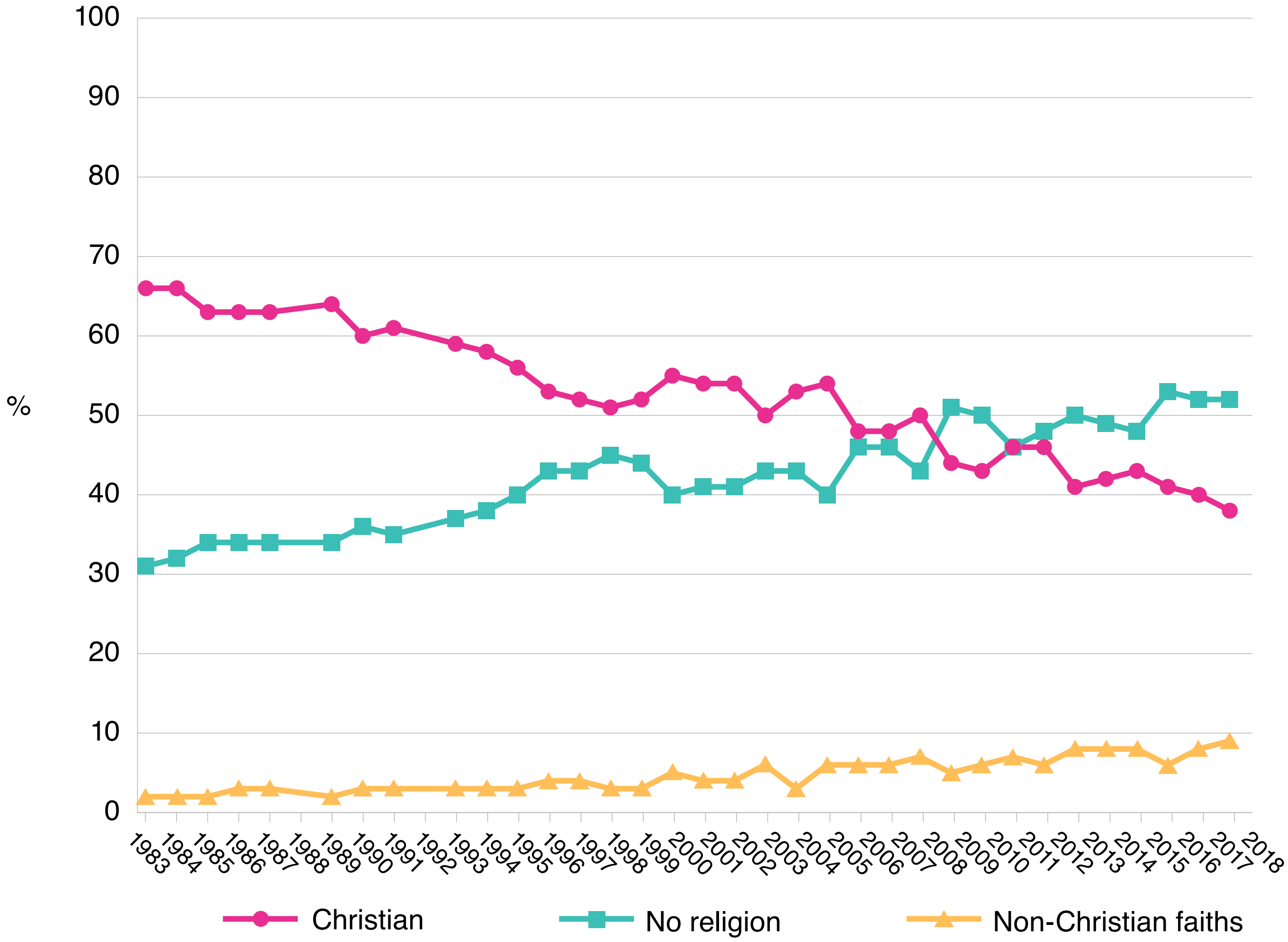
Identity, behaviour and belief over two decades

The past two decades have seen international conflict involving religion and domestic religious organisations putting themselves at odds with mainstream values. Against this backdrop, we compare religious identification, behaviour and belief among the British public. We find a dramatic decline in identification with Christian denominations, particularly the Church of England; a substantial increase in atheism and in self-description as “very” or “extremely” non-religious; and very low confidence in religious organisations, but tolerance of religious difference.

Spotlight

Over time, there has been a dramatic decline in the proportion of people who identify with Christianity along with a substantial increase in those with no religious affiliation, and a steady increase in those belonging to non-Christian faiths.

Religious identity, 1983–2018



Overview

Rise of the ‘nones’

Most of the shift in the religious profile of the nation has been towards non-affiliation, with 52% of the public now saying they do not regard themselves as belonging to any religion.

- Of these, most were simply not brought up with a religion, with a smaller minority having lost a childhood faith.
- Those who do not regard themselves as belonging to a religion are increasingly secular, that is, likely to say they are “very” or “extremely” unreligious.
- The number of people with no religion, who were not brought up in one, has increased from 11% in 1998 to 23% in 2018.

Consolidation of attendance

Two-thirds (66%) of people in Britain never attend religious services, apart from special occasions such as weddings, funerals and baptisms.

- The proportion that report they attend religious services less than monthly has decreased.
- The proportion that report they attend at least weekly, or less often but at least monthly, has remained stable – at around 11% and 7% respectively.

Little time for religion, but prepared to be tolerant

Most people show little enthusiasm for institutionalised religion, although there is evidence that the public are, in general, prepared to be tolerant of the faith of others.

- Almost two-thirds (63%) believe religions bring more conflict than peace.
- Under half (46%) have some or more confidence in churches and religious organisations, with 21% expressing “no confidence at all”.
- Most people have a positive, or at least tolerant view, of members of other religious groups, but have more reservations about extremism.

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Introduction

It is widely accepted that various social changes associated with industrialisation, the rise of liberal democracy, and science and technology, have reduced the power, popularity and persuasiveness of Christianity in the West (Bruce, 2011). Precisely when one dates the start of decline depends on which facets of religiosity one chooses and how one measures them. In Britain, church attendance has declined steadily since at least 1851, when a government count showed about half the population in church on a particular Sunday. The figure derived from recent clergy counts is around 6% (Brierley, 2017). In 1900 church membership was around 25%; it is now less than 10%. In 1900 more than half the age-relevant population attended Sunday schools; now it is less than 4%. Similar declines are visible in the use of religious offices to mark rites of passage. In the nineteenth century, around 90% of Scottish weddings were religious; in 2017 the figure was 30% and in 2012 there were more humanist than Catholic weddings. Before the Second World War, the Church of England was baptising three-quarters of the English population; the figure now is 15% (Wilson, 2016; Bruce, 2019).

Critics of the secularisation thesis have tried to counter this evidence in various ways. It is certainly true that migration to Britain of people from traditionally religious cultures in South Asia, West Africa and elsewhere has produced growth in non-Christian faiths, as well as in Pentecostal Protestantism. However, subsequent growth in charismatic and independent evangelical churches has not kept up with general population increase. Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2004) argued that contemporary, holistic or ‘New Age’ spirituality was filling the gap left by the decline of the churches, but their own research showed less than 2% of a typical small English town engaged in activities that could generously be described as spiritual and half of the participants in yoga, meditation, and various forms of healing were primarily concerned with physical and psychological well-being. We find little support for the argument that religious sentiment or need has not declined; it is just expressed in novel ways (Lyon, 2001). Similarly, the suggestion that the British are “believing but not belonging” (Davie, 1994) is at odds with the findings described below (and see Voas and Crockett, 2005).

Some of the disagreement over recent changes in the status of religion comes from confusing popularity and notoriety. Religion is more newsworthy now than it was in the 1990s. The UK has been involved in wars in countries with predominantly Muslim populations and has suffered jihadi terrorist attacks: for example, on the London transport network in 2005 and at a Manchester concert in 2017. In addition, since the fatwa on author Salman Rushdie in 1989, the UK has faced Muslim demands for changes to laws and social mores (for example, over the status of women, school curricula, and gay rights). Conservative Christians have responded with matching demands (Walton, 2013). And some English xenophobes associated with the

English Defence League and other right-wing groups have justified their attacks on Muslims with the claim that Islamic values are displacing Christian culture in the West. If nothing else, that Muslims are often culturally distinctive and sometimes socially segregated allows many non-Muslims to feel that religion taken seriously is at best a nuisance and at worst a danger (Phillips, 2016).

This very brief review suggests that contemporary analysis of religion in Britain should focus on two issues: what are the current trends in religious belonging and observance in Britain? And what do the British public feel about the role of religion in public life? In 2018 we addressed these concerns by repeating questions about religious belief and behaviour. Collected as part of the International Social Survey Programme, these questions were first asked in 1991 and repeated in 1998 and 2008. This chapter uses that data to extend the significant British Social Attitudes (BSA) time-series tracing religion in Britain, and to contribute fresh evidence regarding its role and influence.

Religion in Britain

This section explores religious identity, practice and belief in Britain in 2018. Taking, in turn, reported affiliation with a religion, attendance at religious services and religious belief, we review changes since the BSA survey series began in 1983 and draw conclusions about the changing religious life of Britain today.

Religious identity

We start with simple affiliation. Table 1 shows the distribution of answers to the question:

Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?

The proportion of the British population identifying as Christian has fallen from two-thirds (66%) to just over one-third (38%) since 1983

The proportion of the British population identifying as Christian has fallen from two-thirds (66%) to just over one-third (38%) since the BSA survey series began in 1983. Most of the shift in the religious profile of the nation has been to non-affiliation, with 52% now saying they do not regard themselves as belonging to any religion. The proportion of the population identifying as Anglican (belonging to the Church of England or sister churches in Scotland and Wales) has fallen from 40% in 1983 to just 12% in 2018. Muslims and non-denominational Christians have increased. Muslims now make up 5% of the population[1] (and 6% of the BSA survey sample, up from 1% in 1998). It is worth noting that, at 13% of the population (from 3% in 1998), the proportion of non-denominational Christians is now equivalent to 'Church of England' (12%). The exact nature of this group is unclear: some of those people will be active members of

1 https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/muslimpopulationintheuk/)

independent non-denominational churches – indeed a third (34%) of them attend services at least monthly. Some may feel alienated from institutionalised religion. Others may be making a claim not so much about religious faith as ethnic identity (Voas and Bruce, 2004).

Table 1 Religious identity, 1983-2018

	1983	**2008**	**2018**
	%	%	%
No religion	**31**	**43**	**52**
Christian (of which…)	**66**	**50**	**38**
Church of England / Anglican	40	22	12
Roman Catholic	10	9	7
Presbyterian	5	3	2
Methodist	4	2	1
Baptist	1	1	*
Christian – no denomination	3	10	13
Other Christian	3	2	1
Non-Christian (of which..)	**2**	**7**	**9**
Muslim	1	3	6
Jewish	1	1	*
Other non-Christian	1	3	3
Unweighted base	*1761*	*4486*	*3879*

** = Less than 0.5% of respondents*

Two non-religious parents successfully transmit their lack of religion. Two religious parents have roughly a 50/50 chance of passing on the faith

Wider research suggests that Britain is becoming more secular not because adults are losing their religion or inclination to practise but because old people with an attachment to the Church of England and other Christian denominations are gradually being replaced in the population by unaffiliated younger people. To put it another way, religious decline in Britain is generational; people tend to be less religious than their parents, and on average their children are even less religious than they are (Voas and Chaves, 2016). Two non-religious parents successfully transmit their lack of religion. Two religious parents have roughly a 50/50 chance of passing on the faith. One religious parent does only half as well as two together (Voas and Crockett, 2004). To borrow the terminology of radioactive decay, institutional religion in Britain now has a half-life of one generation.

To explore the transmission of religion, we also ask:

> *In what religion, if any, were you brought up?*

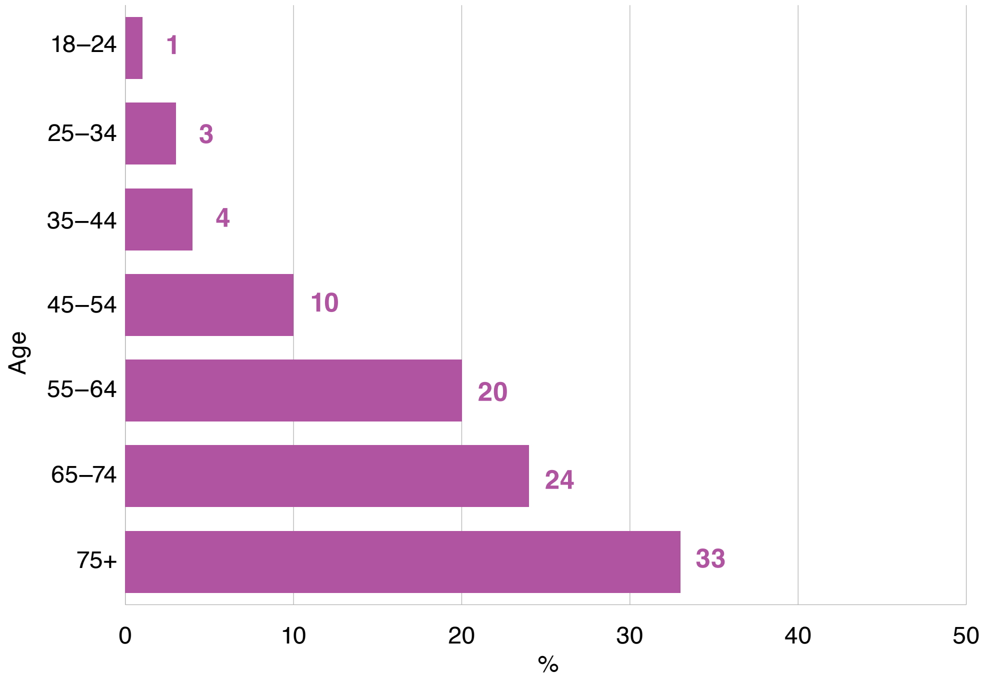
Of those brought up as Anglicans (24% of the total), around half (47%) still regard themselves as such, with an almost equal number saying that they have no religion. Other specific Protestant denominations fare even worse: only 38% of those brought up as Presbyterians and 27% of those brought up as Methodists have kept these specific religious affiliations. Catholics manage to retain a slim majority, as do generic Christians identifying with no named denomination (for both 55% have kept the religious affiliation they were brought up in). However, for those of non-Christian faiths, particularly Islam, religious identity appears to be stickier; only one in ten who were brought up in one of these religions no longer belongs (93% of those brought up as a Muslim, still identify as Muslim).

Retention is highest among people brought up with no religion. At 24%, they are just as numerous as people raised as Anglicans, but nearly all of them (94%) inherit their parents' lack of affiliation. There is little evidence of adults who were not raised with a religion later acquiring one: the 6% figure here is similar to that reported by other research (Bruce and Glendinning, 2003). It follows that there is a degree of future decline built in, as children are increasingly raised in households that do not have a religious affiliation.

Retention is highest among people brought up with no religion

In summary, the proportion of the British population who identify as Christian has fallen dramatically over the last three decades, with most of the decline being in those who identify as Anglican. Some people move away from the faith of their family/childhood, but also an increasing proportion of younger people are not brought up in a religion. This collapse of Anglican affiliation is even more strikingly demonstrated when viewed by age group (Figure 1). A third (33%) of respondents who are aged 75 and above regard themselves as Anglican; in the youngest age group who are 18-24, almost none (1%) do.

Figure 1 Church of England/Anglican affiliation, by age



The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Thinking of oneself as religious is different to claiming a religious identity. To investigate this we ask:

Would you describe yourself as …

Extremely religious

Very religious

Somewhat religious

Neither religious nor non-religious

Somewhat non-religious

Very non-religious

Extremely non-religious

Can't choose

The self-described religious outnumbered the non-religious by 38% to 28% in 1998, but now the non-religious are 44% and the religious only 31%

Table 2 shows a similar pattern of decline to that seen for religious affiliation: the self-described religious outnumbered the non-religious by 38% to 28% in 1998, but now the non-religious are 44% and the religious only 31%. There has also been consolidation – those describing themselves as "very or extremely non-religious" more than doubled (from 14% to 33%) during the past two decades at the expense of the intermediate groups. Three-quarters of the non-religious are now "very or extremely" non-religious, whereas less than a quarter of the religious are "very or extremely" so.

Table 2 Self-assessed religiosity, 1998-2018

	1998	2008	2018
Describing oneself as…	%	%	%
Very or extremely religious	6	7	7
Somewhat religious	31	30	24
Neither religious nor non-religious	30	23	19
Somewhat non-religious	13	11	11
Very or extremely non-religious	14	27	33
Unweighted base	*807*	*1986*	*1552*

The secular population is changing in a direction that may be unexpected. As it becomes more acceptable to say that you have no religion, even vaguely religious people who in the past would have identified themselves as belonging to the Church of England or another group no longer do so. Hence the non-religious category is more inclusive now than in the past: it does not consist solely of highly-educated atheists and agnostics. Some commentators (especially in the USA) claim that the rapid increase in having "no religion" is merely a sign of dissatisfaction with the churches (Fuller, 2001; Newport, 2012). In their view, these people are actually or potentially religious but simply see themselves as "nothing in particular" at the moment. If that were the case, we might expect to find the average level of belief among the religious 'nones' to be higher than before. In fact, as Table 3 shows, those who do not have a religious affiliation are far more likely to say they are 'non-religious' now than they were in 1998. Now, 73% of those who state that they have "no religion" describe themselves as "non-religious", while 15% describe themselves as "somewhat" non-religious, and 58% "extremely/very" non-religious.

Table 3 Self-assessed religiosity, among those who do not identify with a religion, 1998-2018

	1998	2008	2018
Describing oneself as...	%	%	%
Religious (Very/extremely/somewhat)	12	8	5
Neither religious nor non-religious	34	22	17
Non-religious (Very/extremely/ somewhat)	49	64	73
Unweighted base	*368*	*865*	*784*

Base: those who do not have a religious affiliation

The highest levels of religiosity are found among those with non-Christian faiths

People who do not regard themselves as belonging to a religion are increasingly secular, whether we look over time (as shown in Table 3) or by age. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents with no religion aged less than 45 say that they are very or extremely unreligious, compared to fewer than half (47%) of those who are 65 or older.

What about religiosity among people with a religious affiliation? The highest levels of religiosity are found among those with non-Christian faiths[2] (23% "extremely/very" religious, 50% "somewhat") and Roman Catholics (18% "extremely/very", 52% "somewhat"). Anglicans are, typically, much less likely to describe themselves as "extremely/very" religious (6%), with 40% saying "somewhat" and 33% "neither religious nor non-religious". Around 17% of those identifying with the Church of England (or sister churches in Wales and Scotland) said they are "somewhat" (9%) or "extremely/very" (9%) not religious.

Religious practice

Religious affiliation; the proportion of the population who identify as belonging to a religion (specifically Christianity), has shown a significant decline over the last 30 years. Can the same be said of participation in religious practices, such as attending services and praying?

2 It is important to note that the 'Non-Christian' group captures a broad range of religious identities, including Muslim, Hindu and Jewish, and attitudes between these groups may differ, though small base sizes mean we are unable to discern the specific attitudes of these groups.

Almost all religions either require or explicitly encourage active participation in communal activities, and so attendance at services or meetings is a reliable and valid measure of religious interest (Bruce, 2018: 80-1). We ask people who currently belong to a religion, and those who had been brought up in a faith but no longer belonged:

> ***Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals and baptisms, how often nowadays do you attend services or meetings connected with your religion?***

If we combine the group who say they "never or practically never attend" services with those who have no religion and were not brought up in one (who were not asked this question but are shown in the last row of the table), Table 4 shows that, in 2018, two thirds (66%) of people in Britain never attend ordinary services.

Table 4 Attendance at religious services, 1998-2018

	1998	2008	2018
How often attends religious services	%	%	%
Once a week or more	12	10	11
Less often but at least once in two weeks	2	2	2
Less often but at least once a month	5	6	5
Less often than once a month ‡	19	19	13
Never or practically never	48	50	43
No religion and not brought up in a religion	11	12	23
Unweighted base	*3146*	*4486*	*3879*

‡ Less often than once a month combines the answers: "Less often but at least twice a year", "Less often but at least once a year", "Less often than once a year"

The table excludes "varies too much to say", but these are included in the base

Over the last two decades reported weekly attendance has remained stable at around 11% of the general population

Over the last two decades reported weekly attendance has remained stable at around 11% of the general population. Allowing for a degree of exaggeration among nominal Anglicans and with the above-average piety of adherents to other religions, this fits with the less than 8% of the population that church sources and third-party censuses tell us attend Christian churches (Brierley, 2017). Weekly attendance is highest among those of non-Christian faiths (40%), followed by Roman Catholic (23%) and other Christian denominations (23%). Those identifying as Anglicans are much less likely to attend weekly (9%) or indeed to attend at all – 57% say they attend "never or practically never".

The significant change is shown in the centre of Table 4. Those who say they attend less often than once a month, but more than "never" were 19% in 1998 and 2008 but only 13% in 2018. This suggests the consolidation we will also identify in other data. Increasingly, people are either conventionally religious or irreligious; the centre ground of claimed occasional participation is vanishing. This is a combination of two related but analytically separable trends. There is behavioural change: the absence of religious socialisation in schools and elsewhere means that people who were not raised by their parents in a faith now have little or no contact with religious activities and ideas. But there may also be more honesty. When a large part of a population is religious, others on the fringe feel some subtle obligation to pretend to belong to a faith they do not really share; as the proportion of true believers declines, pressure to pay lip service to attitudes of others also declines (Bruce 2019).

Now only half of people claim to ever pray (49%)

Praying has always been a popular religious practice: individuals can choose to do it in their own time and way and it requires less physical effort and inconvenience than attendance at services. But now only half of people claim to ever pray (49% as compared to 56% in 2008 and 67% in 1998 – the sum of all categories except "Never" in Table 5). Again, that change is made up of two counter trends: "occasionally" praying (made up of those who pray less than once a week) is now claimed by 29% (down from 34% in 2008, 41% in 1998); it appears praying "several times a day" has increased (though the change from 5% in 2008 to 8% in 2018 is not statistically significant), which is likely to be explained by the growth in the number of Muslims. Although Muslims are only a small fraction of the total population, they have a substantial impact on very frequent prayer (and also firm belief in God, as we shall see).

Table 5 Frequency of prayer, 1998-2018

	1998	2008	2018
How often pray	%	%	%
Never	30	41	50
'Occasional' (less than once a week) ‡	41	34	29
Every week	5	3	3
Several times a week	6	5	4
Once a day	10	8	6
Several times a day	5	5	8
Unweighted base	*807*	*1986*	*1552*

‡ 'Occasional' (less than once a week) combines the answers: "Less often than once a year", "About once or twice a year", "Several times a year", "About once a month", "2-3 times a month", "Nearly every week"

Religious belief

We turn now to look at the nature of religious beliefs, starting with a question asking the respondent to choose a statement which "best expresses what you believe about God". The response options are

Around half of the population (55%) express some sort of belief in some kind of God

shown in the top half of Table 6. Given the wide range of things that respondents might have in mind, we expect asserting a belief in God to be more popular than engaging in any conventional religious activity.

The top half of Table 6 shows around half of the population (55%) expressing some sort of belief in some kind of God: around a fifth (19%) are confident believers, 15% believe while expressing doubts, with a further fifth expressing a qualified faith – some of the time but not other times (9%) or 'Higher Power' rather than personal God (12%). Around a quarter (26%) are confirmed non-believers, with a further 18% agnostic – not knowing if there is a God and not believing there is any way to find out.

Trends from 1998-2018 indicate both secularisation, in the sense of fewer people believing, and consolidation, as the highly religious are bolstered by growth in the non-Christian population and the non-religious move to harder positions. The biggest change is the increase in the number of people who are confident atheists: from 10% in 1998 to 18% in 2008 and then 26% in 2018. Agnosticism shows little clear change (from 15% in 1998 to 19% in 2008 and 18% in 2018). A statistically significant decrease is found in those who believe "some of the time". Reductions in the proportion who believe in an impersonal 'Higher Power' and 'doubting believers' are not statistically significant. There has been very little change in the proportion of people who say they believe in God and "have no doubts about it" (in 1998 it was 21% and in 2018 it is 19%).

While the sample sizes of the individual non-Christian faiths are too small to present detailed findings for these groups, it is worth noting that Muslims are a third of those who say that they believe in God and have no doubts about it. Hindus and Sikhs also predominantly identify themselves as believers. Overall, the decline in belief in God has occurred despite the growth of these relatively theistic non-Christian groups as a proportion of the population.

It is likely that the growth of atheism is largely just a working-through of the cohort difference identified in earlier decades; as elderly believers die off, their place is taken by younger people who were never believers. To explore this, we ask a question about the respondent's current and previous beliefs:

Which best describes your beliefs about God?

I don't believe in God now and I never have

I don't believe in God now, but I used to

I believe in God now, but I didn't used to

I believe in God now and I always have

Can't choose

Overall, the proportion that had never believed in God increased from 13% in 1998 to 20% in 2008 and then 26% in 2018 (see the bottom half of Table 6). Meanwhile, those who used to have a faith but have lost it have also increased, from 12% in 1998 to 16% in 2018.[3] More detailed exploration reveals a downward trend in Christians saying they believe in God and always have (69% in 1998 to 60% in 2018), which is mainly driven by Anglicans (66% in 1998 to 51% in 2018). Finally, compared with 1998, fewer people with no current religious identification now say they have always believed in God (22% to 7%), with a corresponding upward trend in those with no current religion saying they don't believe in God and never did (26% in 1998 to 46% in 2018).

Table 6 Beliefs about the existence of God, 1998-2018

	1998	2008	2018
Nature of belief in God	%	%	%
I don't believe in God	10	18	26
I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out	15	19	18
I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind	14	14	12
I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others	14	13	9
While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God	23	18	15
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	21	17	19
Belief in God now or in the past	%	%	%
I don't believe in God now and never have	13	20	26
I don't believe in God now, but I used to	12	15	16
I believe in God now, but I didn't used to	4	5	4
I believe in God now and I always have	48	37	35
Unweighted base	*807*	*1986*	*1552*

"Less than a quarter (23%) of people agree that "there is a God who concerns Himself with every human being personally"

A further question suggests that even believers in Britain tend to have in mind a rather distant God. Less than a quarter (23%) of people agree that "there is a God who concerns Himself with every human being personally"; two in five Christians (40%) hold this belief (who overall make up just 15% of the total population).

3 Our question which asks respondents to choose a statement which "best expresses what you believe about God" allows the respondent to express more nuance about their beliefs in God, giving them the chance to express uncertainty, while our question which asks "which best describes your beliefs about God?" does not. We therefore view the former question as producing a more reliable estimate of the level of atheism.

To explore faith in more detail we ask respondents whether they believe in a range of doctrines: life after death, heaven, hell, religious miracles, reincarnation (being reborn in this world again and again), nirvana and the supernatural powers of deceased ancestors. Respondents can answer yes or no, each definitely or probably, as well as indicating that they can't choose. Table 7 shows the proportion that indicate some level of belief (definitely or probably).

When few claim to believe in the sort of God who regulates human fate and even fewer attend events where they would be taught such concepts, it is not obvious what respondents have in mind when considering these statements. But three things can be noted in Table 7: first, there are varying levels of belief in various doctrines, whether traditional Western Christian (life after death, heaven, hell, and miracles) or non-Western (reincarnation, nirvana, or ancestors). Second, it appears that many beliefs have declined in popularity, although the only statistically significant decreases are in belief in heaven and in reincarnation. Third, that belief in heaven is much more popular than belief in hell suggests that traditional Christian doctrine is being displaced by positive thinking.

Table 7 Religious beliefs, 1998-2018

	1998	2008	2018
% definitely/probably believe in…			
Life after death	50	46	42
Heaven	45	41	37
Hell	27	28	26
Religious miracles	32	29	26
Reincarnation	n/a	24	20
Nirvana	n/a	10	8
Supernatural power of ancestors	n/a	18	16
Unweighted base	*807*	*1986*	*1552*

n/a = not asked

There has been an increase in the certainty and assertiveness of responses, with the confidently negative growing faster than the confidently positive

By and large the religious belief questions show the same sort of change we find in questions about behaviour: there has been an increase in the certainty and assertiveness of responses, with the confidently negative growing faster than the confidently positive. For instance, 44% of the public say they either "definitely" did or "definitely" did not believe in heaven compared with 37% in 1998.

There may be an age effect at work in the belief in life after death: not (as many suppose) that we become more drawn to an afterlife as we get older, but rather the reverse. Perhaps because the time ahead of the young is much greater than the time behind them, life seems indefinite, so young adults tend to believe, in some unstudied way, that they will carry on forever. As they age, people come to accept that there is an end. As Table 8 shows, only 13% of respondents aged 18-24 definitely rule out life after death, which is just half the level found among people aged 55 and above (26%) (though note that the 18-24 age group has a relatively small base size here).

Table 8 Belief in life after death, by age

	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes, definitely	21	20	23	19	17	19
Yes, probably	27	22	29	23	20	23
No, probably not	32	28	22	25	24	25
No, definitely not	13	22	20	23	26	22
Unweighted base	*84*	*196*	*236*	*254*	*780*	*1552*

Patterns of identity, practice and belief

In summary, there is continued decline in affiliation to Christianity and religiosity more generally among the British population. Over half of the British population states that they have no religion. Overall attendance at religious services has also continued to decline – two thirds (66%) never attend religious services apart from special occasions – although the proportion of the population attending weekly or at least monthly is more stable. These patterns are echoed by religious belief. While the proportion of the public expressing confident faith is stable at around 19%, confident atheism has increased to 26%. Taken as a whole, these patterns suggest secularisation is increasing on two fronts: the decline in overall levels of involvement with religion, and consolidation of those who were wavering towards more confirmed secular positions.

There are large differences between the young and the old in various key indicators of religious involvement, such as identifying with a religion, attending services, or believing in God (Table 9).

Table 9 Religious identification, attendance and belief in God, by age, by gender

	Male	Female	All
% Have a religion			
18-34	32	41	36
35-54	37	50	43
55+	51	65	58
All ages	41	54	47
% Ever attends religious services or meetings*			
18-34	26	32	29
35-54	28	35	32
55+	29	37	33
All ages	28	35	31
% Believe in God‡			
18-34	29	38	33
35-54	36	44	40
55+	33	50	42
All ages	33	45	39

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

**This includes all frequencies reported, including “less often than once a year”, but excludes those who say “varies too much to say”*

‡ For belief in God we have combined answers for those who say “I believe in God now, but I didn’t used to” and “I believe in God now and always have” (presented in the bottom half of Table 6)

It is tempting but wrong to think that people become more religious with age. As already noted, the evidence strongly suggests that the association between age and religious commitment comes about because people are increasingly raised without religion or lose it in their youth, and they are replacing older generations who were brought up in more religious times (Voas and Chaves, 2016; see also Lee, 2012).

At every age, men are less likely than women to say that they have a religion, or go to church, or believe in God

As with much else in life, religious participation is gendered. Quite why is contentious and complex (Trzebiatowska and Bruce, 2012; Voas et al., 2013) but the differences are striking. At every age, men are less likely than women to say that they have a religion, or go to church, or believe in God (shown in Table 9).

The public reputation of religion

Given the scale and potential significance of the shifts in religious faith in Britain, our attention now turns to wider analysis of public attitudes and religion: what does the British population think of religion and religious institutions?

Religion and public life

As we mentioned in our introduction, media news bulletins regarding religion often focus attention on the threat from Islamist terrorism and the many conflicts around the globe in which at least one agent claims to be motivated by religion. In order to gauge general reactions to whether religion is a force for good or ill, we ask people whether they agree or disagree that:

> *Looking around the world, religions bring more conflict than peace*

Almost two-thirds (63%) of the British public agree that religions bring more conflict than peace (28% “strongly agree”, 35% “agree”) – while only 13% disagree (10% “disagree”, 3% “strongly disagree”).

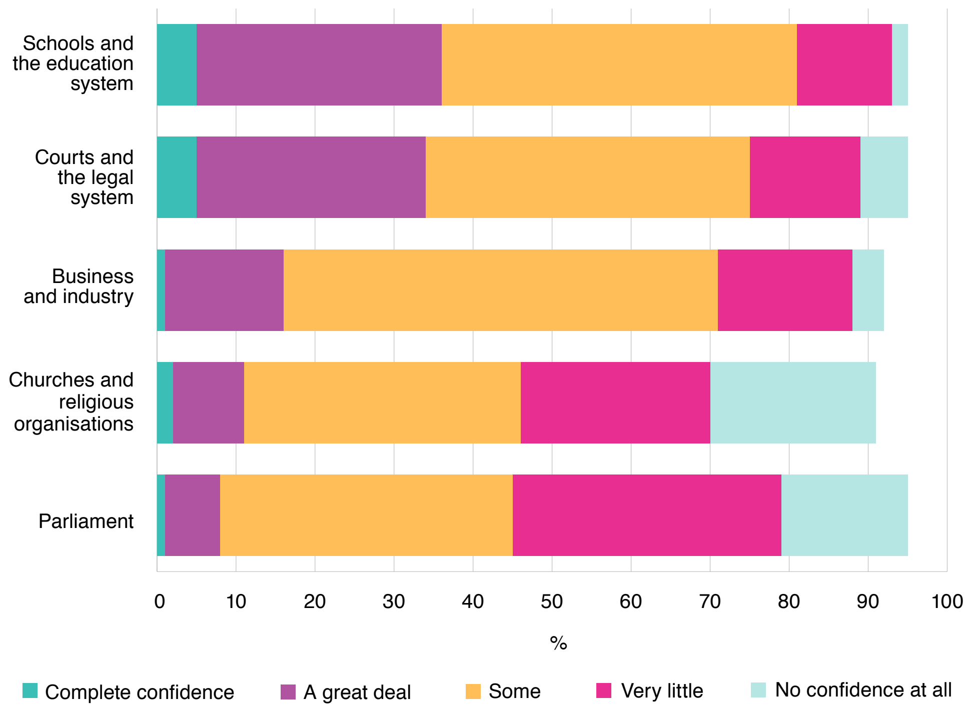
This suggests the generalized view of religion, among a majority of the population, is pretty poor. However, despite increasing secularisation, the proportion that hold negative views has reduced since 1998, when 75% agreed (see the top section of Table 10). As shown, those with “no religion” are an increasingly large group within the population. By 2018, 74% of them agree religions bring more conflict than peace, although around half (52%) of people with a religious affiliation also agree. However, compared to 1998, this proportion is lower among both those with a religion and those without one. This could be attributable to a range of factors, including increasing multiculturalism (diversity, tolerance and knowledge/understanding of other faiths). Despite an apparent increase in faith-inspired terrorism, it also, perhaps, reflects a more nuanced public discourse about the causes of war and conflict.

To assess views of religion at home, we ask how much confidence respondents have in five institutions, offering “complete”, “a great deal”, “some”, “very little” and “no confidence at all” as response options: “schools and the education system” are the most popular, with 80% supporting the three positive positions (Figure 2). The “courts and legal system” follow at 75% and then “business and industry” at 71%. Just 46% have confidence in “Churches and religious organisations”, closely matching “Parliament”, at 45%. Despite the Brexit fiasco, “Churches” exceed even “Parliament” in the proportion expressing “no confidence at all” (21% versus 16%).

Confidence in religious institutions has fallen over the last two decades

Confidence in religious institutions has fallen over the last two decades – 54% had some degree of confidence in 1998, falling to 50% in 2008, then 46% in 2018. This is likely to reflect public exposure of abuse scandals and their handling by churches, coupled with a tendency to associate religious organisations with controversial positions on gender, marriage, sexuality, abortion, and so on. Unsurprisingly, those with no religion are much less likely than Christians to have confidence in religious institutions (28% compared with 66% for Christians, 68% for non-Christian faiths), but levels of confidence have fallen among Christians (down from 72% in 1998) and much more dramatically among those with no faith (54% in 1998).

Figure 2 Confidence in institutions



The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

'Can't choose and not answered' are not featured in this table, but can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Around a third (35%) feel religious organisations have "too much power" (26%) or "far too much power" (9%)

Along with widespread distrust of religious institutions, other research suggests British people now increasingly expect religion to be confined to the domestic hearth (Bruce and Voas, 2007). To explore views on the role of religion in public life, we ask:

> *Do you think that churches and religious organisations in this country have too much power or too little power?*

Around a third (35%) feel religious organisations have "too much power" (26%) or "far too much power" (9%), with only 5% saying "too little/far too little". This has shown an increase over the last few decades, up 5 percentage points since 2008, and 10 since 1998 (see middle section of Table 10). Again, these views are more likely to be expressed by the non-religious. Around half (48%) of those with no religion think religious organisations have too much power, compared with 20% of those who have a religious affiliation. Overall, the attitudes of Christians differ from non-Christian faiths – 23% who identify as 'Christian' feel that religious organisations have too much power compared with 11% for those of non-Christian faiths.

A large majority are also against religious leaders trying to influence voting behaviour. When asked to agree/disagree with the statement: "religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote in elections", only 9% thought religious officials should try to influence

Seventy-two per cent of professing Christians agree that religious leaders should not try to influence voting behaviour

elections, while 76% opposed such intervention. However, this shows less change over time (up from 71% in 1998) and there is also less difference according to religious affiliation: 81% of those with no religion agree, compared with 71% of those who have a faith. Seventy-two per cent of professing Christians agree that religious leaders should not try to influence voting behaviour. Those of non-Christian faiths are slightly less likely to agree (68%) but more likely to say "neither agree nor disagree", rather than express disagreement with the statement.

Table 10 Attitudes toward religious role in public life, by whether have a religion, 1998-2018

	1998	2008	2018
Religions bring more conflict than peace (% strongly agree/ agree)			
Has religion	69	69	52
No religion	82	81	74
All	75	74	63
Religious organisations have too much power or too little power (% too much power/far too much power)			
Has religion	16	21	20
No religion	35	41	48
All	25	30	35
Religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote in elections (% strongly agree/agree)			
Has religion	66	73	71
No religion	76	77	81
All	71	75	76

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

Religious tolerance

Although the British public are increasingly disinclined to participate in religion or hold it in particularly high regard, they are relatively tolerant of people who are religiously different. A classic question on social distance asks how they would feel about a relative marrying someone from another group. The question reads as follows:

> ***People have different religions and different religious views. Would you accept a person from a different religion or with a very different religious view from yours marrying a relative of yours?***

Table 11 shows a 15-point rise over the past decade in "definitely accept", from 24% to 39%, which is a remarkable increase (even

Only 17% agree that "all things considered, people belonging to different religions cannot get along with each other when living close together"

if half of it comes from the "probably accept" category). Only 10% could not accept a mixed marriage (7% probably, 3% definitely). Meanwhile, only 17% agree that "all things considered, people belonging to different religions cannot get along with each other when living close together."

Table 11 Tolerance of religious difference, 2008 and 2018

	2008	**2018**
Person from a different religion marrying a relative	%	%
Definitely accept	*24*	*39*
Probably accept	*50*	*43*
Probably not accept	*10*	*7*
Definitely not accept	*8*	*3*
Unweighted base	*1986*	*1552*

Respondents are asked about their attitude towards members of different religious groups:

> ***What is your personal attitude towards members of the following religious groups?***
>
> ***….Christians?***
>
> ***….Muslims?***
>
> ***…Hindus?***
>
> ***…Buddhists?***
>
> ***…Jews?***
>
> ***…Atheists or non-believers?***

Those aged 55 or over are more inclined to view Muslims negatively (22%) when compared with those who are 18–34 (13%)

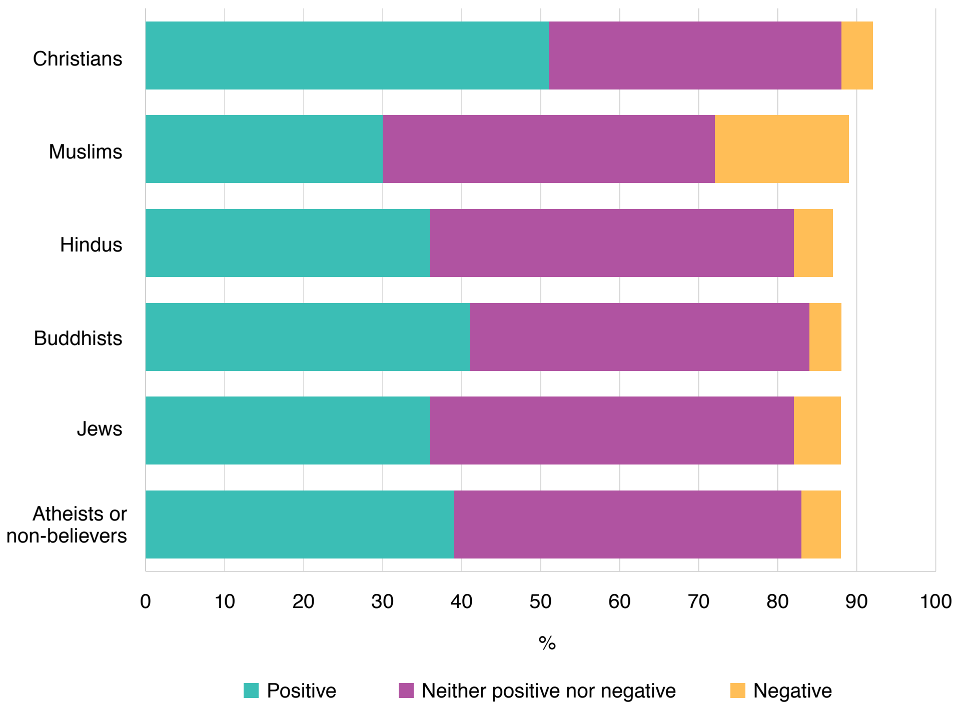
Respondents can give the following answers: "very positive"; "somewhat positive"; "neither positive nor negative"; "somewhat negative"; "very negative"; "can't choose".

As Figure 3 shows, Christians do best, scoring 51% positive ("very" or "somewhat") and only 4% negative ("very" or "somewhat"), with 37% saying "neither positive nor negative". For the non-Christian faiths, roughly the same proportion of respondents (42%-46%) choose the neutral category. That could suggest indecision or indifference, but neither precludes the observation that the British are relatively tolerant. Even the least popular group (Muslims at 17% negative, 42% neutral and 30% positive) is not that unpopular.

Views of other faith groups do differ by age, with older people being generally less positive than younger people about religions other than Christianity. For example, those aged 55 or over are more inclined to view Muslims negatively (22%) when compared with those who are

18-34 (13%). There seems to be a greater degree of tolerance among younger people.

Figure 3 Positive or negative views towards religious groups



The data on which Figure 3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

'Can't choose and not answered' are not featured in this table, but can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Although British people generally have a favourable view of most religious groups, there is evidence that they look less kindly on those who take their religion very seriously. When asked to agree or disagree whether:

> ***People with very strong religious beliefs are often too intolerant of others***

two-thirds (65%) agree; 24% "strongly". This has fallen from 74% in 1998 and 73% in 2008 (although most of the fall is in the more moderate "agree" group, with a corresponding increase in those who neither agree nor disagree).

Suspicion of extremism is evident in unwillingness to take a completely laissez faire approach to religion. On the statement that "governments should not interfere with the attempts of any religion to spread its faith", 39% agree but 28% disagree, with a substantial number of neutral or unsure responses. When the hazards are more explicit, the reaction is stronger, as seen with the question:

> ***There are some people whose views are considered extreme by the majority. Consider <u>religious extremists</u>, who believe***

> *that their religion is the only true faith and all other religions should be considered as enemies. Do you think such people should be allowed to … publish their views on the Internet or social media?*

Two-thirds (68%) of people give a negative answer; only 22% are ready to allow free expression in these circumstances.

Conclusions

The rich data on religion collected as part of the most recent survey will doubtless be analysed in greater detail, but the brief tour above offers compelling evidence that the process of secularisation continues unabated. Britain is becoming more secular not because adults are losing their religion but because older people with an attachment to the Church of England and other Christian denominations are gradually being replaced in the population by unaffiliated younger people. To put it another way, religious decline in Britain is generational; people tend to be less religious than their parents, and on average their children are even less religious than they are (Voas and Chaves, 2016). Further, as having no religion becomes more common and, one would assume, more socially acceptable, it appears that vaguely religious people who in the past would have identified as belonging to the Church of England or another group no longer do so.

Our data show that secularisation continues past the point where people stop identifying with a religion or going to church regularly. The non-religious carry on becoming less and less religious

As we have mentioned, it is claimed by some sociologists of religion that the rapid increase in having "no religion" is merely a sign of dissatisfaction with the churches. If that were the case in Britain, we might expect to find expressions of belief among the religious 'nones' to be higher than before. However, in Britain, people who do not regard themselves as belonging to a religion are increasingly secular. Our data show that secularisation continues past the point where people stop identifying with a religion or going to church regularly. The non-religious carry on becoming less and less religious. As a corollary, the idea that what we observe is transformation of religion, not decline, seems inconsistent with the evidence. Instead, we identify a pattern of divergence and consolidation – with the non-religious, in particular, appearing to become more strident (or at least open) in their non-belief.

Secularisation should not be interpreted as a growth in intolerance, indeed the reverse appears to be true. The British public do increasingly appear to have little confidence in religious institutions or faith that they are a force for good. However, a large majority maintain positive or neutral views of individuals belonging to a religion – a pattern which is even more prevalent among younger people – although also a suspicion regarding, and reluctance to indulge, extremism.

In conclusion, our analysis shows that those claiming religious identity, practising a religion or believing are clearly diminishing, as a proportion of the British population and so, arguably, in influence. In further work to be published elsewhere, we find that social attitudes are associated in different ways with identity on the one hand and practice on the other. Those making blanket or unnuanced claims about the influence of faith or religion or making claims about ‘the religious’ or ‘Christians’ might want to take care.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

The data on which the Spotlight chart is based are shown below.

Table A.1 Religious identity 1983–2018

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994	1995
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Christian	66	66	63	63	63	64	60	61	59	58	56
Non-Christian	2	2	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3
No religion	31	32	34	34	34	34	36	35	37	38	40
Unweighted base	*1761*	*1675*	*1804*	*3100*	*2847*	*3029*	*2797*	*2918*	*2945*	*3469*	*3633*

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Christian	53	52	51	52	55	54	54	50	53	54	48
Non-Christian	4	4	3	3	5	4	4	6	3	6	6
No religion	43	43	45	44	40	41	41	43	43	40	46
Unweighted base	*3620*	*1355*	*3146*	*3143*	*3426*	*3287*	*3435*	*4432*	*3199*	*4268*	*4290*

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Christian	48	50	44	43	46	46	41	42	43	41	40	38
Non-Christian	6	7	5	6	7	6	8	8	8	6	8	9
No religion	46	43	51	50	46	48	50	49	48	53	52	52
Unweighted base	*4124*	*4486*	*3421*	*3297*	*3311*	*3248*	*3244*	*2877*	*4328*	*2939*	*3988*	*3879*

The data on which Figure 1 is based are shown below.

Table A.2 Affiliation with Church of England, by age

% belong to Church of England		*Unweighted base*
Age group		
18-24	1	*218*
25-34	3	*512*
35-44	4	*629*
45-54	10	*631*
55-64	20	*665*
65-74	24	*681*
75+	33	*536*

Bases for Table 9 are shown below.

Table A.3 Religious identification, attendance and belief in God, by age, by gender

	Male	**Female**	**All**
Religion	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
18-34	*314*	*416*	*730*
35-54	*530*	*730*	*1260*
55+	*845*	*1037*	*1882*
All ages	*1691*	*2188*	*3879*
Attends religious service or meeting	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
18-34	*314*	*416*	*730*
35-54	*530*	*730*	*1260*
55+	*845*	*1037*	*1882*
All ages	*1691*	*2188*	*3879*
Believe in God	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
18-34	*133*	*147*	*280*
35-54	*198*	*292*	*490*
55+	*358*	*422*	*780*
All ages	*690*	*862*	*1552*

The data on which Figure 2 is based are shown below.

Table A.4 Confidence in institutions

	Schools and the education system	Courts and the legal system	Business and industry	Churches and religious organisations	Parliament
Level of confidence	%	%	%	%	%
Complete	5	5	1	2	1
A great deal	31	29	15	9	7
Some	45	41	55	35	37
Very little	12	14	17	24	34
No confidence at all	2	6	4	21	16
Can't choose/No answer	6	5	8	9	6
Unweighted base	*1552*	*1552*	*1552*	*1552*	*1552*

The data on which Table 10 is based are shown below.

Table A.5 Attitudes toward religious role in public life, by whether have a religion, 1998-2018

	1998	2008	2018
Religions bring more conflict than peace (Agree)	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Has religion	*436*	*1116*	*765*
No religion	*368*	*865*	*784*
All	*807*	*1986*	*1552*
Religious organisations have too much power or too little power	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Has religion	*436*	*1116*	*765*
No religion	*368*	*865*	*784*
All	*807*	*1986*	*1552*
Religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote in elections	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Has religion	*436*	*1116*	*765*
No religion	*368*	*865*	*784*
All	*807*	*1986*	*1552*

The data on which Figure 3 is based are shown below.

Table A.6 Positive or negative feeling toward different faiths

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus	Buddhists	Jews	Atheists or non-believers
Feel toward faith	%	%	%	%	%	%
Positive	51	30	36	41	36	39
Neither positive nor negative	37	42	46	43	46	44
Negative	4	17	5	4	6	5
Can't choose or not answered	8	11	13	13	12	13
Unweighted base	*1552*	*1552*	*1552*	*1552*	*1552*	*1552*

Science

Have the British public really had enough of experts?

This chapter assesses public attitudes to science and technology. We consider how we engage with science during our day-to-day lives, whether science and technology are viewed as a force for social good, and to what extent scientists in the academic and commercial arenas are trusted to act in the public interest. We also examine how the public strikes the balance between science, feelings and faith, explore our relationship with scientific developments that pose complex ethical questions such as prenatal testing, and chart how public attitudes towards such technologies have changed over time.

Spotlight

Over time, the public has become less likely to agree that modern science does more harm than good. Just 11% now feel that science does more harm than good, compared with 24% in 1993.

Modern science does more harm than good, 1993–2018

Overview

Support for modern science is strong

Attitudes towards the impact of science on our lives are largely positive.

- More than three-quarters of the public (77%) agree that science and technology are making our lives healthier, easier and more comfortable.
- Over nine in ten (94%) of the public believe that medical research will improve our quality of life over the coming decades.
- However, while almost three-quarters (73%) believe that medical research benefits everyone equally, almost one fifth of the public (18%) view such research as mostly benefitting those who are better off.

A majority trust scientists to work in the public interest

Trust in university scientists is higher than in their commercial counterparts.

- More than four-fifths (85%) of people trust university scientists to do their work with the intention of benefitting the public, while two-thirds (67%) trust commercial scientists to work with the intention of benefitting the public.
- However, a degree of scepticism remains about the level of funding transparency, particularly in the commercial sector; while one fifth (19%) trust university scientists “not much” or “not at all” to be transparent about their sources of funding, 35% have this limited level of trust in company scientists to be open about funding sources.

Views remain mixed on ethically complex technologies

While public attitudes towards GM food production have shifted over time, attitudes towards other scientific developments have remained comparatively stable.

- Around a quarter (26%) agree that Britain should grow GM foods to compete with the rest of the world, with a similar proportion (25%) agreeing that the advantages of GM foods outweigh any dangers, an increase since 1999 when the level of support for these statements was around one in ten (10% and 11% respectively).
- 74% of the public believe that scientists should be able to use cells from human embryos for medical research, while 21% believe this should not be permitted, a small shift since 2008 when the equivalent figures were 69% and 28% respectively.
- Around two-thirds of the public agree that parents should be able to use prenatal genetic testing in the case of unborn children with serious mental or physical disabilities (67% and 66% respectively), representing little change in the overall level of support for such tests since 2003.

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Introduction

> ***'Our world is suffering from a bad case of "Trust Deficit Disorder". People are feeling troubled and insecure. Trust is at a breaking point. Trust in national institutions. Trust among states. Trust in the rules-based global order. Within countries, people are losing faith in political establishments, polarization is on the rise and populism is on the march.'***
>
> Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General, Speech to the General Assembly 25th September 2018

Public trust in science and technology is more essential than ever. Our day-to-day lives are increasingly interwoven with and dependent upon science and technological innovation. Most of us use complex technologies daily, relying on science and technology to bank and shop, to travel, to connect and communicate, to access services, and to learn. When we look to the future, solving the global challenges of climate change, population ageing, and technology-driven labour market transformation will all require close public engagement with science and technological innovation. Yet most citizens do not have the time, expertise, or inclination to forensically assess risks and hazards arising from the production and use of pervasive and rapidly-changing technologies. As a result, trust in advice and guidance from scientific experts is a crucial, if implicit, underpinning for citizen and societal decision making.

Academic and popular accounts of the 'crisis of trust' connect these changes to growing support for populist parties and movements, driven by public disengagement from 'politics as usual' and the social and economic impacts of globalisation (Nichols, 2017). Widespread concern about low and declining levels of trust in political actors and institutions and the corrosive effect this may have on systems of representative democracy dates back to the mid-1970s (Norris, 2011). More recently, high profile U-turns and political scandals, including 'cash for questions' in the 1990s, followed by the MPs' expenses scandal of the late 2000s, further damaged the British public's confidence in politicians and government more generally (Lee and Young, 2013). From 2008 onwards, the aftermath of the Great Recession brought these concerns to the fore with renewed vigour, provoking further fears of declining confidence in politics and institutions in countries around the world (Van Erkel and Van der Meer, 2015).

Within the scientific community, concerns about declining trust and antagonism toward the role of experts have been amplified by challenges from within science and technology. Recent years have witnessed the potentially corrosive effects on public trust of 'science hype' and over-selling (Nowotny, 2016), the reproducibility crisis in the social and life sciences, and high-profile cases of data fabrication and research misconduct. Increasingly, deference to institutional authority is not automatically conferred by sceptical and critical citizens who question the equitable distribution of social goods and the objectivity and neutrality of elite expertise.

In June 2016, Michael Gove (then Justice Secretary) remarked "people in this country have had enough of experts". The prominent Leave campaigner was responding to the majority of forecasters predicting negative economic consequences of Brexit, but his comments were widely taken as a succinct expression of a new zeitgeist in which the general public has a growing and bitter distrust of authority figures, particularly those perceived to be wielding influence through technical expertise.

Given the significance of science and technology in modern life, this kind of rejection of scientific and technical expertise would have profound social consequences.

Despite widely-expressed concerns about declining public trust in science, there is little hard evidence to support the notion of a precipitate drop in trust from a notional heyday. In the United States, where the longest time-series is to be found, the evidence suggests that Americans have long expressed high levels of trust in science and scientists, with no support for any notable decline since the 1970s (Gauchat, 2014). Neither do we find evidence of low or declining trust in scientists in the UK, albeit over a shorter time period, with around six in ten adults expressing high levels of trust in university scientists between 2009 and 2015 (Wellcome Trust, 2015).

This high level of support is not uniform. Attitudes to science are associated with key demographic characteristics such as education and age, as well as gender and religious identity (Wellcome Trust, 2016). In the United States, while levels of trust of science and scientists in the general population have remained high, those on the right of politics in the US have tended to become less trusting over time (Gauchat, 2014). Similarly, while the public expresses high levels of trust in the abstract notion of 'science', they can be notably more sceptical about the societal benefits of specific areas of scientific research. This is particularly so for science which poses challenges to core values and beliefs and to religious faith, such as the genetic modification of plants and organisms and the use of stem cells for medical treatments (Wellcome Trust, 2009, 2012). Education is becoming an ever more important political cleavage in western democracies, with steep gradients emerging on a range of economic and social issues between graduates and non-graduates, as access to secure and well remunerated employment, housing, and health crystalize differences in world-views (Bovens and Wille, 2017).

So, have the British public really had enough of experts? To attempt to answer that question, this chapter explores public attitudes to, and understanding of, science. First, we ask whether science and technology are seen as a force for social good, whether scientists can be trusted to act in the public interest and with transparency, and whether the public feels we place too much emphasis on science, compared to feelings or faith? Next, we consider public interest in science, asking how we engage with science in our day-to-day lives. In particular, we explore whether levels of scientific knowledge affect our attitudes to science and scientists? And then, finally, how do we feel about scientific developments that pose complex ethical questions – such as prenatal testing, stem-cell research and genetically modified (GM) foods? Are public attitudes to these controversial technologies changing? And how do views towards them differ between different social groups?

For each set of questions, we draw on BSA's time series data to consider how public attitudes to and trust in, science have changed over time. We also explore how attitudes differ between groups, focusing on a number of characteristics that are known to influence attitudes to science, including age, sex, education, and social class as well as political orientation and religious identity[1]. Throughout the chapter we present the findings for these background variables only where they are significantly related to the attitude in question.

Attitudes to science

This section explores high-level attitudes to science: To what extent does the general public perceive science, technology and medical research to be a 'good thing' for society? Do people trust scientists to be acting in the public interest? And how do we feel about the weight given to science, compared to other factors such as feelings or faith?

Social value of science and technology

Public trust in science rests on our assessment of whether science and technology are 'social goods', including the role they play in society, our belief in their current and future potential to make life better, and whether we believe the benefits of science are equally felt.

In order to understand how the public feels about the value of science, we ask people to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statement:

Overall, modern science does more harm than good

Just over half of the public (55%) reject the idea that science does more harm than good

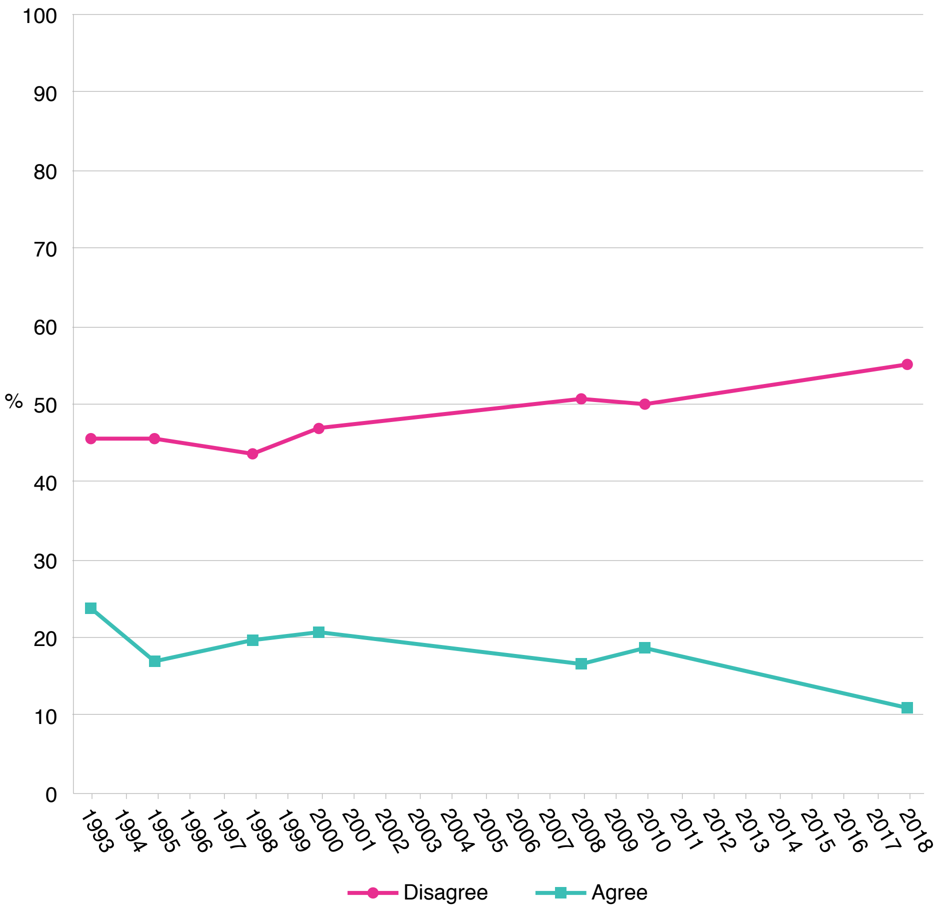
Just over half of the public (55%) reject the idea that science does more harm than good (36% "disagree", while 20% "disagree strongly"). Around one in ten (11%) agree with the statement (2% "agree strongly", while 9% "agree"). Interestingly, one quarter (25%) say that they "neither agree nor disagree" with the statement, with a further 9% not able to answer at all. This suggests that for a

1 Social class was measured using the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC): "managerial and professional" are relatively self-explanatory; "intermediate" is comprised of self-employed, lower supervisory or employer in a small organisation; and "routine" is comprised of those with routine or semi-routine occupations.

significant minority – around a third of respondents – the benefits and drawbacks of science may be seen as finely balanced[2].

Over time, the public has become less likely to agree that modern science does more harm than good, and more likely to disagree, with a sharper difference since 2000 (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Modern science does more harm than good, 1993–2018



The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

There are no statistically significant differences according to sex, age, education or social class. Those on the right of the political spectrum are more likely to refute the statement that "overall, modern science does more harm than good" – only 6% of those on the right agree that "modern science does more harm than good", compared with 11% of those in the centre and 14% of those on the left.

The relationship between attitudes towards the benefits of modern science and religious adherence is complex: while those of no religion are much more likely to disagree strongly that modern science does more harm than good, those who identify as Anglican

2 Evidence from the National Centre for Social Research panel experiments indicates that while some respondents use "neither" as a proxy for "don't know'" approximately 60% choose "neither" because "My answer would vary depending on the situation" and around 20% choose "neither" because "I don't know enough about the topic." See also, Sturgis, P. et al (2012).

and Roman Catholic also display relatively high levels of support for science (see Table 1).

Table 1 Modern science does more harm than good, by religion

	Church of England / Anglican	Roman Catholic	Other Christian	Non-Christian	No religion	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly	2	1	1	2	3	2
Agree	6	9	13	15	6	9
Neither agree nor disagree	27	29	22	32	24	25
Disagree	46	36	37	29	34	36
Disagree strongly	10	14	16	14	25	20
Don't know / Refusal	9	12	10	8	8	9
Unweighted base	*375*	*177*	*423*	*140*	*1182*	*2300*

We also ask questions aimed at understanding public attitudes towards the impact of science and technology on day-to-day life.

First, we ask whether people agree or disagree that:

> ***Science and technology are making our lives healthier, easier and more comfortable***

More than three-quarters (77%) agree that science and technology are making our lives healthier, easier and more comfortable, while just under a tenth (9%) disagree

More than three-quarters (77%) agree that science and technology are making our lives healthier, easier and more comfortable, while just under a tenth (9%) disagree. This level of approval for science's contribution to day-to-day life has not changed significantly since the last time we asked this question in 1996, when just under three-quarters (73%) of the public agreed.

Men (80%) are more likely than women (74%) to support the idea that science and technology have a positive impact on our lives. While those with higher educational qualifications and those in managerial and professional occupations are more likely to agree with this sentiment than their counterparts, across all groups agreement with the positive impact of science and technology on day-to-day life is very high.

We also ask respondents to consider the future impact of medical research by asking:

> ***Please say whether you think medical research will or will not lead to an improvement in the quality of life for people in Britain over the next 20 years?***

Overwhelmingly, the public believe that medical research will improve our quality of life over the coming decades, with 94% agreeing with this proposition (51% believe that medical research "definitely will lead to an improvement" in our quality of life, while 42% feel that it "probably will"). There are relatively small but statistically significant differences associated with education and social class, with higher levels of education and social class both associated with more positive views. Those from faiths other than Christianity are slightly less likely to agree (88%).

It is clear that a large proportion of the public believe that science and technology are having a positive impact on our lives, and that medical research has the potential to improve our lives in the future. But do people believe that these benefits are felt equally, or do they perceive that these benefits accrue more to the already advantaged? We ask:

> ***Some people think that scientific research into people's health mainly benefits those who are better off. Others think that it mainly benefits those who are worse off. Using this card, please choose the number from the scale which best describes your views.***
>
> ***Scientific research into people's health mainly benefits…***
>
> *1 (Those who are better off)*
>
> *2*
>
> *3*
>
> *4 (Everyone more or less equally)*
>
> *5*
>
> *6*
>
> *7 (Those who are worse off)*

Almost three-quarters (73%) see medical research as benefiting everyone equally

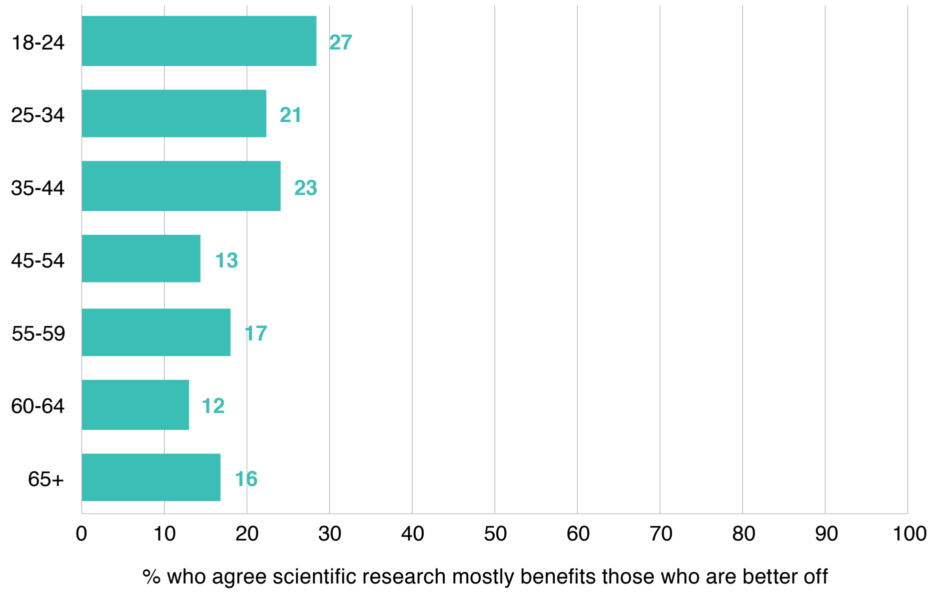
As shown in Table 2, almost three-quarters (73%) see medical research as benefiting everyone equally, with women (77%) more likely to think this than men (70%). However, almost a fifth of people (21% of men, 16% of women) believe that medical research mostly benefits those who are better off.

Table 2 Views on who benefits from scientific research, by sex

	Men	Women	All
Scientific research into people's health mainly benefits…	%	%	%
Those who are better off	21	16	18
Everyone more or less equally	70	77	73
Those who are worse off	8	6	7
Unweighted base	*1289*	*1632*	*2921*

Younger people are more likely to see medical research as mostly benefitting those who are better off, with over a quarter (27%) of 18-24-year olds taking this view compared with just over a tenth (12%) of 60-64-year olds (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Belief that scientific research into people's health mostly benefits those who are better off, by age



The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Similarly, people who identify as left-wing are more likely to feel medical research primarily benefits richer people than those who identify as right-wing, a finding that is likely to be underpinned at least in part by the distinctive views of younger people on this question, who themselves are more likely to fall on the left of the political spectrum.

It appears, then, that the British public view science and technology as being, on balance, socially beneficial. Across a range of measures, well over half the population feel clear about the value that science and technology bring to our lives. Views about the impact of medical research, in particular, are overwhelmingly positive. And these attitudes are strengthening over time, with the BSA time series showing a notable increase in positive appraisals of the role and benefits of science in society over the past 25 years. While there are some differences of view between different social groups, these differences are not substantial and there is strong support for the idea that science benefits us all.

Trust in scientists

Next, we turn to how confident people feel in scientific institutions and scientists to act in the public interest. To understand this we ask a series of questions about public benefit and transparency, addressing the potential for conflicts of interest to undermine trust. To explore the contrast between the academic and commercial sectors, two sets of questions ask:

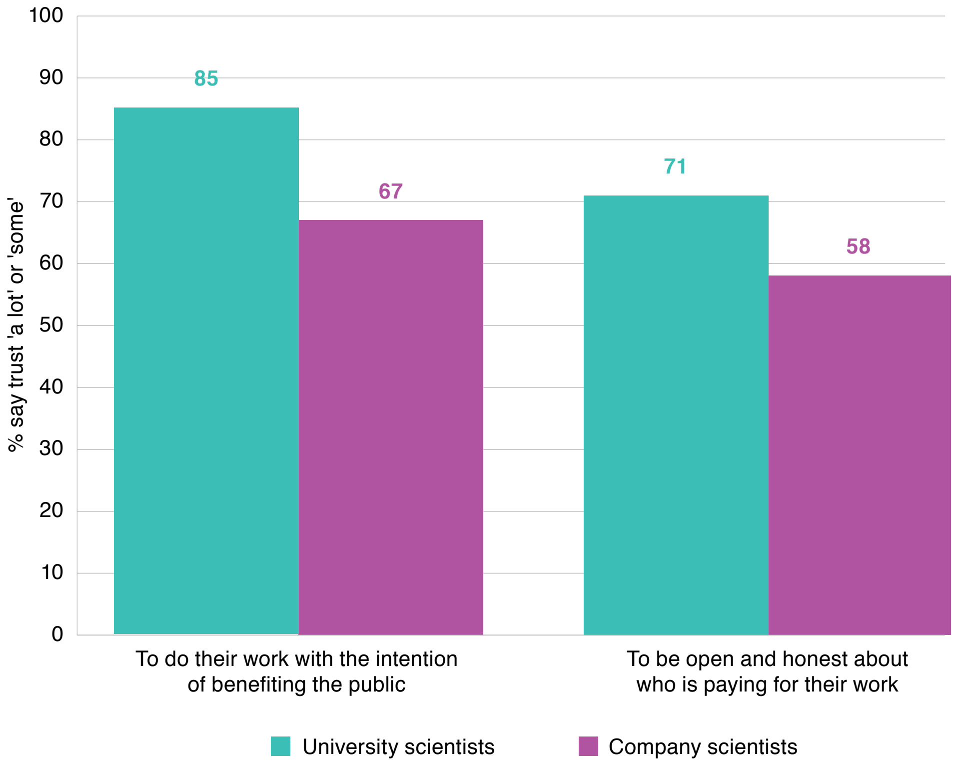
> *How much do you trust SCIENTISTS working in colleges or universities in Britain to do each of the following?*
>
> *....To do their work with the intention of benefiting the public*
>
> *....To be open and honest about who is paying for their work.*
>
> *Do you trust them to do this a lot, some, not much, or not at all? If you don't know, please just say so.*
>
> *Now, thinking about companies - for example, those who make medicines or agricultural supplies - how much do you trust SCIENTISTS working for COMPANIES in Britain to do each of the following?*

The level of trust in scientists working in the commercial sector to be working in the public interest is, as might be expected, lower than for university scientists

This split question helps us to explore whether the corporate structure, with its primary responsibility to shareholders as opposed to the public, alters attitudes to scientists.

More than four-fifths (85%) of people trust university scientists to do their work with the intention of benefitting the public either "a lot" or "some", compared with one in ten (9%) who trust "not much" or "not at all" (Figure 3). The level of trust in scientists working in the commercial sector to be working in the public interest is, as might be expected, lower than for university scientists: 67% state that they have "a lot" or "some" trust and over a quarter (28%) report trusting commercial scientists "not much" or "not at all".

Figure 3 Trust in university / company scientists



The data on which Figure 3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

As we saw with attitudes to science, attitudes towards trust in scientists are more positive among people with higher levels of education and those in managerial and professional occupations. As shown in Table 3, nine-tenths of people with a university education, and similar proportions of those with A-Level or O-level/GCSE qualifications, trust university scientists to work with the intention of benefiting the public, compared with less than three-quarters (73%) of people with no formal qualifications. Similarly, 90% of people in managerial occupations trust university scientists, compared with 80% of people in semi-routine and routine occupations.

Table 3 Trust in scientists to do their work with the intention of benefiting the public, by socio-demographic characteristics and position on attitude scales

% trust "a lot" or "some"	**Scientists working in colleges / universities**	**Scientists working for companies**	*Unweighted base*
All	85	67	*2921*
Highest educational qualification			
Degree	90	68	*756*
Higher education below degree / A-level	88	67	*777*
GCSE, O level, CSE or equivalent	87	69	*733*
No qualification	73	65	*604*
Socio-economic class			
Managerial or professional	90	67	*1227*
Intermediate occupations	87	70	*387*
Employers in small org; own account workers	83	66	*268*
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	86	72	*205*
Semi-routine & routine occupations	80	66	*708*
Placement on left-right scale			
Left	83	59	*701*
Centre	90	72	*869*
Right	88	73	*693*
Liberal - Authoritarian scale			
Most liberal	91	65	*791*
Neither	86	70	*643*
Most authoritarian	84	71	*834*
Religion			
Church of England/ Anglican	89	70	*448*
Roman Catholic	87	73	*231*
Other-Christian	82	70	*553*
Non-Christian	78	69	*208*
No religion	88	64	*1469*

Unlike attitudes to university scientists, attitudes to scientists working in the commercial sector do not show a statistically significant association with higher educational and social class, but they are associated with where people fall on the left-right spectrum. Three-fifths (59%) of people who identify as being on the left trust corporate scientists to work in the public interest, compared with just under

Respondents are more sceptical about funding transparency than public benefit

three-quarters of people who identify as being on the centre (72%) or right (73%). This may reflect a more general scepticism among those on the left of politics about the social benefits of private enterprise (Leibrecht and Pitlik, 2018). This hypothesis is supported by the breakdown according to liberal-authoritarian attitudes: those with the most liberal views are most likely to trust university scientists to act in the public interest, but least likely to trust commercial scientists.

Respondents are more sceptical about funding transparency than public benefit: 71% trust university scientists to be open about funding sources, while one fifth (19%) do not; trust in the commercial sector is lower (58%, with 35% saying they trust company scientists "not much" or "not at all"). For attitudes to university scientists, being younger, more highly-educated and from higher socio-economic groups are all related to trust around funding sources (Table 4). For company scientists, statistically significant differences are only found relating to education (although this was not a linear gradient) and political affiliation (only 53% of those on the left trust company scientists to be open about funding, compared with 66% of those on the right).

Table 4 Trust in scientists to be open about funding sources, by socio-demographic characteristics and position on attitude scales

% trust to be open about funding – "a lot" or "some"	Scientists working in colleges / universities	Scientists working for companies	*Unweighted base*
All	71	58	*2921*
Age			
18-34	75	62	551
35-54	70	56	936
55+	68	57	1430
Highest educational qualification			
Degree	79	62	756
Higher education below degree / A-level	70	54	*777*
GCSE, O level, CSE or equivalent	69	61	*733*
No qualification	62	56	*604*
Socio-economic class			
Managerial or professional	75	59	*1227*
Intermediate occupations	74	57	*387*
Employers in small org; own account workers	70	56	*268*
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	67	60	*205*
Semi-routine & routine occupations	65	58	*708*
Placement on left-right scale			
Left	69	53	*701*
Centre	74	59	*869*
Right	72	66	*693*
Liberal - Authoritarian scale			
Most liberal	75	60	*791*
Neither	72	59	*643*
Most authoritarian	69	58	*834*

Taken as a whole, there is little evidence here to support the proposition that people have 'had enough' of scientists. Trust in university scientists to act in the public benefit is very high, and although the level of trust is somewhat lower for scientists working in the private sector, it is still substantial. Where lower levels of trust are evident, this appears to be related to education and, to a certain extent, to political beliefs, with those on the left being more sceptical of public benefits and funding transparency in the commercial sector.

Science versus feelings and faith

Another essential dimension of public attitudes to science is the degree to which we strike the right balance between science and other factors that are relevant to societal decision making (Besley, 2013). This balance between science, faith, and feelings is relevant to our personal lives and choices, but also to public decision making and in particular the policy environment for investment in science and technological innovation. To understand how the British public feel about the role of science in informing individual and societal decision making compared to more obviously subjective modes of reasoning, we ask respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following statement:

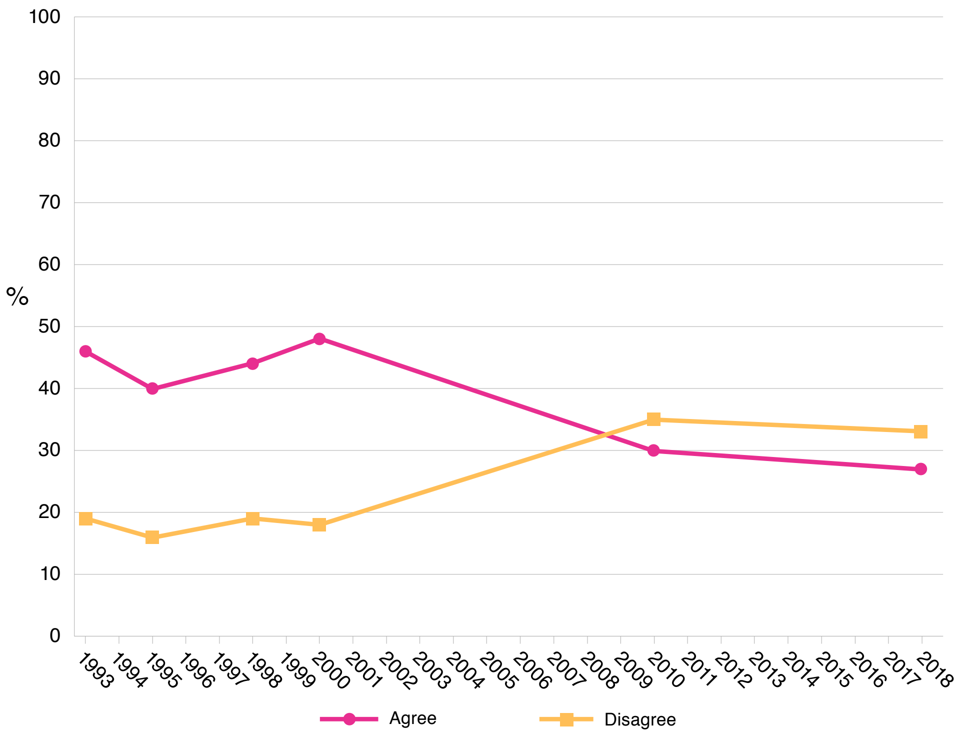
> ***We believe too often in science and not enough in feelings and faith***

Overall, attitudes to this proposition are mixed: 27% agree that we believe too often in science (although only 3% "agree strongly"), 33% disagree (with 12% saying "disagree strongly") and 31% said they "neither agree nor disagree". An ambivalent view of the relative balance between science, feelings and faith does not necessarily imply a negative perspective on the value of science; rather, it may reflect the idea that other factors are important in personal and social decision making.

There has been a marked decrease since 2000 in the proportion who feel that we place too much emphasis on science over feelings and faith

While the public remains fairly evenly divided on this question, there has been a marked decrease since 2000 in the proportion who feel that we place too much emphasis on science over feelings and faith (Figure 4). This no doubt reflects at least in part the decline in religious faith that the UK and many other countries have witnessed over this period (see the Religion chapter) but may also represent a strengthening of confidence in science as a basis for social and individual decision-making.

Figure 4 Agreement that 'We believe too often in science, not enough in feelings and faith', 1993-2018



The data on which Figure 4 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

As Table 5 shows, there are differences between social groups in response to this question. Men (39%) are more likely to disagree with the statement than women (28%). However, although slightly more women than men agree (29% compared with 25%), women are also more likely to not express an opinion as to whether we believe too often in science and not enough in feelings and faith.

Half of graduates (51%) disagree with the statement, compared with 34% of those whose highest qualification is at A-Level or equivalent, 25% of those with GCSEs or equivalent as their highest qualification, and 18% for those with no qualifications. However, those with lower levels of education are more likely to not be able to give a view, either by saying "neither agree nor disagree" (around a third for all groups under degree level) or "don't know" (as high as 18% for those with no qualifications, 11% for those with GCSEs or equivalent as their highest qualification). The same pattern occurs by socio-economic class.

Attitudes to the relative importance of science, feelings and faith are related to religious identification

Unsurprisingly, attitudes to the relative importance of science, feelings and faith are related to religious identification. Among people with no religion, support for the statement is just 15%, while almost half (44%) of this group disagree that we believe too often in science and not enough in feelings and faith. Roman Catholics and those who belong to the Church of England have very similar perspectives, with one third (33%-34%) agreeing and around a fifth (20%-21%) disagreeing. While the groups are heterogenous and the base sizes low, it is interesting to note that the views of people in the ‘other Christian’ and ‘non-Christian’ groups are distinctive, and more likely to be in support of the idea that we should focus more on feelings and faith (41% and 46% respectively). Analysis by religious attendance adds further support to these findings; while half (49%) of those who attend a service connected with their religion at least once per month either “strongly agree” or “agree” that “we believe too often in science, not enough in feelings and faith”. This proportion falls to just over one third (35%) among those who attend religious services less often than once per month but at least once a year, and to just over one fifth (22%) among those who attend less often than once a year.

Table 5 Agreement with statement "We believe too often in science, not enough in feelings and faith", by socio-demographic characteristics and position on attitude scales

		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know/ Refused	*Unweighted base*
All	%	27	31	33	9	*2300*
Sex						
Male	%	25	29	39	8	*992*
Female	%	29	34	28	10	*1308*
Highest educational qualification						
Degree	%	21	24	51	4	*630*
Higher education below degree / A-level	%	24	36	34	5	*637*
GCSE, O level, CSE or equivalent	%	31	34	25	11	*568*
No qualification	%	33	30	18	18	*434*
Socio-economic class						
Managerial or professional	%	21	29	44	6	*997*
Intermediate occupations	%	26	36	31	7	*324*
Employers in small org; own account workers	%	30	30	27	13	*209*
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	%	28	36	27	9	*159*
Semi-routine & routine occupations	%	32	33	21	13	*532*
Placement on left-right scale						
Left	%	33	28	32	7	*701*
Centre	%	27	33	33	8	*869*
Right	%	20	34	37	10	*693*
Liberal - Authoritarian scale						
Most liberal	%	16	28	48	7	*791*
Neither	%	28	36	28	8	*643*
Most authoritarian	%	36	32	23	9	*834*
Religious affiliation						
Church of England	%	34	36	21	10	*375*
Roman Catholic	%	33	38	20	9	*177*
Other Christian	%	41	26	24	9	*423*
Non-Christian	%	46	29	17	8	*140*
No religion	%	15	32	44	9	*1182*

Attitudes and scientific understanding

In an ever more technologically dependent society, even non-scientists need to be able to understand and form well-founded opinions about science (Entradas 2015). The so-called 'deficit' model of public understanding of science assumes that hostility to technological innovation derives, at least in part, from a lack of understanding of the science underlying such innovation (Sturgis and Allum, 2004). It follows from this that support for science and scientific research programmes could be expected to be higher among more 'scientifically literate' members of society.

This section explores two aspects of 'scientific literacy': to what extent do people feel scientific understanding is interesting and important? And does level of scientific knowledge help to explain differences in attitudes to science?

Interest in science

To understand how the British public weighs the importance of an understanding of science in day-to-day life, we ask respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement:

> ***It is <u>not</u> important for me to know about science in my daily life***

Three-fifths disagree with this statement – indicating that they <u>do</u> think knowing about science is important for daily life – while one quarter agree that scientific knowledge is <u>not</u> important. This represents a significant shift since we last asked the question in 1996, when 51% disagreed, suggesting the general public may be becoming more inclined to see scientific knowledge as having day-to-day relevance. This question sets a very high bar, asking not whether it is 'important' to know about science when grappling with specific decisions, but whether it is 'important' to know about science in daily life. Overwhelmingly, people support this idea, demonstrating a belief that scientific understanding matters to us as we go about our lives.

There is an association with education and occupational class, with higher education and higher occupational class associated with stronger support for the importance of scientific knowledge in daily life. Four in five graduates (78%) disagree that it is not important to know about science in daily life, compared with 39% of those with no formal qualifications. Similarly, three-quarters (74%) of people in managerial occupations disagree with the proposition, compared with 41% of people in routine and semi-routine occupations.

Interestingly, the importance of science in day-to-day life is one of the areas where we see associations between attitudes to science and political attitudes. In this case, almost three-quarters (72%) of the most liberal group disagree that it is not important to know about science as compared with just over half (56%) of the authoritarian group.

The data show strong public support for the idea that scientific knowledge is important, but do people find it interesting? In order to understand public interest in science, we ask:

> *Medical research is about how the body works, the causes of illnesses and diseases, and developing and testing new treatments.*
>
> *How interested, if at all, would you say you are in medical research?*

Over four-fifths (82%) say they are interested in medical research. This is perhaps unsurprising given the level of support for science and technology as a whole, and the direct salience of medical research to our lives and quality of life. However, there are some significant differences between groups:

Interest in medical research is associated with higher levels of education and higher occupational class

Interest in medical research is more prevalent among women (84% compared with 81% for men) and older people (86% of those aged 55 and over, compared with 78% for under 35 year olds). As for positive attitudes to science, interest in medical research is associated with higher levels of education and higher occupational class; nine-tenths (91%) of graduates are interested in medical research, compared with just under seven in ten (68%) people with no formal qualifications. Similarly, almost 89% of people in managerial occupations feel interested in medical research, compared with 77% of people in semi-routine or routine occupations.

Interest in medical research differed very little between those of no religion (83%) and Christians (87% for Church of England, 84% for Roman Catholics, 85% other Christian denominations). Those from non-Christian religions are, however, less likely to say they are interested in medical research (71%).

Scientific knowledge

As we noted earlier, a prevalent belief among scientists and policy makers is that a better-informed or 'scientifically literate' public will be both better-placed to make personal decisions involving science and technology and have a more positive attitude to science and technology as a whole. However, empirical studies suggest that the relationship between attitudes to science and scientific understanding is more complex, with knowledge and general attitudes to science only weakly correlated, and in the case of more controversial technologies, knowledge sometimes associated with negative attitudes (Allum et al, 2008; Entradas, 2015).

In order to assess the level of people's understanding of a range of scientific principles, respondents are asked a 'quick quiz' about science:

> *Now for a quick quiz about science. For each of the following statements, please say whether you think it is definitely true,*

probably true, probably false or definitely false. If you don't know, just say so and we'll go on to the next one.

Electrons are smaller than atoms?

More than half of human genes are identical to those of mice?

The cloning of living things produces genetically identical copies?

Lasers work by focusing sound waves?

By eating a genetically modified fruit, a person's genes could also become modified?

It is the mother's genes that determine the sex of the child?

Respondents were allocated a score of 1 for each question that was answered correctly (in the case of the first three items, respondents were given a score of 1 if they answered 'definitely true' or 'probably true', and in the case of the latter three items respondents gained a score of 1 if they answered 'probably false' or 'definitely false'). Scores were then combined, so that respondents who answered all six questions correctly achieved a score of 6, respondents who answered five questions correctly achieved a score of 5, etc.

People with higher levels of scientific knowledge are more likely to feel positively about science and technology, more likely to be interested in science and see it as relevant in day-to-day life, and more likely to support scientific interventions in ethically-complex contexts. Only trust in scientists in the commercial sector is uncorrelated with levels of scientific knowledge: having a higher quiz score is not associated with being more likely to believe corporate scientists act for the public benefit or are likely to be transparent about their funding sources. This association between higher quiz scores and more positive attitudes to science persists even after controlling for age, sex, social class and critically, education, indicating that scientific knowledge itself does indeed appear to be strongly related to attitudes to science and technology.

So far we have demonstrated that the majority of the public perceive science to be important for daily life, express a high level of interest in medical research, and believe an understanding of science and technology is important for modern living. There are differences between social groups, particularly according to education, class and, on some measures, sex, age and political views. This demonstrates that people's appraisals of the benefits of science are also related to their engagement in science, and particularly their level of knowledge. The more knowledgeable people are, the more supportive they are of science and of scientists. Our final section turns to how these factors shape public attitudes to more specific, and controversial areas of science.

Attitudes to controversial technologies

Analysis presented so far demonstrates that support for science and scientists in broad terms is very high, especially among those with higher levels of education and/or scientific knowledge. However, this may not necessarily translate to support in the context of specific, more controversial technologies. We have seen that the public believes that religious faith and feelings are also important as a guide for social action. Many areas of modern science and technology pose complex moral and ethical challenges (Nuffield Council, 2012), and for some people, faith or other beliefs may act as a 'moral compass' in such areas.

To explore this, we repeat a set of questions asked on previous BSA surveys about attitudes to pre-birth testing and genetically modified (GM) foods. These scientific procedures have been the subject of public debate, both in the UK and internationally. Yet their use has also become increasingly prevalent. Have the public become more positive about, or at least less opposed to, these ethically complex areas of science and technology? And are there differences between different social groups?

Attitudes to prenatal testing

Pre-birth screening tests are routinely offered in the UK, with standard tests covering infectious diseases as well as a range of physical and intellectual conditions. The purpose of the tests is to enable parents to make decisions about medical treatment for the mother and the baby during pregnancy, which may include decisions as to whether to continue with the pregnancy. This connection between pre-birth screening tests and termination has raised significant ethical concerns. Some of these are grounded in pro-life worldviews, based on the sanctity of human life and so often associated with religious faith. Others are grounded in relative rights to life and well-being of mother and baby, as well as disability rights, including concerns regarding the potential eradication of some disabled communities[3].

In 2018, we ask:

> ***Genetic tests can be carried out on an unborn child. Do you agree or disagree with parents using such tests to help them decide whether or not to have a child that...***
>
> ***...has a serious mental disability and would never be able to live an independent life?***
>
> ***…has a serious physical disability and would never be able to live an independent life?***

3 This debate has particularly focused on the rights of people with Downs Syndrome, see https://dontscreenusout.org

As Table 6 demonstrates, responses to both questions are broadly similar. Around two-thirds agree that parents should be allowed to use pre-birth genetic tests to decide whether to have a child that has mental or physical disabilities of a kind that would mean they would never be able to live an independent life. Only 16% disagree that parents should be allowed to use this kind of pre-birth testing, and a similar proportion (15%-16%) "neither agree nor disagree". This is very similar to the position in 2003, when BSA first asked these questions, although the proportion of people who "agree strongly" that parents should be able to choose pre-birth testing has increased significantly, indicating a strengthening of support for this kind of medical intervention.

Table 6 Views on parents' use of genetic tests, 2003 and 2018

For an unborn child that has…	**a serious mental disability**		**a serious physical disability**	
	2003	**2018**	**2003**	**2018**
	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly	23	34	20	32
Agree	44	33	44	35
Neither agree nor disagree	13	15	14	16
Disagree	12	9	13	9
Disagree strongly	7	7	6	7
Unweighted base	*3272*	*2921*	*3272*	*2921*

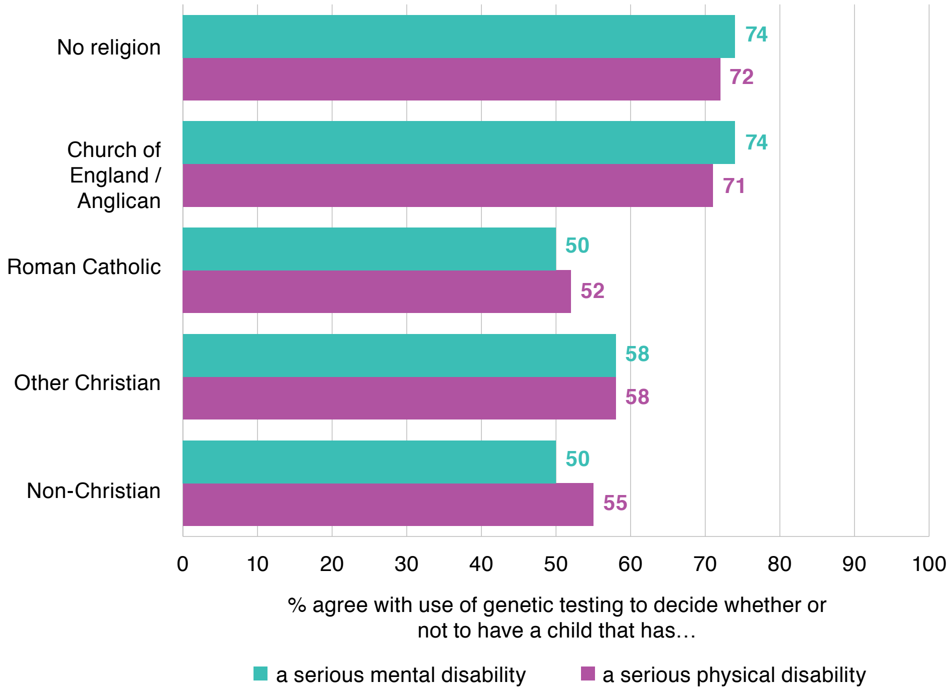
There are significant differences in attitudes to prenatal testing between religious groups

Interestingly, neither parenthood, sex, nor age is associated with levels of support for pre-birth genetic testing. There are also no significant differences according to political views.

As might be expected there are significant differences in attitudes between religious groups. The highest rates of support for prenatal testing are found among those with no religion (74% for mental disability, 72% for physical disability), along with those who identify as Church of England (74% and 71% respectively). Rates are lowest among Roman Catholics, whose Church teachings are most outspoken about terminations – although even so, around half of those identifying as Roman Catholic support testing. Those who identify with another Christian denomination and religions other than Christianity also had more mixed views.

These findings are again supported by an analysis of attitudes towards genetic testing by religious attendance; for example, while 51% of those who attend a religious service at least once per month agree with the right of parents to undertake genetic tests on an unborn child with a serious mental disability, this figure increases to 65% of those who attend a religious service less often but at least once a year, and to 70% among those who attend a service less often than this.

Figure 5 Agreement with parents' use of genetic tests, by religion



The data on which Figure 5 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

For both questions there is an association with education and social class; people with higher levels of education and from higher social class groups are more likely to agree that parents should be able to access pre-birth genetic testing in these circumstances. Seventy four per cent of graduates and 69% of those with A-Levels or equivalent as their highest qualification support access to genetic testing for a mental disability compared with 57% of those with no formal qualifications. This pattern is repeated in the case of a physical disability.

There is a steep gradient across levels of scientific knowledge; for both questions, around four in five with the highest levels of scientific knowledge believe that parents should be able to use pre-birth tests (82% in the case of an unborn child with a severe mental disability and 78% in the case of an unborn child with a severe physical disability) compared with around two in five (40%-43% respectively) of those with the lowest level of science knowledge.

Embryonic stem cell research

Embryonic stem cells' ability to propagate and develop into any cell type have made them valuable in a range of medical research fields, including treatment of injuries, diabetes and degenerative neurological conditions such as Parkinson's. However, as with pre-birth testing, the use of embryonic stem cells in research has been highly contested on ethical grounds by groups who believe that embryonic stem cells have the potential for life, and therefore should be protected.

In 2018 we repeat a question about the use of stem cells from human embryos in medical research which was first asked in 2008:

> *Some people think that scientists should be allowed to use cells from human embryos for certain types of medical research. Others think this should never be allowed. Using this card, please say what you think?*
>
> *Definitely should be allowed*
>
> *Probably should be allowed*
>
> *Probably should not be allowed*
>
> *Definitely should not be allowed*

Around three-quarters of people say scientists should be allowed to use cells from human embryos for medical research

In 2018, as shown in Table 7, around three-quarters of people say scientists should be allowed to use cells from human embryos for medical research (43% "probably should", 30% "definitely should"), while around a fifth (21%) oppose the use of stem cells in this context (13% "probably should not", 8% "definitely should not").

This is slightly higher than in 2008, when the combined figure supporting stem cell research was 69%, and the combined figure saying it probably/definitely should not be allowed was 28%. This suggests a positive shift in the acceptability of this area of science and technology. However, the change is relatively small and it remains to be seen if this is a long-term trend.

Table 7 Attitudes towards the use of cells from human embryos in medical research, 2008 and 2018

	2008	2018
	%	%
Definitely should be allowed	26	30
Probably should be allowed	43	43
Probably should not be allowed	16	13
Definitely should not be allowed	12	8
Unweighted base	*2250*	*2921*

As we saw with attitudes towards genetic testing on unborn children, faith is significantly related to attitudes to stem cell research. Rates of support are highest among those with no religion (79%), Christians who identify as Church of England (77%) and those of 'other Christian' denominations (70%). This compares with 59% for Roman Catholics and 62% for those who identify with non-Christian faiths (62%). Attitudes towards stem cell research also differ by frequency of attendance at religious services, with 62% of those who attend a service at least once per month displaying support for such research compared with 74%-77% of those who attend religious services either less frequently or never.

Again, there is also a link with level of education: over four in five (82%) of graduates feel that scientists should be able to use embryonic stems cells in medical research, compared with around two-thirds (65%) of those with no formal educational qualifications. These differences are also mirrored by occupational group.

There are also statistically significant differences by sex (77% of men in support, 71% of women) and age (70% of those under 35 are in support, 74% of those aged 35-54, 76% of those aged 55+).

Finally, support for stem cell research is also strongly associated with substantive scientific knowledge: 87% of those scoring '6' on our quiz agreed that scientists should be able to use embryonic stem cells compared with just over two-fifths (44%) of those scoring '0'.

Genetically modified crops and foods

Genetically modified (GM) crops have been the subject of substantial public opposition in the UK since the technology first emerged in the mid-1990s, and there has been a moratorium on their growth in the European Union since 2003. Yet, during the time the moratorium has been in place, the use of GM in other parts of the world, including the United States, has increased enormously without any evidence of harm to human health. Might this have led to a softening of opposition to this area of science and technological innovation?

In 2018, we include a short series of questions regarding GM technology in the self-completion questionnaire. The first questions focus on the overall balance of risks and benefits associated with GM, asking people to agree or disagree with three statements:

> ***You may have heard of genetically modified or 'GM' foods. These are made from plants which have had their genes altered. Some people say that growing these plants may damage other plants and wildlife and that food made from them may not be safe to eat. Other people say that growing these plants may mean lower food prices and less use of pesticides and weed killers. Please say how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements about genetically modified (GM) foods.***

The statements themselves then read as follows:

> ***In order to compete with the rest of the world, Britain should grow genetically modified (GM) foods***

> ***Genetically modified (GM) foods should be banned, even if food prices suffer as a result***

On balance, the advantages of genetically modified (GM) foods outweigh any dangers

As Table 8 shows, opinion regarding GM technology is divided: around a quarter (26%) agree that “in order to compete with the rest of the world, Britain should grow genetically modified (GM) foods”, around a third disagree (32%) and a similar proportion (30%) neither agree nor disagree. Similarly, a quarter agree that “on balance, the advantages of genetically modified (GM) foods outweigh any dangers” (25%), while a comparable proportion (23%) disagree and just over a third (36%) neither agree nor disagree.

When we look at responses to the explicitly anti-GM statement: “GM foods should be banned, even if food prices suffer as a result” this mixed picture shifts slightly, with almost two-fifths (37%) disagreeing (that is expressing support for a pro-GM stance), one fifth (19%) agreeing that GM foods should be banned, and just under a third (31%) neither agreeing or disagreeing.

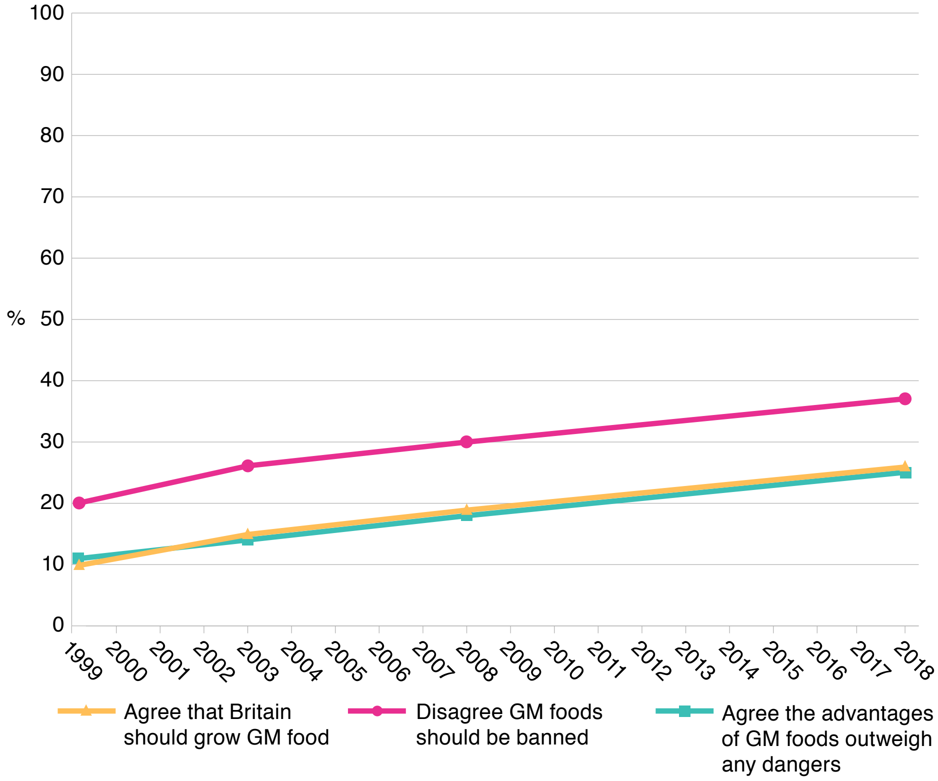
Table 8 Attitudes towards genetically modified (GM) foods

	In order to compete with the rest of the world, Britain should grow GM foods	**On balance, the advantages of GM foods outweigh any dangers**	**GM foods should be banned, even if food prices suffer as a result**
	%	%	%
Agree strongly	4	4	4
Agree	21	21	14
Neither agree nor disagree	30	36	*31*
Disagree	24	18	*28*
Disagree strongly	7	5	9
Don’t know / Refusal	13	16	14
Unweighted base	*2300*	*2300*	*2300*

Public opinion regarding GM foods is divided, with a substantial proportion remaining uncertain in their views

Public opinion regarding GM foods in 2018 therefore is divided, with a substantial proportion remaining uncertain in their views. However, as Figure 6 demonstrates, support for GM food production has increased significantly since the late 1990s, albeit that none of the questions show a majority in favour. When we first asked our respondents this series of questions in 1999, just 10% agreed that “in order to compete with the rest of the world, Britain should grow genetically modified (GM) crops”, while 11% agreed that “on balance, the advantages of genetically modified (GM) foods outweigh any dangers”. Around half (52%) agreed that “Genetically Modified (GM) foods should be banned, even if food prices suffer as a result’, while just 20% disagreed.

Figure 6 Attitudes towards genetically modified (GM) foods, 1999–2018



The data on which Figure 6 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Two further questions explore views on the potential risks of GM foods for human, animal, and plant health:

> ***In general, do you think that growing genetically modified (GM) foods poses a danger to other plants and wildlife?***

> ***Do you think that all genetically modified (GM) foods already available in the shops are safe to eat?***

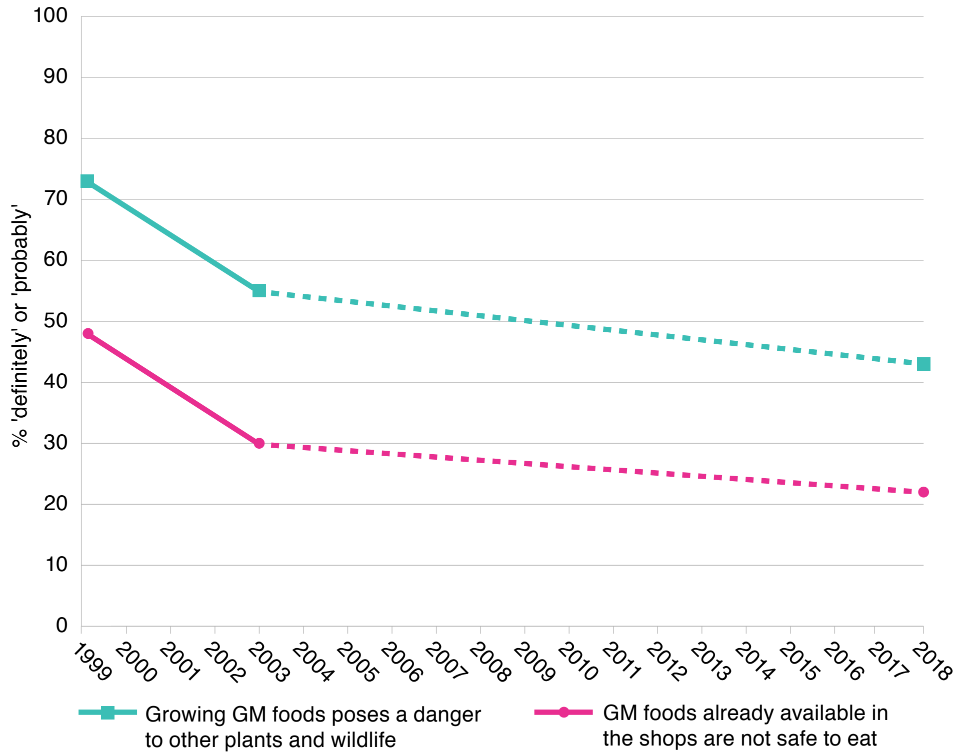
As shown in Table 9, there is considerable concern about the impact of growing GM foods upon plants and wildlife, with 43% asserting that growing genetically modified foods either "definitely" (12%) or "probably" (31%) poses a danger to other plants and wildlife. Meanwhile, although 56% feel that GM foods already available in shops are safe to eat (12% "definitely", 44% "probably"), just over one in five (22%) disagree. Very few people (3%) are prepared to state that GM foods are "definitely not" a risk to wildlife, but equally few (4%) are certain that GM foods are "definitely not" safe. Levels of "don't know or refusal" are high – a quarter (25%) report that they "don't know" whether GM foods pose a danger to wildlife and around a fifth (21%) "don't know" whether GM foods are safe to eat.

Table 9 Attitudes towards the risks involved in genetically modified (GM) food production

	Do you think growing GM foods poses a danger to other plants and wildlife?	**Do you think GM foods already available in the shops are safe to eat?**
	%	%
Definitely	12	12
Probably	31	44
Probably not	29	19
Definitely not	3	4
Don't know / Refusal	25	21
Unweighted base	*2300*	*2300*

Attitudes towards the potential risks posed by GM food production have also softened considerably over time (Figure 7). When BSA first asked the public for their thoughts on GM in 1999 perceptions of risk were relatively high; almost three-quarters (73%) felt that growing GM foods either "definitely" or "probably" posed a danger to other plants and wildlife, while around half (48%) felt that GM foods available in shops were either "probably not" or "definitely not" safe to consume. By 2003 these figures had decreased to 55% and 30% respectively and have fallen further to 43% and 22% in 2018 – a very substantial decline. This is perhaps unsurprising given that during the period between 1999 and 2018 there have been several assessments and reviews that have concluded GM crops are safe to eat and do not pose a threat to wildlife (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2015).

Figure 7 Attitudes towards the risks involved in genetically modified (GM) food production, 1999–2018



The data on which Figure 7 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

As with most of the other questions we have considered, there is an association between attitudes to GM crops and both education and social class: those with higher educational qualifications are more likely than those with no educational qualifications to agree that "Britain should grow GM foods" and that the advantages outweigh any dangers, with a similar gradient for social class (there was no significant difference by education or social class in views regarding whether GM foods should be banned).

Those with higher qualifications are more likely to believe GM foods pose a danger to other plants and wildlife, but also more likely to feel that genetically modified foods already available in the shops are safe to eat. It should be noted, however, that for both questions those with no qualifications are more than twice as likely as graduates either to state that they "can't choose" an appropriate answer, or to decline to respond.

There are also differences between the sexes, with women more likely to express disagreement regarding the benefits of GM technology and to be concerned about GM food's impact on the ecosystem, and the relative safety of GM foods available in shops. It is possible that this greater scepticism among women is related to the fact that women are far more likely than men to be responsible for all or most of the buying and cooking of food in their household (Food Standards Agency, 2019).

Younger people are more concerned about the impact of growing GM foods on plants and wildlife

While there are no significant differences in attitudes to the safety of GM foods by age, younger people are more concerned about the impact on plants and wildlife, with around half (49%) of those aged 18-34 suggesting that dangers may be present, compared with two in five (40%) of those aged 55 and over.

Religious identity was also related to attitudes towards the safety of GM foods, as was political orientation. Once again, those with no religion and those who identify as Church of England hold similar views; 61% of those with no religious identity and 66% of those belonging to the Church of England believe that GM foods available to buy in shops are safe to consume, compared with half of Roman Catholics and those falling into the 'other Christian' category, while just 36% of those belonging to a faith other than Christianity view such products as safe to eat.

That religious identity is related to some but not all aspects of attitudes towards GM food production is reflected in the distribution of attitudes by religious attendance. Aside from views on whether the advantages of GM food production outweigh the dangers (where religious attendance was seen to be significantly associated with attitudes but religious affiliation was not), the pattern of attitudes towards GM food production by religious attendance mirrors the picture painted by our analysis by religious identity and reinforces the complex nature of the relationship between religion and this particular ethical debate.

Fifty three per cent of those who are categorised as the most left wing (measured on BSA's left-right scale) believe that GM crops either "definitely" or "probably" pose a risk to plants and wildlife compared with 41% of those in the political centre and 37% on the political right. This is perhaps unsurprising given the relative focus on environmental issues on the political left, including concern about the impact of 'Big Pharma' corporations such as Monsanto in developing countries[4].

More positive views are also associated with higher levels of scientific knowledge. While 44% of people with the highest score on the knowledge scale agree that "on balance, the advantages of genetically modified (GM) foods outweigh any dangers", just 4% of those with the lowest score do so. Similarly, almost six in ten (59%) of those with the highest score disagree that growing GM foods should be banned even if prices rise, compared with just under one in five (18%) of people with the lowest score. Eight in ten (79%) of those with the highest score on the science knowledge scale feel that GM products available to purchase in shops are safe to eat compared with around three in ten (29%) of those with the lowest score. This relationship with levels of scientific knowledge was not evident for beliefs about risks to plants and wildlife.

4 Monsanto is the world's largest producer of genetically modified seed, as well as Roundup. It has been the subject of significant global controversy and organised campaigning as well as several high-profile lawsuits.

Table 10 Attitudes towards the risks involved in genetically modified (GM) food production, by socio-demographic characteristics

	Growing GM foods poses a danger to other plants and wildlife	GM foods already available in shops are safe to eat	Britain should grow GM foods to compete	The advantages of GM foods outweigh any dangers	GM foods should be banned, even if food prices suffer	*Unweighted base*
	% definitely / probably		% agree			
All	43	56	26	25	19	*2300*
Sex						
Men	39	63	34	33	18	*992*
Women	47	49	18	17	19	*1308*
Highest educational qualification						
Degree	47	64	33	33	21	*630*
Higher education below degree / A-level	46	61	25	25	20	*637*
GCSE, O level, CSE or equivalent	43	52	24	20	16	*568*
No qualification	33	43	19	18	16	*434*
Socio-economic class						
Managerial or professional	44	64	32	31	18	*997*
Intermediate occupations	40	54	21	21	18	*324*
Employers in small org; own account workers	46	53	20	20	23	*209*
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	40	58	24	26	20	*159*
Semi-routine & routine occupations	42	48	23	20	18	*532*
Religion						
Church of England / Anglican	45	66	28	24	19	*375*
Roman Catholic	48	49	24	21	19	*177*
Oher Christian	47	50	20	22	24	*423*
Non-Christian	48	36	19	17	23	*140*
No religion	39	61	29	28	16	*1182*

Conclusions

Public support for, and trust in, science and scientists have long been seen as essential for the smooth functioning of a technologically-advanced society. We inhabit a socio-technical ecosystem which requires citizen confidence that scientists are competent and working for the public good (Barber, 1990). More instrumentally, of course, declining trust in science may threaten public consent and financial support for both fundamental and applied research programmes, without which the grand challenges we face simply cannot be solved.

Analysis presented in this chapter has shown that levels of confidence in science are generally high. Most people perceive modern science as a force for good, seeing it as improving their lives, and being both interesting and relevant on a day-to-day basis. We find little support here for the idea of a crisis of public trust in science or scientists, indeed there is some evidence that as we become a more scientifically and technologically complex society, so our trust in science and technology is growing.

Most people perceive modern science as a force for good, seeing it as improving their lives, and being both interesting and relevant on a day-to-day basis

Higher levels of education, scientific knowledge and occupational status are indeed associated with more positive views of science in both abstract and concrete terms. But these differences are not substantial, and there is little evidence of a disenfranchised population turning against the institutions of science, or of US style ‘culture wars’.

Views about the relative importance placed upon science, feelings and faith in modern society are mixed, with around a third of respondents respectively agreeing and disagreeing that “we believe too often in science and not enough in feelings and faith”, with a final third unable to say. Clearly, the public takes the view that science is not the only body of knowledge or way of knowing the world, and that other things, like faith and feelings also matter. The importance of faith in particular is evident in our attitudes to more controversial, and ethically complex technologies, such as pre-birth testing, and the use of embryonic stem cells, both of which have majority support, but are viewed far more negatively by Roman Catholics, and adherents of non-Christian faiths.

So, while trust in some key social institutions has declined, support for science has strengthened, and strengthened from a high base. This should not lead us to conclude that more cannot be done to better engage and involve the public in the specification, development, and conduct of scientific research programmes. And, indeed, our evidence reveals a small but significant minority of the public with low levels of trust and confidence in science and its governance that should lend further caution against complacency. Nonetheless, the scientific community, rather than fearing a crisis of trust, has every reason to be confident in an engaged public, open to and supportive of science and technology’s role now and in the future.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

The data on which Figure 1 is based are shown below.

Table A.1 Modern science does more harm than good, 1993-2018

	1993	1995	1998	2000	2008	2010	2018
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	24	17	20	21	16	19	11
Disagree	46	46	44	47	51	50	55
Unweighted base	*1261*	*1054*	*1684*	*1963*	*1986*	*928*	*2300*

The data on which Figure 2 is based are shown below.

Table A.2 Belief that scientific research into people's health mostly benefits those who are better off, by age

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	27	21	23	13	17	12	16
Unweighted base	*167*	*384*	*456*	*480*	*263*	*252*	*915*

The data on which Figure 3 is based are shown below.

Table A.3 Trust in university and company scientists

	Scientists working in colleges or universities	Scientists working for companies
% trust 'a lot' or 'some'		
To do their work with the intention of benefiting the public	85	67
To be open and honest about who is paying for their work	71	58
Unweighted base	*2921*	*2921*

The data on which Figure 4 is based are shown below.

Table A.4 We believe too often in science, not enough in feeling and faith, 1993-2018

	1993	1995	1998	2000	2010	2018
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	46	40	44	48	30	27
Disagree	19	16	19	18	35	33
Unweighted base	*1261*	*1054*	*1684*	*1963*	*928*	*2300*

The data on which Figure 5 is based are shown below.

Table A.5 Agreement with parents' use of genetic testing, by religion

% agree with use of genetic testing to decide whether or not to have a child that has…	**a serious mental disability**	**a serious physical disability**	*Unweighted base*
No religion	74	72	*1469*
Church of England / Anglican	74	71	*448*
Roman Catholic	50	52	*231*
Other Christian	58	58	*553*
Non-Christian	50	55	*208*

The data on which Figure 6 is based are shown below.

Table A.6 Attitudes towards genetically modified (GM) foods, 1999-2018

	1999	**2003**	**2008**	**2018**
	%	%	%	%
Agree that Britain should grow GM foods to compete	10	15	19	26
Agree the advantages outweigh the dangers	11	14	18	25
Disagree GM foods should be banned	20	26	30	37
Unweighted base	*833*	*2649*	*1986*	*2300*

The data on which Figure 7 is based are shown below.

Table A.7 Attitudes towards genetically modified (GM) foods, 1999-2018

	1999	**2003**	**2018**
% say 'definitely' or 'probably'	%	%	%
Growing GM food poses a danger to other plants and wildlife	73	55	43
GM foods already available in the shops are not safe to eat	48	30	22
Unweighted base	*833*	*2649*	*2300*

Women and work

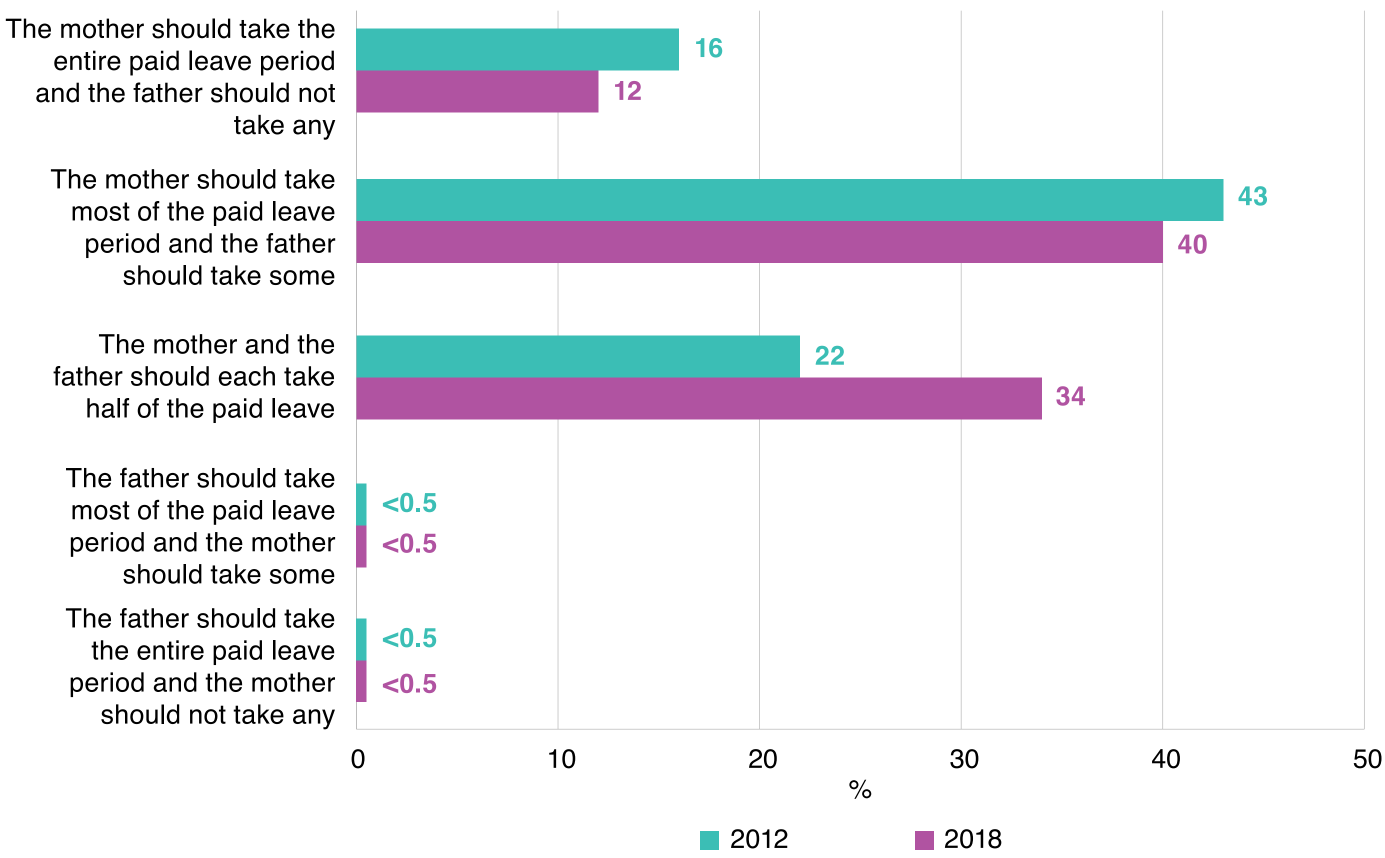
Do attitudes reflect policy shifts?

This chapter examines whether the recent introduction of policies to improve the representation and progression of women in the labour market and facilitate a more equitable sharing of childcare between parents reflect, or have influenced, people's attitudes and behaviour. While the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and the extension of the right to request flexible working are in tune with people's attitudes, views about the gender pay gap are more mixed. Levels of awareness of and support for these policies vary, with the views of women being more closely aligned with the aims of these policies, than those of men. Those in lower socio-economic groups are less supportive of sharing parental leave, less aware of and comfortable asking about flexible working, but also are most opposed to the existence of a gender pay gap.

Spotlight

The principle of sharing parental leave, in some configuration, is well supported. Since 2012 people's preferences have shifted towards shared leave arrangements, as opposed to leave being taken solely or predominantly by the mother.

Views on how paid leave following the birth of a child should be divided between the mother and the father, 2012 and 2018



Overview

Sharing parental leave

The introduction of Shared Parental Leave reflects the direction of long-term changes in attitudes towards gender roles.

- 40% think for a working couple with a newborn child, the mother should take most of the paid leave and the father should take some. 34% think the parents should divide the leave equally. Support for this view has increased from 22% in 2012 and it is most popular among the youngest age group, graduates, and those with a socially liberal outlook.
- In 2012, 31% thought that the best way for a family with a child under school age to organise their life was for the mother to stay at home and the father to work full-time; just 19% think this now.

Flexible working

Awareness of eligibility for flexible working is relatively high and there is little evidence that the extension of the right to request flexible working has altered employees' attitudes to requesting a flexible working arrangement or perceptions of its potential impact on their careers or behaviour.

- 79% correctly believe that workers with caring responsibilities for adult family members can request flexible working, while 74% know this is the case for workers with children. 57% know that any employee has the right to request flexible working.
- 18% of employees think that asking for a flexible working arrangement would have a positive impact on their career prospects, while 52% do not think it would have a positive or negative impact and 29% think it would have a negative impact.

Gender pay gap

While almost everyone supports the principle of equal pay, the public is more divided about the gender pay gap.

- 89% think that it is wrong for men to be paid more than equally qualified women, working in the same job for the same company, suggesting almost universal support for the principle of equal pay.
- 43% consider it wrong for the average earnings of men to be higher than those of women, in a company where most senior staff are male and most junior staff female. 31% consider this to be right, and 20% view it as neither right nor wrong.
- Women (48%), those with no qualifications (55%) and those in the lowest occupational grouping (53%) are most likely to regard this situation as wrong.

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Introduction

There is a substantial body of evidence that parenthood has a significant impact on women's participation, progression and remuneration within the labour market. Although women's employment rate has increased steadily for decades and is now at a record high, at 72% the proportion of women in the UK in employment is still lower than the proportion of men (80%) (ONS, 2019). Similarly, although the hours worked by women have increased steadily since records began in 1971, women are still more likely to work part-time than men (41% of all women in employment, compared with 13% of all men in employment) (ONS, 2019).

The connections between labour market outcomes and parenting are clear. While, for men, parenthood is associated with higher levels of employment, for women the opposite is the case: mothers of all ages are less likely to be in work than women without children (ONS, 2013). Similarly, mothers are less likely to work full-time than fathers, with 50.5% of mothers working full-time in 2018, compared with 93.2% of fathers (ONS, 2018a). This inequality in labour market participation is also reflected in pay, although it is not the gender pay gap's only cause. The UK's gender pay gap (the difference between men's and women's average hourly earnings) is currently 8.6% for full-time employees. Analysis of the drivers of the gender pay gap suggests that differences in the labour market histories of men and women, with women having spent less time working full-time and more time undertaking unpaid care work, is the main driver of this difference, with other major drivers being discrimination or gendered behaviour and occupational segregation (Olsen et al., 2018).

The last decade has seen the introduction of a suite of policies designed to tackle under-representation of women in the labour market, support increased pay and progression for female workers and enable parents to share childcare responsibilities more equitably

The last decade has seen the introduction of a suite of policies designed to tackle under-representation of women in the labour market, support increased pay and progression for female workers and enable parents to share childcare responsibilities more equitably[1]. In this chapter we draw on data from the 2012 and 2018 British Social Attitudes (BSA) surveys to examine attitudes in relation to three of these policies: Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP); the extension of the right to request flexible work; and the mandatory reporting of the gender pay gap for businesses with more than 250 staff. In each case we examine, as far as is possible given the data collected, whether these policies appear to be working as intended and if they reflect, or appear to have had an impact on, people's attitudes and their actual or anticipated labour market outcomes. Given the fact that these policies were partly devised to address differences between the labour market outcomes of men and women, we consider how far perceptions and impacts vary by sex. We also examine how far attitudes vary by a range of

1 These policies sit within a wider government strategy to promote economic growth through a labour market that is flexible, effective, and fair. Consultation on Modern Workplaces (2011) https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-modern-workplaces; https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-42918951

other demographic characteristics which have historically been associated with attitudes to gender roles or employment policies, or where we might theoretically expect variation to exist.

Shared Parental Leave

Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) were introduced in December 2014 for the parents of children who were due or placed for adoption from 5 April 2015, replacing Additional Paternity Leave and Statutory Additional Paternity Pay. SPL gives both parents the right to take and share leave after the birth or adoption of a child by allowing mothers to transfer some or all of their maternity leave and pay to the father or their partner[2]. Couples can take SPL together or one at a time, and leave can be taken in up to three different blocks of time (more if the employer allows). The policy was introduced to give parents greater choice and flexibility in childcare, to encourage more fathers to play a greater caring role, and to increase flexibility for employers and employees in balancing work and other commitments (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, February 2013). Critically, the intention of the policy was to promote women's participation and progression within the workplace and to contribute to closing the gender pay gap (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012a).

Since coming into force in 2015, take-up rates for Shared Parental Leave and Pay among eligible parents have been low, but this was expected

Since coming into force in 2015, take-up rates among eligible parents have been low, but this was expected. Government estimated take-up as being between 2% and 8% when the policy was introduced[3]. A 2018 survey of expectant mothers found that finances and worries over potential negative consequences on fathers' careers were the primary barriers to take up (Twamley and Schober, 2018) – although it is worth noting that comparable concerns may need to be navigated in the one third of households where women are the main wage-earners. More recent qualitative research with both men and women entitled to SPL identified additional barriers including lack of awareness and understanding of the policy among employers and employees as well as different expectations of how work and care should be divided between men and women (Birkett and Forbes, 2019). Both studies noted that parents with higher levels of education were more likely to take up shared parental leave.

In the following section we examine attitudes to parental leave, including sharing parental leave, and assess whether these may have changed as a result of the introduction of SPL in 2015, although we do not measure attitudes to the policy specifically. Given the short time since the policy was introduced, and the fact that attitudes in this domain are driven by wider attitudes to gender, work and caring, we might anticipate there to be minimal evidence of change. We

2 Except for the mandatory two-week maternity leave (four if the mother works in a factory) that all mothers must take.

3 Oral questions, Kelly Tolhurst, Parliamentary Under Secretary, BEIS, HC Deb, 14 March 2019, c513

then examine which sections of society are more supportive of these policies, our expectation being that they are likely to be most popular with groups who are best positioned to take advantage of them (such as those with higher incomes) and least popular among groups with more traditional views on gender, work and caring (such as older age groups and those with fewer educational qualifications). We also anticipate that women and men might have different views, given they have traditionally adopted distinct roles in relation to work and caring.

Attitudes towards sharing parental leave

To measure support for the principles underpinning paid parental leave, we ask respondents:

> ***Consider a couple who both work full-time and now have a new born child. One of them stops working for some time to care for their child. Do you think there should be paid leave available and, if so, for how long?***
>
> ***And who should pay for this leave?***
>
> ***[The government, the employer, both the government and the employer, other sources]***

Among the public, the consensus remains that paid leave should be available for the parents of a newborn child. Almost nine in ten (88%) support paid leave for new parents with just one in ten (10%) saying that parents should not be eligible for any paid leave. This division in views has not changed significantly since 2012. Similarly, views about who should pay for parental leave have remained stable since 2012. The most popular option, supported by two-thirds (61%) is for the responsibility for paying to be shared between the government and the employer. Similar proportions think that the government alone (16%) or the employer alone (17%) should pay for the leave. These data suggest considerable support for the availability of paid parental leave that is, at least in part, publicly funded.

To understand attitudes to sharing parental leave, we ask respondents a follow-up question:

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

Respondents have the options of stating that either the mother or the father should take the entire paid leave period, should take most of the leave period (with the other parent taking some of it) or that the mother and father should each take half of the leave period. The three most popular answers provided are presented in Table 1, alongside those recorded when the question was asked in 2012.

The majority of people are of the opinion that parental leave should be shared, to some degree, between the mother and the father

Clearly, the majority of people are of the opinion that parental leave should be shared, to some degree, between the mother and the father. Four in ten (40%) feel that the mother should take most of the leave period (with the father taking some), while a third (34%) think the leave period should be equally shared between both parents. Around one in ten (12%) feel that the mother should take the entire leave period, while almost nobody supports the view that the father should take most or all of the leave. These data indicate that the principle of shared parental leave is well supported, with three-quarters of people favouring mothers and fathers sharing parental leave, in some configuration. However, the fact that only one third support an equal division of leave suggests that the default path prior to the introduction of SPL, for the mother to take all of the leave, may still be exerting some influence on attitudes. Given the increase in support for this option, this influence may have reduced since the introduction of SPL.

Table 1 Views on how paid leave following the birth of a child should be divided between the mother and the father, 2012 and 2018 [4]

	2012	2018
	%	%
The mother should take the entire paid leave period and the father should not take any	16	12
The mother should take most of the paid leave period and the father should take some	43	40
The mother and the father should each take half of the paid leave	22	34
The father should take most of the paid leave period and the mother should take some	*	*
The father should take the entire paid leave period and the mother should not take any	*	*
Can't choose	8	13
Unweighted base	*808*	*1302*

** = fewer than 0.5% of respondents*

Have views shifted following the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay?

By comparing results from the 2018 survey with those obtained in 2012, presented in Table 1, we are able to explore whether there has been a shift in attitudes towards sharing parental leave since the introduction of SPL and ShPP. A number of changes are evident. Most markedly, the proportion supporting the mother and father sharing the leave period equally has increased by 12 percentage

4 A larger proportion of respondents did not answer this question in 2012 compared with 2018 (10% and 1% respectively); however, exclusion of these cases from the analysis would not impact on our substantive conclusions or result in any of the identified changes over time no longer being significant.

People's preferences have shifted, to some degree, in line with the direction of policy change, with support reducing for options where leave is taken solely or predominantly by the mother, to an arrangement where it is shared equally

points. At the same time, support for arrangements where the mother takes the majority of the leave has reduced; support for the propositions that the mother should take the entire leave period or most of the leave period has fallen by 4 percentage points in both instances, although the latter difference is not significant. At the same time, the proportion indicating that they cannot choose one option has risen by 5 percentage points. Clearly then, people's preferences have shifted, to some degree, in line with the direction of policy change, with support reducing for options where leave is taken solely or predominantly by the mother, to an arrangement where it is shared equally. However, it is unclear to what extent these changes can be directly attributed to the introduction of SPL and ShPP; given they may be part of a longer-term shift in attitudes to gender roles, which has contributed to the development and implementation of new policies in this area. This is a possibility we examine in the next section.

Are views linked to broader attitudes to gender roles?

We can assess the impact of this policy change, by considering whether attitudes to the division of caring responsibilities have changed markedly in relation to a child in the first year of their life, or whether there has been comparable change in relation to caring for children under school age more generally (a group not impacted, in the main, by these specific policy changes). We have tracked views about family and working lives for families with children under school age since 1987, by asking respondents the following question:

> ***Consider a family with a child under school age. What, in your opinion, is the best way for them to organise their family and work life?***
>
> ***The mother stays at home and the father works full-time.***
>
> ***The mother works part-time and the father works full-time.***
>
> ***Both the mother and the father work full-time.***
>
> ***Both the mother and the father work part-time.***
>
> ***The father works part-time and the mother works full-time.***
>
> ***The father stays at home and the mother works full-time***
>
> ***Can't choose***

The responses provided, along with those obtained when this question was asked in 2012, are presented in Table 2. Strikingly, there is little consensus regarding how a family with a child under school age should best organise their work and family life – to the extent that almost one third of people are unable to select one of the arrangements. The most popular arrangement, favoured by one third, is for the mother to work part-time and the father to work full-time.

Around two in ten favour the mother staying at home and the father working full-time. No more than one in ten respondents support any of the other options.

Table 2 Views on the best way for a family with a child under school age to organise family and work life, 2012 and 2018

	2012	2018
	%	%
The mother stays at home and the father works full-time	31	19
The mother works part-time and the father works full-time	38	32
Both the mother and the father work full-time	4	6
Both the mother and the father work part-time	5	9
The father works part-time and the mother works full-time	-	*
The father stays at home and the mother works full-time	*	*
Can't choose	19	30
Unweighted base	*950*	*1504*

** = fewer than 0.5% of respondents, and - = zero*

Analysing data collected in 2012 and focusing on changes in attitudes since 1987, Scott and Clery (2013) demonstrated that attitudes have grown steadily less-gendered since the question was first asked, with declining support for arrangements where the mother plays the main caring role. The authors attributed this change to a generational shift, with older generations, holding more traditional views on gender roles, being replaced by younger, more liberal generations, and anticipated that this trend would continue, (although might slow down slightly). By comparing the most recent data with responses from 2012, we can see that this trend has indeed continued. The proportion of people favouring the father as the sole or main breadwinner (the two top rows in Table 2) has decreased from around two-thirds (69%) in 2012 to a half (51%) now. In contrast, the proportion of people who think that both parents should work part-time has almost doubled, from 5% to 9%.

Interestingly, however, the decrease in favouring the father as the sole or main breadwinner has not translated into an equivalent increase in the proportion of people favouring mothers and fathers sharing work and caring responsibilities equally. Instead, the proportion selecting the "can't choose" option has grown from just under two in ten in 2012 to three in ten now. Attar Taylor and Scott (2017) have previously interpreted this growing uncertainty as being driven by a more nuanced interpretation of the question, acknowledging that the right answer might be context-dependent (for example, depending on the job prospects and earning potential of the mother and father). Nevertheless, these data suggest that the shifts in preferences for sharing paid leave in the first year of a child's life have not occurred in isolation (being replicated, to some degree, in attitudes to sharing work and caring for families with children under school age), and therefore cannot necessarily be attributed to the related policy changes.

In order to understand how far attitudes to sharing parental leave are driven by broader attitudes to gender, we ask respondents the following question, exploring attitudes to gender and work:

> ***Here is a list of jobs, generally speaking do you think men are better suited, women are better suited, or are both equally suited to the following roles?***
>
> *Civil engineer*
>
> *Primary school teacher*
>
> *Doctor*
>
> *Local councillor*
>
> *Member of Parliament*

Respondents have the option of saying that men are “much better” or “slightly better” suited than women to each job role, that women are “much” or “slightly better” suited, or that men and women are “equally suited”. The responses provided demonstrate that clear majorities think that men and women are equally suited to each of these roles, with neither gender appearing to ‘own’ the roles of doctor, local councillor or Member of Parliament. The public is more divided in the case of a civil engineer and a primary school teacher; around two in ten (19%) consider men better suited to the former role while a similar proportion (18%) consider women better suited to the latter role. Across the board, men are slightly more likely than women to think jobs are more suited to either men or women.

To compare preferences for the sharing of parental leave with views on gender roles in the sphere of work, we divided respondents into two groups – those who indicated that all of the jobs asked about are equally suitable for men and women, and those who indicated that this is not the case in at least one instance. The proportions of these two groups who express preferences for each of the approaches to sharing paid leave following the birth of a child are presented in Table 3 (with the exception of those options stating the father should take all or most of the leave period, given these are each selected by fewer than 1% of respondents).

Table 3 Views on how paid leave following the birth of a child should be divided between the mother and father, by attitudes to gender and occupations

		The mother should take the entire paid leave period and the father should not take any	The mother should take most of the paid leave period and the father should take some	The mother and the father should each take half of the paid leave	Can't choose	*Unweighted base*
All	%	12	40	34	13	*1302*
Attitudes to gender and occupations						
Some job roles are more suited to men or women	%	19	44	26	8	382
All job roles are equally suited to men and women	%	9	39	37	14	*813*

Clearly, there is some association between views about the suitability of men and women for different job roles and preferences for paid parental leave. Around two in ten of those who think some of the job roles are more suited to one of the genders think that the mother should take the entire leave period, compared with one in ten of those who hold a gender-neutral view. Similarly, people with a gender-neutral view of job roles are also more likely to feel that the mother and father should split parental leave equally. There is, therefore, some overlap between groups who appear to believe women are more suited to caring for a child in the first year of their life, and who believe men or women are more suited to certain occupations – suggesting that attitudes to shared parental leave have developed in the context of wider attitudes to gender. However, the fact that preferences vary substantially among both those who think some jobs are more suited to one gender, and those who do not, suggests other influences may be at play here; it is to these which we turn next.

Who is in favour of sharing parental leave?

As noted at the outset, a number of demographic characteristics are known to be associated with attitudes to gender roles, and so might be expected to link to attitudes to parental leave specifically. Older people, people with fewer educational qualifications and those with lower incomes have historically advocated more traditional gender roles (Taylor and Scott, 2017). Attitudes to gender are also known to be correlated with attitudes to a range of other social issues, with those holding liberal views on gender roles being more likely to hold liberal attitudes across the board (Scott and Clery, 2013). Finally, men and women might be expected to hold different views, reflecting individual preferences for working and caring responsibilities, while parents – who will have experienced dilemmas associated with this issue in practice, rather than simply thinking about them in theory – might also be expected to hold different views.

Interestingly, there are no differences in the views of men and women when it comes to how parental leave should be split. While the lack of a difference by sex may seem surprising, it reflects earlier analyses by Taylor and Scott (2017) and Scott and Clery (2013). Our analysis also found only very slight differences in views between parents of young children and those who were not parents of young children.

Differences in attitudes to sharing parental leave are associated with age, level of education, occupational status and income. In each of these instances, we see that the social groups which tend to hold more liberal views per se, do so in relation to parental leave specifically

Instead, as shown in Table 4, differences in attitudes are associated with age, level of education, occupational status and income. Younger people are more likely than older people to support the sharing of parental leave: over four in ten 18-34-year olds think that parental leave should be split equally, while less than three in ten of those aged 55 or over take this view. In contrast, almost six in ten (59%) of those aged 55 and over think that the mother should take most or all of the leave, while only just above four in ten of 18-34-year olds think this. Views also differ by education level, with almost a quarter of people with no qualifications feeling that the mother should take all the leave, compared with less than one in ten graduates. Similar differences, of a lesser magnitude, are evident by occupational grouping and household income although, given the known association between education levels, income and occupational status, these may simply result from the link between education levels and attitudes in this area. In each of these instances then, we see that the social groups which tend to hold more liberal views per se, do so in relation to parental leave specifically.

Table 4 Views on how paid leave following the birth of a child should be divided between the mother and father, by demographic characteristics

		The mother should take the entire paid leave period and the father should not take any	The mother should take most of the paid leave period and the father should take some	The mother and the father should each take half of the paid leave	Can't choose	*Unweighted base*
All	%	12	40	34	13	*1302*
Age						
18-34	%	7	35	42	14	*244*
35-54	%	8	44	33	12	*443*
55+	%	20	39	27	12	*615*
Education level						
Degree	%	7	39	41	13	*370*
A-level equivalent	%	10	45	30	14	*387*
GCSE equivalent	%	13	41	34	10	*307*
No qualification	%	23	30	28	15	*223*
Household income quartile						
Highest	%	8	44	35	14	*252*
2nd highest	%	12	41	33	14	*258*
2nd lowest	%	11	45	32	11	*297*
Lowest	%	18	33	36	8	*265*
Occupational status						
Managerial and professional occupations	%	8	42	38	11	*576*
Intermediate occupations	%	10	43	25	21	*176*
Employees in small organisations and own account workers	%	22	35	24	17	*121*
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	%	12	47	25	13	*90*
Semi routine and routine occupations	%	15	37	38	8	*299*
Social outlook						
Socially conservative	%	20	42	28	9	*440*
Socially liberal	%	5	34	44	16	*447*

Given SPL is a relatively new policy, the coming years will determine whether positive attitudes, in combination with higher levels of awareness, will be sufficient to drive uptake, and ultimately change women's labour market outcomes, or whether further policy change is needed

To explore this link further, we also investigated whether views on sharing parental leave differ between those with a 'socially liberal' outlook and those with a 'socially conservative' outlook. Each year respondents to BSA are asked a series of questions designed to ascertain whether they are more inclined to the libertarian or the authoritarian end of the ideological spectrum. Details of these questions are given in the Technical details of this report. Differences can be detected here as well: a fifth of the most authoritarian group think that the mother should take all paid leave, compared with only one in twenty of those with the most liberal outlook.

Based on these results, it appears that broader values as well as attitudes to traditional gender roles may play a role in determining attitudes towards sharing parental leave. However, from Table 4 it is also clear that other factors are at play here.

From the analysis presented thus far, it seems likely that changing attitudes towards sharing parental leave are reflective of a wider trend towards less gendered attitudes to work and caring responsibilities. This conclusion is further supported by the fact that the relationship between responses to the two questions on work and family life appears to be consistent over time: among those who expressed each view about how a family with a pre-school child should organise their work and family life we found a similar range of responses to the question about how a couple with a newborn child should divide their paid leave in 2012 and 2018. However, it is also clear that SPL and ShPP are policies that are broadly in keeping with both the current views of the public, and the trajectory of change in attitudes to traditional gender roles. The challenge for SPL is one of uptake, as recognised by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) which has made substantial investments in promoting awareness of the policy, including through the 'Share the Joy' campaign, costing £1.5 million, and subsequent activities to raise awareness of SPL in 2019. Given SPL is a relatively new policy, the coming years will determine whether positive attitudes, in combination with higher levels of awareness, will be sufficient to drive uptake, and ultimately change women's labour market outcomes, or whether further policy change is needed to bring the UK closer to a model where men and women share early childhood care more equally, as seen in the Nordic countries, which have made use of interventions including 'daddy quotas' for leave as well as higher levels of compensation for parental leave (Atkinson, 2017; Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018). It should, however, be noted that the Nordic countries differ from the UK in a number of other respects, that might encourage take-up of shared parental leave.

Flexible working

The Right to Request Flexible Working for parents caring for a child under the age of six or a disabled child under the age of 18 was introduced in 2003 (Pyper, 2018) and was extended to employees

In 2014 the 'right to request' flexible working was extended from parents to all employees who had worked with the same employer for 26 weeks

who care for dependent adults in 2007 and those with parental responsibility for children under 17 in 2009. The aims of the policy were to support parents to balance work with caring responsibilities, reduce child poverty and increase productivity. A 2006 study by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) suggests that this policy change was followed by a substantial increase in uptake of nearly all forms of flexible working, including a trebling of the use of flexi-time and doubling of the use of home working by fathers (Smeaton and Marsh, 2006). Similarly, data from the Work-Life Balance Survey of Employees has shown that the take-up of flexible working arrangements among employees to whom these were available increased from 56% in 2006 to 60% in 2011 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012).

In 2014 the 'right to request' was extended from parents to all employees who had worked with the same employer for 26 weeks. As well as aiming to increase productivity and support longer working lives, this extension of the right to request flexible working was intended to combat the 'cultural belief that flexible working is only of benefit to parents and carers and consequently for women, as they continue to deliver the majority of the caring role.' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012b). In introducing the policy, the government explicitly recognised the stigma associated with flexible working which drives negative consequences including lower pay and damaged career prospects, primarily for women (Chung, 2019).

In the next section, we examine perceptions around flexible work in light of these policy aims. We first look at whether the take-up of flexible work has changed following the extension of the right to request. Subsequently we examine awareness of the policy, whether there is any evidence that the stigma associated with flexible working has reduced, and people's attitudes to requesting a flexible working arrangement themselves.

Take-up of flexible working

Take-up of flexible working has traditionally been monitored by the government through BEIS' Work-Life Balance survey series[5]. In order to understand whether the extension of the 'right to request' has increased, or indeed normalised flexible working we ask BSA respondents in employment the following question:

> *Thinking about your job, in the last 12 months have you done any of the following...*
>
> *Worked part time*
>
> *Worked term time only*
>
> *Job shared*
>
> *Worked flexitime*

5 Findings from this survey series in relation to flexible working are available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-life-balance-survey-number-4

Worked a compressed working week

Worked reduced hours for a limited period

Worked from home on a regular basis (either all of the time or part time as part of their normal working hours)

Worked annualised hours?

Forty-two per cent of employees report using at least one flexible working arrangement in the last 12 months. This proportion has not changed significantly since the question was asked in 2012

The responses obtained are presented in Table 5, alongside those given when the question was first asked in 2012. Forty-two per cent of employees report using at least one of these flexible working arrangements in the last 12 months. This proportion has not changed significantly since the question was asked in 2012.

Table 5 Take-up of flexible work, 2012 and 2018

	2012	2018
	%	%
Part-time	27	21
Flexi-time	12	12
Work from home	8	11
Term-time only	7	6
Reduced hours	3	4
Compressed week	2	2
Jobshare	1	1
Annualised hours	1	2
None of the above	54	57
Unweighted base	*1341*	*779*

Base: all employees

Take-up rates for most types of flexible working have not changed significantly between 2012 and 2018, although significant differences might have been detected had bigger sample sizes been available. Home working increased slightly from 8% in 2012 to 11% in 2018. Interestingly, take-up of part-time working decreased from 27% in 2012 to 21% in 2018. It seems likely that, rather than representing a decline in the popularity of part-time working, this decrease is the consequence of the strengthening labour market enabling people to move from ‘underemployment’ (part-time work among people who would like to work full-time) to full-time roles.

Consistent with the long-term pattern, women are more likely than men to have worked flexibly in the last 12 months with half of working women (50%) reporting flexible working, compared with just over a third (36%) of men. Older workers are more likely than younger workers to have worked flexibly, with over half (56%) of those aged 55 and over reporting flexible working, compared with over a third

(36%) of 18-34-year olds. Differences by education levels are also apparent, with nearly half (48%) of employees who are graduates having used a flexible working arrangement in the last 12 months, compared with around one third of those with O levels (or equivalent) (35%) or no qualifications (33%) – though caution needs to be applied in the latter case, due to the small number of respondents in this category[6]. Between 2012 and 2018 the proportion of women who report working flexibly has declined by ten percentage points (from 60%), while the proportion of men using such arrangements has risen slightly by three percentage points. The proportions of those with different levels of qualifications and in different age groups working flexibly have remained stable, however.

There is little evidence that the extension of the right to request has substantially altered the take-up of flexible working although rates of take-up of flexible working for men and women appear to have converged to some extent

On this basis, there is little evidence that the extension of the right to request has substantially altered the take-up of flexible working, with women remaining significantly more likely to work flexibly than men (although rates of take-up of flexible working for men and women appear to have converged to some extent – suggesting that the flexible working policy is moving in the right direction, in terms of narrowing the gender gap). However, the assumption underpinning the policy was that by extending the right to all employees, the ‘stigma’ associated with flexible working, and the associated negative consequences would be reduced. In the following sections we explore employees’ perceptions of flexible working, to test whether the policy may have altered attitudes to flexible working, and in particular, reduced the perception that flexible working impacts negatively on individuals’ careers.

Awareness and understanding of flexible working

Awareness of the right to request flexible working is a necessary pre-condition for influencing take-up or reducing the associated stigma. To gauge levels of awareness, we ask employees:

> ***Do you think the following people currently have or do not have the legal right to request to work flexibly?***
>
> ***Employees with children under the age of 17***
>
> ***Employees who need to care for a family member with long-term mental or physical ill health***
>
> ***Any employee regardless of their circumstance***

A majority think that those with familial caring responsibilities have the legal right to request flexible working. Interestingly, the proportion of people who believe the legal right covers workers with caring responsibilities for adult family members is higher than the proportion who believe it covers childcare (79% and 74% respectively).

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6 There is also a relationship between take-up of flexible working and income – here, however, the latter is partially a product of the former, as the reduction in hours associated with some forms of flexible working results in a corresponding decrease in salary.

Fewer than six in ten (57%) understand that any employee, regardless of their circumstances, has the right to request flexible working

However, fewer than six in ten (57%) understand that any employee[7], regardless of their circumstances, has the right to request flexible working. These findings are unsurprising, given the length of time for which right to request was available to specific groups, prior to its extension to all employees.

We anticipated that certain groups of employees would be more likely to be aware of which groups have a legal right to request flexible working. It was envisaged that graduates would be likely to be more knowledgeable about this area, along with those with higher incomes, as these groups have a stronger labour market position, where flexible working may be more accepted. Alternatively, we anticipated that those working for smaller employers might have lower levels of awareness, as these employers might be less likely to promote and publicise these schemes, as their take-up would have greater organisational impacts and be harder to accommodate. The data confirms that each of these assumptions is correct. Those with higher levels of education and income are more likely to be aware that the right to request flexible working does not depend on having caring responsibilities. Sixty-five per cent of graduates think that all employees have the right to request flexible working, compared with 49% of those with no qualifications. Interestingly, the fourth Work-Life Balance Employee survey detected a similar pattern of difference by level of education, in relation to the 2009 extension of the right to request to parents which children caring for children aged under 17 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012c).

However, awareness is lowest among those working for small employers, with just over half (52%) of people working in organisations with less than 50 employees being aware of the right to request flexible working, compared with 63% of people in organisations with a staff of more than 200. This suggests that promoting the right to request flexible working is likely to be particularly important in small and medium employers (SMEs) – especially given these employers may be less enthusiastic about doing so (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013). Interestingly, however, there were no significant differences between male and female employees' understanding of these rights.

Has the stigma associated with flexible working reduced?

A key ambition for extending the right to request flexible working was that employers would start to be more open to their employees working in different ways, and that employees would feel comfortable asking for a working arrangement that best suited their circumstances. To examine employees' perceptions of their employers' attitudes, we ask them the following questions:

7 The extension of the right to request was for all employees who had worked with the same employer for 26 weeks.

> ***Do you think working flexibly would change your employer's perception of you as an employee?*** [8]
>
> ***Do you think asking for a flexible working arrangement would have any impact on your career prospects or likelihood of promotion?*** [9]

The responses obtained to the first question overall, and for those with different levels of education (who we might anticipate holding different views) are presented in Table 6. Perceptions of employers' attitudes appear to be, on balance, neutral. Around one fifth of employees feel that working flexibly has had, or would have, a negative impact on their employer's perception of them as an employee. Half perceive neither a positive nor a negative impact, and around one quarter feel that working flexibly has had or would have a positive impact. A comparison with responses obtained in 2012 indicates that there has not been a significant shift in perceptions since the extension of the right to request flexible working, suggesting that the policy has had little impact in this regard.

Table 6 Whether thinks working flexibly has had or would have an impact on employer's perception of them as an employee, by level of education

	Degree	Higher education below degree/ A level	GCSE, O level or equiv / CSE	No qualification	All
	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely or probably positive impact	31	20	24	29	26
Neither positive nor negative impact	46	55	51	50	50
Definitely or probably negative impact	21	24	24	19	22
Don't know / Refusal	1	1	2	2	1
Unweighted base	*269*	*247*	*183*	*69*	*776*

Base: all employees

Employees who have used a flexible arrangement in the last 12 months are more likely to feel that their employers viewed flexible working positively, with one third (33%) saying flexible working had

8 Those who had worked flexibly were asked whether they think this has had or will have an impact.

9 Those who had worked flexibly were asked whether they think this has had or will have an impact.

had a positive impact on their employer's view of them, compared with 20% of people who had not worked flexibly. Additionally, as shown in Table 6, graduates are more likely to feel the impact would be, or has been, positive, compared with those whose highest qualification is at A-Level or equivalent. The pattern by level of education is not straightforward, as just under three in ten (29%) of those with no qualifications also report a positive impact – although we should be cautious about this finding, given the small sample size involved. It is possible that this relatively positive view of the impact of flexible working is a direct consequence of the very high concentration of part-time and other forms of flexible working in the low pay / low skill end of the labour market[10] (ONS 2018b).

Turning to the second question measuring employees' perceptions of employers' attitudes, as shown in Table 7, employees feel similarly about the impact of flexible working on career prospects or likelihood of promotion, with three in ten believing it has had (or would have) a negative effect, around half anticipating neither a positive nor a negative impact, and under two in ten experiencing or anticipating a positive effect. Once again, attitudes appear to have remained static since 2012, suggesting that the extension of the right to request flexible working has not had a discernible impact on employees' perceptions of their employer's attitudes to this policy to date, although we did not test this link directly.

People who have worked flexibly in the last 12 months are again more likely to believe this would have a positive impact on their prospects of progression, compared with those who have not (25%, compared with 13%). Age also makes a difference, with younger employees more likely to think that working flexibly has had, or would have, a positive impact. Just under a quarter (23%) of 18-34-year olds hold this view, compared with 10% of those aged 55 and over. Interestingly, there was no difference in the proportions of male and female employees perceiving a positive or negative impact on their employer's perception of them, or on their career prospects, as a result of working flexibly.

10 Analysis undertaken on the basis of occupational class (known to be correlated with number of educational qualifications) obtained similar, though less pronounced, results, although the sizes of a number of the sub groups were too small for these differences to be treated with confidence.

Table 7 Whether thinks working flexibly has had / will have any impact on career prospects, by age

	18-34	35-54	55+	All
	%	%	%	%
Definitely or probably positive impact	23	17	10	18
Neither positive nor negative impact	45	52	65	52
Definitely or probably negative impact	31	30	22	29
Don't know / Refusal	2	2	3	2
Unweighted base	*197*	*367*	*166*	*731*

Base: all employees

The employee view of flexible working is relatively positive: the majority, and particularly those who have worked flexibly, feel flexible working has no negative impacts on employment prospects or employer perspectives

The fact that there has been no significant change between 2012 and 2018 in employees' perceptions of their employers' attitudes on either measure indicates that the extension of the right to request has not altered employees' perceptions of its potential impacts on their work and careers. However, it is important to recognise that the employee view of flexible working is relatively positive: the majority, and particularly those who have worked flexibly, feel flexible working has no negative impacts on employment prospects or employer perspectives, and, while a significant minority do fear the 'stigma' of flexible working, a larger group believe it will help, or have a neutral impact on, rather than harm their careers.

Attitudes to requesting a flexible working arrangement

To explore whether perceived stigma affects employees' views about making a request to work flexibly, we ask employees who had not worked flexibly in the last 12 months how comfortable they would feel asking their employer for a flexible working arrangement, using the following question:

> ***How comfortable would you feel asking your employer for a flexible working arrangement?***

In addition, for the first time in 2018, we ask those employees who had indicated they were already working flexibly a comparable question:

> ***Suppose you needed to move to a new flexible working arrangement. How comfortable would you feel asking your employer for this new flexible working arrangement?***

The responses obtained are presented in Table 8. Given the responses of employees who have and have not worked flexibly in

67% think that they would feel comfortable making a flexible working request. 13% say they would feel neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, and 18% would feel uncomfortable making such a request

the past 12 months are not significantly different, these have been combined for this and subsequent analyses[11]. Sixty-seven per cent think that they would feel comfortable making such a request. Thirteen per cent say they would feel neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, and 18% would feel uncomfortable making such a request. Female employees are more likely than male employees to say that they would feel comfortable asking their employer for a (new) flexible working arrangement (72%, compared with 63% of male employees).

In 2012, when only the first question was asked (of those who did not have a flexible working arrangement), 63% said they would be comfortable asking for flexible working; this proportion has not changed among this group significantly in the six years to 2018 (65%).

Table 8 How comfortable would feel asking employer for a new flexible working arrangement, by education level and income quartile

	Highest education level				
	Degree	**Higher education below degree/ A-level**	**GCSE, O level or equiv / CSE**	**None**	**All**
	%	%	%	%	%
Very or fairly comfortable	74	68	63	54	67
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	12	11	15	17	13
Very or fairly uncomfortable	14	19	20	22	18
Unweighted base	*269*	*247*	*183*	*69*	*776*
	Income quartile				
	Lowest	**2nd lowest**	**2nd highest**	**Highest**	**All**
	%	%	%	%	%
Very or fairly comfortable	60	66	61	75	67
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	13	12	12	11	13
Very or fairly uncomfortable	20	22	22	14	18
Unweighted base	*58*	*180*	*188*	*231*	*776*

Base: all employees

We might anticipate those with a greater number of qualifications, higher incomes and in higher occupational groupings being more comfortable making a flexible working request as a consequence

11 Those who have worked flexibly in the last 12 months are not significantly more likely to report feeling comfortable making a request, compared with those who have not (71% compared with 65%).

of them having a strong position in the labour market. These assumptions were all borne out by the data. As shown in Table 8, around three-quarters of graduates, compared with over half of those with no qualifications, anticipate feeling comfortable although, given the small number of respondents with no qualifications, we should be cautious about the latter finding. Similarly, this is the case for three-quarters of those in the highest quartile of household incomes, compared with 60% of those in the lowest quartile although, once again, caution needs to be applied, as the number in the latter category is small. Similarly, we find that just under three-quarters (73%) of those in managerial and professional occupations anticipate feeling comfortable, compared with 59% of those in semi-routine and routine occupations.

We ask those who are not currently working flexibly the following question to ascertain whether they think their employer would be likely to approve such a request:

> ***Suppose you wanted to move to a flexible working arrangement to improve your work-life balance. How likely do you think your employer would be to agree to you working flexibly?***

Four in ten employees who are not currently working flexibly (40%) think that their employer would be either very or quite likely to approve such a request. Thirty four per cent think this is very or quite unlikely, while 19% express a neutral view – that this is neither likely nor unlikely. These proportions have not significantly changed in the years since the extension of the right to request flexible working: in 2012, 38% of employees expressed this view (this group is too small in size to enable further analysis).

From the data on flexible working reviewed in this section, there is little evidence that the extension of the right to request has substantially altered the level or pattern of take-up of flexible working arrangements; while a greater number of differences may have been detected from larger samples of employees with different characteristics, it should be noted that this tentative conclusion is reflected in analysis of the Labour Force Survey (Beatson, 2019). Nor can we see any significant impact on employees' perceptions of flexible working and its impact on their standing or future career prospects. On the other hand, it is also clear that the majority of employees see flexible working as having (or having the potential to have) neutral or even positive impacts on their work and career, that is to say, if there is a stigma associated with flexible working, it is not one that is universally felt.

Concern about the gender pay gap has grown. The pay gap has come to be seen as critical not only to gender equality, but also to addressing poverty, and building a more productive economy

Gender pay gap

Concern about the persistent gap between men's and women's hourly wages (the gender pay gap) has grown considerably over the last decade. Over that time, the pay gap has come to be seen as critical not only to gender equality, but also to addressing poverty, and building a more productive economy (Dias et al., 2018).

The gender pay gap arises from the fact that women are over-represented in less well-paid job roles and working arrangements than men. Studies have identified a number of causes of the gender pay gap, in particular the impact of parenting with the associated shift to part-time work (Olsen et al., 2018) and reduction of years of working experience (Dias, 2018). Other major drivers include differences between men and women in their behaviour, their distribution across different occupations and their experience of discrimination (ibid).

Data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings shows a steady decline in the size of the pay gap among both full-time and part-time workers since 1997 (ONS, 2018c). Although the gap has declined, the most recent data, from 2018, shows that it is still the case that there is a considerable gap (of 8.6%) among full-time employees, which rises to an overall gap of 17.9% among full and part-time employees (due to the concentration of women in part-time roles, and the association between part-time roles and low pay).

In addition to the introduction of SPL and the extension of the right to request flexible working, the government, in 2017, introduced mandatory annual reporting of the gender pay gap for organisations with more than 250 employees as a direct intervention designed to influence pay and progression within larger employers. Accounts of the impact of this 'name and shame' approach at the employer level are inconclusive, with no systematic investigation yet available. Announcing the publication of this year's data, the Government Equalities Office (GEO) noted that while 3,736 employers saw their pay gap improve, 3,387 employers saw their pay gap worsen and 645 employers reported no change (GEO, 2019).

This section explores attitudes to the gender pay gap, placing them in the broader context of attitudes to equal pay[12].

Views about equal pay

Equal pay is the legal right for men and women to be paid the same for doing the same work, or work of equivalent value, introduced in the Equal Pay Act of 1970. On BSA, we examine attitudes towards equal pay by asking respondents the following question:

> *We would like you to imagine a situation in a large company*

12 As the question about the gender pay gap was asked for the first time in 2018, we are unable to examine change over time.

Around nine in ten (89%) say that it is either "wrong" or "very wrong" for men to be paid more than equally qualified women working in the same job for the same company

> *where equally qualified men are being paid more than women for doing the same job.*
>
> *How right or wrong do you think it is for men to be paid more than women if working in the same job, for the same company?*

The responses provided suggest a clear consensus in favour of equal pay, with around nine in ten (89%) saying that it is either "wrong" or "very wrong" for men to be paid more than equally qualified women working in the same job for the same company. Education levels are associated with attitudes, with more than nine in ten graduates (92%) expressing this view, compared with under eight in ten (78%) of those with no qualifications. There are also differences in the attitudes of men and women, particularly in their strength of opinion; while 78% of women consider pay inequality "very wrong", just 57% of men express this view.

Attitudes to the gender pay gap

In order to understand how people feel about the gender pay gap, we present respondents with a scenario describing one of the key structural causes of the pay gap. We ask respondents to:

> *Now imagine a large company where most of the senior jobs are done by men, and most of the junior jobs are done by women. As a result of this, the average hourly earnings of men in the company are higher than the average hourly earnings of women.*
>
> *How right or wrong do you think it is that men are paid more than women in this company?*

The overall responses, along with the views of groups with different demographic characteristics, are presented in Table 9. In contrast to the question about equal pay, where we find a consensus among the public, people appear to be divided on the question of the gender pay gap. Just over four in ten consider the situation described to be wrong, around three in ten consider it to be right, with two in ten viewing it as neither right nor wrong[13].

13 Very similar patterns exist in the answers to a question where the same situation is mapped to the staff of a supermarket.

Table 9 How right or wrong thinks it is for men to be paid more than women in a large company where most of the senior jobs are done by men, and most of the junior jobs are done by women, by sex, age, education and occupational class

		Right	Wrong	Neither right nor wrong	*Unweighted base*
All	%	31	43	20	*2269*
Sex					
Men	%	35	38	22	*948*
Women	%	28	48	18	*1321*
Age					
18-34	%	37	38	21	*394*
35-54	%	28	45	21	*732*
55+	%	30	46	18	*1138*
Education level					
Degree	%	41	33	21	*617*
A-level equivalent	%	35	40	20	*613*
GCSE equivalent	%	26	49	21	*552*
No qualification	%	19	55	17	*453*
Occupational status					
Managerial and professional occupations	%	41	35	20	*951*
Intermediate occupations	%	30	43	21	*320*
Employees in small organisations and own account workers	%	26	45	23	*228*
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	%	31	46	15	*166*
Semi routine and routine occupations	%	21	53	20	*533*

As is the case with equal pay, the views expressed by men and women are significantly different, with 38% of men regarding the scenario as wrong, compared with just under half (48%) of women. Younger people are less likely than older people to consider the gap in pay to be wrong (38% of 18-34-year olds express this view, compared with 46% of those aged 55 years and over). In addition, higher levels of educational qualifications, occupational status and income are all clearly associated with attitudes to the pay gap – with those with lower incomes, those with fewer educational qualifications and those in lower occupational groupings being more likely to describe the gap in pay as wrong. Most markedly, 33% of graduates consider the gap in pay to be wrong, compared with more than half (55%) of those with no qualifications.

These findings are somewhat surprising and there are two underlying factors that may be contributing to these distributions of attitudes. The first is that, while pay equality engages a direct comparison between men and women, the pay gap requires us to take account of an interconnected set of drivers that, taken together, result in an unfair outcome (Dias et al., 2018). Given this, it is unsurprising that views are more mixed. The second is that there is a clear pattern in attitudes: pay gap 'winners' – men, people with higher levels of education, higher pay and so on are more likely to see the gap as justified than pay gap 'losers'. This is in spite of the fact that many of these groups historically tend to express more liberal views in a range of related areas. Attitudes to the gender pay gap, to some extent, are therefore something of an anomaly in the sphere of attitudes to gender roles.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have examined attitudes to a set of policies that are highly relevant to women's participation, progression and remuneration in the labour market, as well as the gendered nature of care. It should be recognised that these policies are driven by challenging goals, seeking to change not just the way in which we work, but also, and perhaps most importantly, the way in which we parent and relate.

In the case of parental leave and flexible working, the policies introduced in recent years appear very much in tune with the public's attitudes

In the case of parental leave and flexible working, the policies introduced in recent years appear very much in tune with the public's attitudes: the majority of people are supportive of (some) sharing of paid parental leave and feel positively about flexible working and its career impacts. While there is limited evidence of further marked shifts in attitudes following the introduction of these policies, particularly in relation to the extension of the right to request flexible working, this is perhaps unsurprising as attitudes to gender roles have been shown to evolve slowly over time. However, given the fact that views on balance, are positive, we might expect to see increasing uptake of SPL or flexible working particularly among men, but as yet there is little evidence of this: estimates of SPL uptake are very low, and women continue to be overrepresented in the flexible workforce, particularly in part-time, low paid roles. Attitudes to the gender pay gap are more mixed, indicating that, for a substantial group, this disparity is perceived as being warranted on merit. Given the drivers of the gap, as well as the mechanics of organisational employment policies, it is perhaps unsurprising that early indications are of slow progress at the employer level.

In each policy area, we can see significant differences in attitudes between different groups. Unsurprisingly, women have attitudes that are more congruent with the aims of all three policies, including being substantially more likely to perceive the pay gap as unfair. But, as well as gender, we also see clear associations between attitudes and socio-economic status (as indicated by levels of education, occupational grouping and income). The group with the lowest socio-economic status are less likely to support sharing parental leave, which might be attributed both to more traditional attitudes to gender, but also the significantly lower returns to work for low-income mothers. Similarly, while levels of 'flexible working' are very high in this group, as a consequence of the strong correlation between low pay and part-time working, this group is less likely to know they have a right to request flexible working, or to feel comfortable making a request, potentially as a consequence of the distinction between choosing part-time work, and being underemployed. This group is also more likely to see the gender pay gap as unfair.

There is a risk then, not only that these policies will not make a significant difference to the gendered pattern of work and care in the UK, but also that they may do most good for the women who need them least: highly educated women, who already have a relatively privileged position in the labour market. While this will deliver greater equality for (some) women, it will leave the intractable problems of equality for low income women, as well as poverty and productivity unchanged. However, in the longer-term, take-up of these policies by women in higher socio-economic groups might begin to shift social norms, removing some barriers that may currently be preventing a wider range of women taking advantage of them.

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Relationships and gender identity

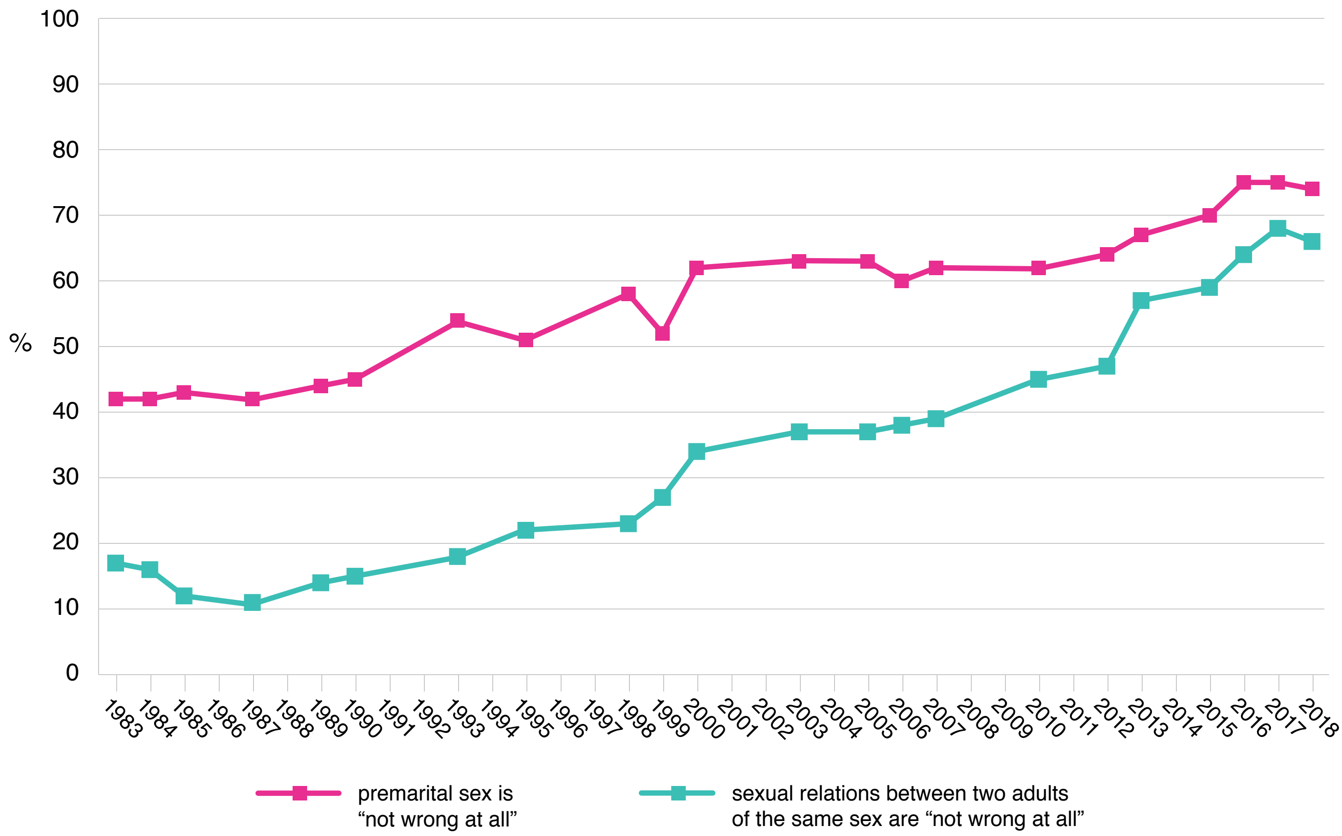
Public attitudes within the context of legal reform

Since British Social Attitudes (BSA) began, we have seen major changes in public attitudes to sexual relationships as well as the legal frameworks that support them. Our attitudes to gender have also transformed, with a sustained shift away from support for traditional gender roles. In this chapter we explore attitudes towards one of the most recent reforms in this area: the extension of civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples. We also explore ‘common law marriage’: in a context where couples increasingly choose to live together without formalising their relationships, the question of legal protections for cohabiting partners is now moving up the political agenda. Finally, we look at attitudes to gender in the context of proposed legal reforms to the Gender Recognition Act, which would give transgender people the right to declare and define their own gender identity.

Spotlight

The liberalisation in attitudes to sexual relationships observed since first recorded by BSA in the 1980s appears to be slowing down, perhaps reflecting the marked divides between the attitudes of religious and non-religious people in this sphere.

Attitudes towards premarital sex and same-sex relationships, 1983-2018



Overview

Support for opposite-sex civil partnerships

We find evidence of substantial public support for opposite-sex civil partnerships, coinciding with the announcement of their introduction in October 2018.

- Two-thirds (65%) of the public support civil partnerships for opposite-sex couples, while less than one in ten (7%) oppose them.
- Those who do not identify with a religion are more supportive of the idea that a man and woman should be able to have a civil partnership (73%), compared with those who do identify with a religion (34%-67%).
- Around half (49%) of those with no formal education support civil partnerships for opposite-sex couples compared with seven in ten of those educated to degree level or above (71%).

Belief in the 'common law marriage' myth persists

Around half of us believe that cohabiting couples have legal entitlements if their relationship breaks down.

- Almost half (47%) of people believe common law marriage "definitely" or "probably" exists.
- This is only a small drop since the question was asked in 2000, when 56% believed the myth.
- Belief in common law marriage does not vary by marital status; around half of cohabitees subscribe to this myth, as do around half of those who are married or in civil partnerships.

Mixed messages about transgender people

While the population are very keen not to be seen as personally prejudiced against transgender people, they are less clear that transphobia is always wrong.

- 83% state they are "not prejudiced at all" towards transgender people, compared with just 15% who describe themselves as "very" or "a little" prejudiced.
- However, around half of respondents (49%) view prejudice against transgender people as "always" wrong, compared with 6% who feel it is "rarely" or "never" wrong.
- A minority (13%) agree that the process transgender people go through reflects "a very superficial and temporary" need, compared with 62% who disagree.

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One of the most marked changes in social attitudes since the British Social Attitudes survey began in 1983 has been the sustained liberalisation of attitudes towards sexual relationships and gender

Introduction

One of the most marked changes in social attitudes since the British Social Attitudes survey (BSA) began in 1983 has been the sustained liberalisation of attitudes towards sexual relationships and gender. Over this time period, we have seen attitudes to marriage change radically: while marriage remains an important social institution, our ideas about what marriage is, and who marriage is for, are almost unrecognisable. For instance, today three-quarters of us see nothing wrong with sex outside of marriage compared with 42% when BSA began, while two-thirds of us see nothing wrong in same-sex relationships, a considerable rise from 17% in 1983. Attitudes to traditional gender roles have also changed significantly over the same time period, with just 8% of us now supporting the idea that men should be breadwinners and women homemakers, the view of 42% of the public in 1984 (Attar Taylor and Scott, 2018). These changes have coincided with a sustained decline in religious belief and religious observance (as discussed in this year's Religion chapter), resulting in a weakening of the influence of religion on the public's attitudes to sexuality and personal relationships (Brown, 1992), and a residualisation of the religious, who continue to hold distinctive views in this sphere (Park and Rhead, 2013).

As attitudes to sexual relationships and gender have transformed we have embarked on a substantial programme of policy change, at times rushing to keep up with social norms, and at times (as with attitudes to same-sex relationships) appearing to accelerate the change[1]. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 provided for legal recognition of same-sex relationships, followed by the introduction of same-sex marriage in the Marriage Act 2013, and the extension of civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples through the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Death Act 2019. Soon, both same and opposite-sex couples will be able to choose marriage or civil partnership on an equal basis and the debate is shifting toward the need to protect the rights of people in intimate relationships that lie outside of civil partnership or marriage. Changing attitudes to gender roles have been accompanied by a sustained programme of legislation starting with the Equal Pay Act of 1970 and extending to changes to parental leave (as discussed in this year's Women and Work chapter), all designed to protect women's rights and promote participation in the labour market while encouraging a more equal division of caring responsibilities. The current legislative focus is not only about equality between men and women, but about gender identity itself, and the rights of transgender people to declare and define their own identity, supported by the law.

1 As illustrated in Figure 3 which maps public views about same-sex relationships against legislative change

In this chapter we examine attitudes to recent and current policy developments, starting with opposite-sex civil partnerships and the myth of common law marriage, and then exploring attitudes to transgender people in the context of proposals to make it less intrusive and bureaucratic for transgender people to achieve legal recognition of their gender. In doing so we consider whether the liberalising of attitudes continues to follow a consistent pattern. In particular we examine whether the liberalising trend is slowing, and whether the historical demographic basis of attitudes to sexual relationships and gender, where age, education and religious belief have all played a key role in shaping our views, continues to hold true today (Park and Rhead, 2013; Swales and Attar Taylor, 2017; Attar Taylor and Scott, 2018).

Civil partnerships and cohabitation

As discussed above, recent decades have seen dramatic changes in the legal recognition of sexual relationships in Britain alongside major shifts in public attitudes. Not only has the public become more supportive of relationships outside of traditional marriage, it has also become more inclusive, with growing acceptance of same-sex relationships.

Today, people in opposite and same-sex relationships are able to marry, and soon both will be able to enter civil partnerships, with similar rights and protections for both institutions. Up until now, heterosexual couples have only had the option of formalising their relationship through marriage. In March 2019, the law was changed to extend civil partnerships (previously available only to same-sex couples) to opposite-sex couples in England and Wales, following a Supreme Court ruling that barring opposite-sex couples from forming civil partnerships was in breach of their human rights.

Today, people in opposite and same-sex relationships are able to marry, and soon both will be able to enter civil partnerships, with similar rights and protections for both institutions

While the legal recognition of sexual partnerships has become more inclusive, the number of cohabiting couples (both opposite and same-sex) has risen substantially. According to figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the number of cohabiting couples more than doubled from 1.5 million families in 1996 to 3.3 million families in 2017 (ONS, 2017). However, contrary to a popular misconception, cohabiting couples have no legal rights if the relationship breaks down, irrespective of how long they have been together or whether they have children. In light of the rising numbers of cohabitees and widespread belief in the common law marriage myth (see Barlow et al, 2008, for a full discussion and the earlier trends in attitudes; for the latest BSA figures see Phillips, 2019), recent years have seen calls, particularly from the legal profession and MPs, for a change in the law to give cohabiting couples a degree of legal protection (Fairbairn, 2018). In Scotland, while common law marriage still doesn't exist, the Family Law Act 2006 introduced a set of basic rights (not equal to those of couples who are married or in civil partnerships) to protect cohabiting couples in the event of relationship breakdown or bereavement (Scottish Executive, 2006).

Meanwhile, though the status of the Cohabitation Rights Bill 2017–2019 remains unresolved, the UK Government last year said it would consider proposals for reform in this area of the law (Fairbairn, 2018).

Against the backdrop of recent and ongoing reforms to legal protections for cohabiting partners, this section examines the public's views and perceptions of these issues, which together paint a picture of public opinion about sexual relationships outside of the traditional form of marriage. We first explore attitudes towards civil partnerships for opposite-sex couples, examining the characteristics of those who support them. We then explore links between attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnerships and premarital sex, both of which represent sexual relationships that deviate from traditional marriage, and compare the demographic profile of attitudes towards each. This section ends by looking at the prevalence of the common law marriage myth, and whether belief in common law marriage varies across different groups in society.

What are the public's attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnerships?

For the first time, BSA 2018 asked respondents about their views on the extension of civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples (which was announced by the government at the end of the survey fieldwork period in October 2018):

> ***There are two ways that couples can obtain formal recognition of their relationship in law: marriage and civil partnership. At the moment, opposite-sex couples (a man and a woman) can get married. Same-sex couples (two women or two men) can choose to get married or to form a civil partnership.***
>
> ***How much do you agree or disagree that <u>a man and a woman</u> should be able to form a civil partnership, as an alternative to getting married?***

Two-thirds "agree" or "agree strongly" that opposite-sex couples should be able to form a civil partnership as an alternative to getting married, while only 7% "disagree" or "disagree strongly"

Two-thirds "agree" or "agree strongly" that opposite-sex couples should be able to form a civil partnership as an alternative to getting married, while only 7% "disagree" or "disagree strongly". Without historical data on opposite-sex civil partnerships, it is not possible to determine trends in public opinion over time and assess whether attitudes have been influenced by political and legal decisions, or vice versa. We nonetheless now know that around the time the extension of civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples was announced in October 2018, there was substantial support for this step among the adult population.

We now turn to look at the demographic breakdown of attitudes to opposite-sex civil partnerships. If we consider other attitudinal trends in relation to sexual relationships and marriage, we might expect to see marked differences of opinion by age group, with older groups tending to be more conservative in their views than their younger counterparts. It is surprising then to find that attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnerships deviate from this norm, with no significant differences between different age categories in response to this question. As shown in Table 1, demographic divides do however emerge by education. While 71% of those with a degree-level qualification or above agree that opposite-sex couples should be able to form a civil partnership, support for this stance falls to just 49% among those with no formal educational qualifications. Interestingly, the difference is driven by uncertainty or neutrality rather than by opposition. Twenty-seven per cent of those with no formal educational qualifications say they "neither agree nor disagree", perhaps reflecting the legalistic nature of the question, compared with just 14% of those with a degree-level qualification or above, while the same proportion in both groups (8%) disagree.

Support for opposite-sex civil partnerships is highest among those who do not identify with a religion (73%), while those who do identify with a religion are less likely to support the idea

Given the importance that many religions place on the institution of marriage, and the fact that the case for opposite-sex civil partnerships was grounded in the desire for a legal union without the history and associations of traditional marriage (Petter, 2018), it is reasonable to expect attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnership to vary by religious affiliation. Our findings verify this assumption and show that support for opposite-sex civil partnerships is highest among those who do not identify with a religion (73%), while those who do identify with a religion are less likely to support the idea. We see divides among the religious too, with Anglicans, Roman Catholics and others of the Christian faith being more supportive of opposite-sex civil partnership (67%, 59% and 58% respectively) than people who identify with religions other than Christianity (34%).

Table 1 Attitudes to opposite-sex civil partnerships, by demographics

		Agree	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	*Unweighted base*
Highest educational qualification					
Degree	%	71	14	8	*640*
Higher education below degree /A level	%	70	17	6	*616*
O level or equivalent/CSE	%	64	19	8	*590*
No qualification	%	49	27	8	*427*
Marital status*					
Married	%	64	19	8	*1086*
Living with a partner	%	71	14	5	*187*
Separated/divorced/dissolved same-sex civil partnership	%	68	21	6	*319*
Widowed/surviving partner from a same-sex civil partnership	%	53	24	12	*241*
Single (never married/never in a civil partnership)	%	66	18	6	*473*
Religion					
Church of England/Anglican	%	67	17	9	*374*
Roman Catholic	%	59	24	8	*167*
Other Christian	%	58	23	12	*420*
Non-Christian	%	34	27	16	*137*
No religion	%	73	15	4	*1206*

**Base size for those in same-sex civil partnerships is too small for this group to be presented*

We might also anticipate that attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnership may vary by marital status, with support for extending civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples possibly reflecting respondents' own relationship status. However, there appears to be little consistent variance in attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnerships by marital status; while 71% of those who are cohabiting with their partner support opposite-sex civil partnership, so do around two-thirds of those who are separated, divorced or whose same-sex civil partnership has been dissolved, those who are single, and those who are married (although surviving partners from a marriage or civil partnership are significantly less likely to demonstrate support for the extension of civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples).

We know that the characteristics associated with attitudes to opposite-sex civil partnerships are also associated with each other. For example, more highly educated people are more likely to be married, and there is also a strong link between religious affiliation and marriage. To assess which characteristics influence attitudes to opposite-sex civil partnerships once their relationships with each other are controlled for, we conducted logistic regression analysis for our measure of agreement with the view that opposite-sex couples ought to be able to enter into a civil partnership. In the first model, we included as our explanatory variables marital status, level of education and religious affiliation, along with sex and age. Our findings show that any association between support for opposite-sex civil partnerships and marital status is no longer present once its relationships with other demographic characteristics have been taken into account. However, level of education and religious affiliation remain associated with support for opposite-sex civil partnerships. Full details of the regression model are presented in Table A.1 in the appendix to this chapter.

How do attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnerships and premarital sex compare?

As mentioned above, this is the first time attitudes to opposite-sex civil partnerships have been captured using BSA, and as such we cannot measure trends over time in relation to this issue, or explore the pattern of attitudes underpinning them. The question nonetheless remains: how have attitudes to marriage and relationships evolved such that a large proportion of the public support opposite-sex civil partnerships today? Given we have historical data on a range of attitudes relevant to sexual relationships and marriage, we ask if there is a link between support for civil partnerships for opposite-sex couples and other attitudes, in particular the view that premarital sex is not wrong, assuming that views on these two issues may be connected by a belief that there is a place for sexual relationships outside of traditional forms of marriage. And if there is a link between these attitudes, can the growing acceptance of premarital sex in recent decades be regarded as an indication of more liberal attitudes towards marriage, of which support for opposite-sex civil partnerships is the latest manifestation?

A first look at these two attitudes shows that seven in ten (71%) of those who think premarital sex is "not wrong at all" or "rarely wrong" also "agree" or "strongly agree" with opposite-sex civil partnerships. In order to test the link between attitudes to premarital sex and opposite-sex civil partnerships further, we re-ran the logistic regression analysis for our measure of support for opposite-sex civil partnerships, described above, adding views on premarital sex as an additional explanatory variable. Our findings show that the view that premarital sex is "not wrong at all" or "rarely wrong" remains positively associated with support for opposite-sex civil partnerships, even once its relationships with other demographic variables have been controlled for. In addition, religious affiliation and level of education remain associated with support for civil partnerships for opposite-sex couples. Full details of the regression model are presented in Table A.2 in the appendix to this chapter.

Having established a link between more accepting attitudes towards both premarital sex and opposite-sex civil partnerships, we now ask whether the pattern of findings by demographics will also be similar for these two sets of attitudes. Overall, we find that the pattern of attitudes toward premarital sexual relations is very similar to that observed in attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnerships, as described above, as shown in Table 2. Unlike the patterns in support for civil partnerships among opposite-sex couples however, we do find differences by age, whereby those aged 65 and over are less supportive of premarital sex than younger cohorts (74% compared with 79%-86%). It is worth noting that the difference in attitudes between those aged over 65 and their younger counterparts is a small one, perhaps reflecting that this cohort consists of large numbers of people who grew up in the wake of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and may therefore hold more liberal attitudes towards premarital sex.

The pattern of attitudes toward premarital sexual relations is very similar to that observed in attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnerships

The religious divides seen in attitudes towards opposite-sex civil partnerships hold true for attitudes to premarital sex. The vast majority (93%) of those who identify as non-religious consider premarital sex to be “rarely wrong” or “not wrong at all”, falling to 82% among those who identify as Anglican or Roman Catholic, 66% among those who identify as other Christian and 35% of those who are affiliated with non-Christian religious groups. Such clear religious divides in attitudes to premarital sex and opposite-sex civil partnerships are likely to reflect the importance many religions place upon the sanctity of marriage. Those cohabiting with a partner and who are separated or divorced are most likely to think premarital sex is “not wrong at all”, while expressing greater support for civil partnership for opposite-sex couples.

Table 2 Attitudes to premarital sex and opposite-sex civil partnerships, by demographics

	Premarital sex is "rarely wrong" or "not wrong at all" (%)	***Unweighted base***	**"Agree" that "a man and a woman should be able to form a civil partnership" (%)**	*Unweighted base*
Age				
18-24	86	*159*	63	*133*
25-34	80	*370*	70	*291*
35-44	79	*475*	66	*348*
45-54	86	*474*	64	*382*
55-64	86	*485*	66	*414*
65+	74	*915*	60	*736*
Highest educational qualification				
Degree	82	*747*	71	*640*
Higher education below degree/A level	86	*752*	70	*616*
O level or equivalent/CSE	84	*711*	64	*590*
No qualifications	69	*620*	49	*427*
Marital status*				
Married	77	*1294*	64	*1086*
Living with a partner	93	*243*	71	*187*
Separated/divorced/ dissolved same-sex civil partnership	84	*413*	68	*319*
Widowed/surviving partner from a same-sex civil partnership	68	*313*	53	*241*
Single (never married/ never in a civil partnership)	86	*313*	66	*473*
Religion				
Church of England/ Anglican	82	*460*	67	*374*
Roman Catholic	82	*220*	59	*167*
Other Christian	66	*513*	58	*420*
Non-Christian	35	*194*	34	*137*
No Religion	93	*1485*	73	*1206*

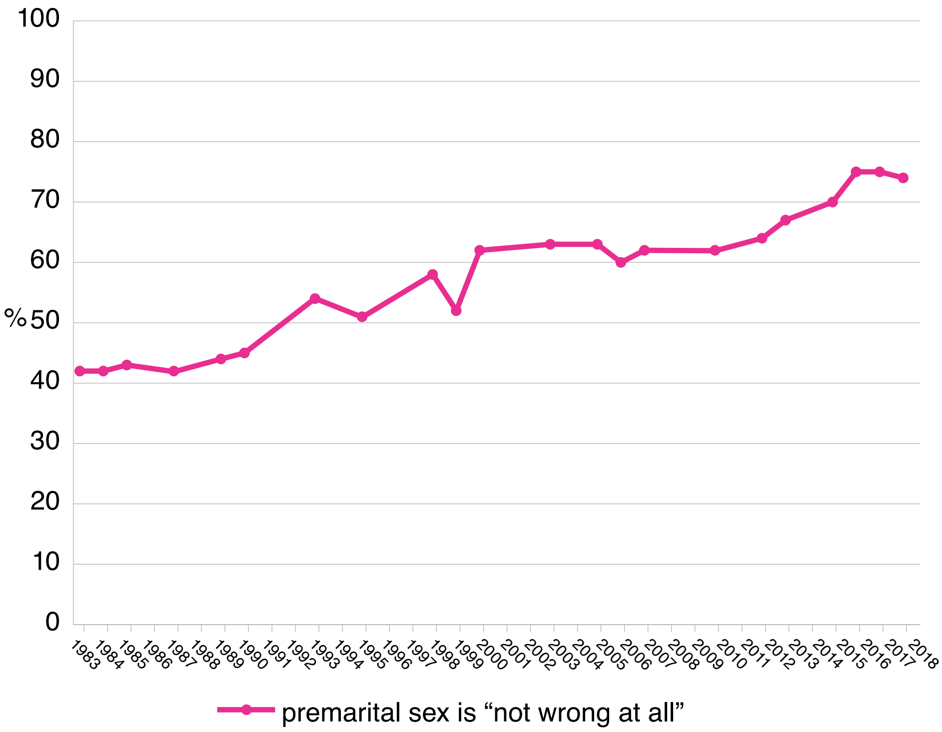
**Base size for those in same-sex civil partnerships is too small for this group to be presented*

Since the 1980s, trends in attitudes towards premarital sex have liberalised considerably. As shown in Figure 1, when BSA began in 1983, just over four in ten (42%) considered premarital sex to be "not wrong at all", compared with around three-quarters today (74%). It should however be noted that this trend is showing signs of stabilising, with the proportion of people viewing premarital sex as "not wrong at all" having remained at around three-quarters over the last three years (see Table A.3 in the appendix to this chapter).

When BSA began in 1983, just over four in ten (42%) considered premarital sex to be "not wrong at all", compared with around three-quarters today (74%). It should however be noted that this trend is showing signs of stabilising

Over this time we have seen a gradual liberalisation of once-conservative attitudes towards sex before marriage; the legal recognition of committed relationships through marriage; and of the idea that only opposite-sex couples should be allowed to have sexual relationships, either within or outside of the framework of marriage.

Figure 1 Attitudes towards premarital sex, 1983-2018



The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

The recent extension of civil partnerships will offer heterosexual couples the option of formalising their relationship in law without the religious or conservative connotations of marriage, and whatever their personal choices, two-thirds of the public support this form of legal union. Within the context of liberalising attitudes towards premarital sex and shifts away from more conservative concepts of sexual relationships and marriage, opposite-sex civil partnerships could be seen as the latest instalment in a more open-minded societal outlook on sex and relationships. Future BSA surveys offer a vehicle for monitoring the trajectory of these attitudes.

Almost half of all participants (47%) believe unmarried couples who live together for some time either "definitely do" or "probably do" have a common law marriage. This represents only a small drop since the question was asked in 2000

Who believes in the common law marriage myth?

BSA 2018 measures the prevalence of belief in the 'common law marriage' myth. Respondents are asked if as far as they know, unmarried couples who live together for some time have a 'common law marriage', which gives them the same legal rights as married couples, with response options ranging from "definitely do" to "definitely do not". Almost half of all participants (47%) believe unmarried couples who live together for some time either "definitely do" or "probably do" have a common law marriage. This represents only a small drop since the question was asked in 2000, when the equivalent figure stood at 56%.

We might expect people who know that common law marriage is a myth to be more supportive of opposite-sex civil partnership, on the basis that it offers legal protection to couples who do not wish to marry in the traditional way. However, our findings show that people are just as likely to support opposite-sex civil partnership whether or not they believe in common law marriage.

Belief in this myth does not vary by relationship or marital status. While 42%-49% of those who are married or in a civil partnership believe in common law marriage, so too do 49% of those who are living with a partner but are not in either a marriage or a civil partnership. This suggests that almost half of cohabiting couples in Britain wrongly believe themselves to be legally protected in case of relationship breakdown or bereavement.

Almost half of cohabiting couples in Britain wrongly believe themselves to be legally protected in case of relationship breakdown or bereavement

With cohabitation representing the fastest-growing form of sexual relationship in England and Wales, these findings highlight the increasing policy relevance of this issue. Misconceptions about this myth can have severe consequences for people's lives, as cohabitants risk significant financial hardship[2]. The introduction of opposite-sex civil partnerships offers an alternative to couples who wish to enter a legal partnership without forming a traditional marriage, however as almost half of cohabitees are unaware of their lack of legal protection, it is likely that many people will remain at risk (Barlow, 2019). As discussed above, the UK Government has announced that it is considering how to take forward proposals for introducing legal rights for cohabiting couples. Unless and until such reform takes place, the prevalence of the 'common law marriage' myth will remain a concern for policymakers.

Attitudes to transgender people

The 2004 Gender Recognition Act (GRA), considered ground-breaking at the time of its introduction[3], allows transgender people

2 Under the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006, which came into force in May 2006, cohabitants (opposite-sex and same-sex couples) may make limited claims against each other in the event of their relationship terminating or on the death of one cohabitant.

3 When introduced, the GRA was the first statutory instrument to allow trans people to achieve legal recognition of their gender without undergoing medical sterilisation.

to legally change gender if they have a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria, proof of having lived for at least two years in their acquired gender and the consent of their spouse (if married), among other requirements[4]. Over recent years, advocates have called for a move away from this model, which has been criticised for unnecessary medicalisation of transgender people and for reinforcing gender stereotypes (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016), as well as being expensive and bureaucratic. In response, in 2018 the UK Government brought forward a consultation on reforming the GRA "to make it less intrusive and bureaucratic for trans people to achieve legal recognition of their gender" (UK Government, 2018). Proposals that would make it easier for people to legally change their gender have been contested, particularly on the grounds of perceived impact on legal protections and single sex spaces for women.

BSA 2018 does not directly address the issue of legal gender recognition. Rather it poses a series of questions aimed at exploring how the public view transgender people and transphobia. In this section, we consider what these general attitudes to transgender people might mean in the context of proposed changes to the GRA, as well as the lived experience of transgender people more broadly. We also explore whether the demographic basis of attitudes to transgender people reflects that of attitudes towards same-sex relationships.

How do people perceive the process of transitioning?

Since 2016, BSA has asked a series of questions about attitudes to transgender people, providing the following definition of transgender:

> ***People who are transgender have gone through all or part of a process (including thoughts or actions) to change the sex they were described as at birth to the gender they identify with, or intend to. This might include by changing their name, wearing different clothes, taking hormones or having gender reassignment surgery.***

Our first question explores the way in which the public view the process of transitioning, and in particular, the extent to which people agree or disagree that the process transgender people go through reflects "a very superficial and temporary" need:

> ***Thinking about the reasons why transgender people have gone through this process,***
>
> ***please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement …***
>
> ***Most people who are transgender have gone through this process because of a very superficial and temporary need***

4 Government Equalities Office (2018) Trans People in the UK, available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721642/GEO-LGBT-factsheet.pdf

A minority of the public “agree” or “strongly agree” with this statement (13%) compared with just over three-fifths of the population (62%) who “disagree” or “strongly disagree”. At face value, this suggests that the public view the drivers of transition as serious. However, it is important to note two things. Firstly, around one fifth of the population (21%) “neither agree nor disagree” with the statement[5]. Second, the statement represents an extreme position: that people transition because of a need that is both ‘superficial’ and ‘temporary’ in nature. It is of course possible for a person to believe that the drivers of transition are both significant and permanent, while also holding transphobic views about what those drivers are, and how society should view them.

Is the public prejudiced towards transgender people?

We then ask two questions about prejudice towards transgender people. The first asks respondents to rate their own perceived level of prejudice.

> ***How would you describe yourself ...***
>
> ***... as very prejudiced against people who are transgender, a little prejudiced, or, not prejudiced at all?***

More than four-fifths of the population (83%) state they are “not prejudiced at all” towards transgender people, compared with just 15% who describe themselves as “very” or “a little” prejudiced

More than four-fifths of the population (83%) state they are “not prejudiced at all” towards transgender people, compared with just 15% who describe themselves as “very” or “a little” prejudiced. This is a striking finding given that levels of self-reported prejudice towards some other minoritised groups remain stubbornly high: in 2017, for example, data from the National Centre for Social Research’s Panel showed that more than four decades after the Race Relations Act of 1973, over a quarter of the population (26%) still describe themselves as “very” or “somewhat” racially prejudiced (Kelley et al, 2017).

We also ask respondents the following question:

> ***Do you think that prejudice against transgender people is always wrong, mostly wrong, sometimes wrong, rarely wrong or never wrong?***

Importantly, this question is part of a self-completion module, and so does not require people to tell their answers to an interviewer and is asked in this way to reduce the risk of respondents giving socially desirable responses.

Around half of the population (49%) view prejudice against transgender people as “always” wrong, compared with just 6% who feel it is “rarely” or “never” wrong. However, a significant proportion

5 This is a complex question which some members of the public may feel ill-equipped to answer, therefore “neither agree nor disagree” may be a substitute for “don’t know” in some cases. For others, particularly taking into account social desirability bias, it may indicate ambivalence about the nature of transition.

have more mixed feelings, with around a third (34%) stating that prejudice against transgender people is only "mostly" or "sometimes" wrong. Taken together, this suggests that while the population are very keen to be seen as not personally transphobic, they are less clear that transphobia is always wrong. This more mixed view is consistent with previous BSA findings, where despite 82% of respondents describing themselves as 'not at all prejudiced' against transgender people, just four in ten supported the idea that a suitably qualified transgender person "definitely should" be employed as a police officer or a primary school teacher (43% and 41% respectively, Attar-Taylor and Swales 2017).

As noted, these questions do not directly address the question of reforms to make the legal gender recognition system easier. However, they do indicate that while the desire to be (or be seen as) not prejudiced towards transgender people is almost universal, tolerance of prejudice, and actual discrimination against transgender people, is more widespread, at least in some circumstances.

How do attitudes towards same-sex relationships and transgender people compare?

Evidence suggests that liberal attitudes toward one topic or group tend to predict liberal attitudes toward others, and conversely prejudice in one area tends to be reflected by prejudice in other areas (Aosved and Long, 2006). Throughout the post-war period, social movements for LGBT equality have been increasingly visible in Britain, and increasingly successful in their advocacy. Though these movements have not always been trans-inclusive, it has nonetheless become commonplace in Britain to consider the experiences, needs, rights and contributions of sexual and gender minorities as interrelated, as use of the 'LGBT' acronym illustrates. For this reason, it is reasonable to assume that public attitudes to transgender people may be reflective of attitudes to same-sex relationships, and to LGB people.

People who express less negative attitudes towards same-sex relationships are also less likely to report being prejudiced towards transgender people

To test this assumption, we ran two regression analyses – the first for our self-reported measure of prejudice towards transgender people and the second for our measure of agreement with the view that, "most people who are transgender have gone through this process because of a very superficial and temporary need". In both models we included attitudes to sex between two adults of the same sex as an explanatory variable, along with age, level of education, religious affiliation and sex.

Even after controlling for these demographic characteristics, attitudes towards same-sex relationships remain associated with prejudice towards transgender people – with people who express less negative attitudes towards same-sex relationships also being less likely to report being prejudiced towards transgender people. Sex is the only other characteristic which remains associated with prejudice towards transgender people, with women being less likely to self-report prejudice. Full details of the regression model are presented in Table A.4 in the appendix to this chapter.

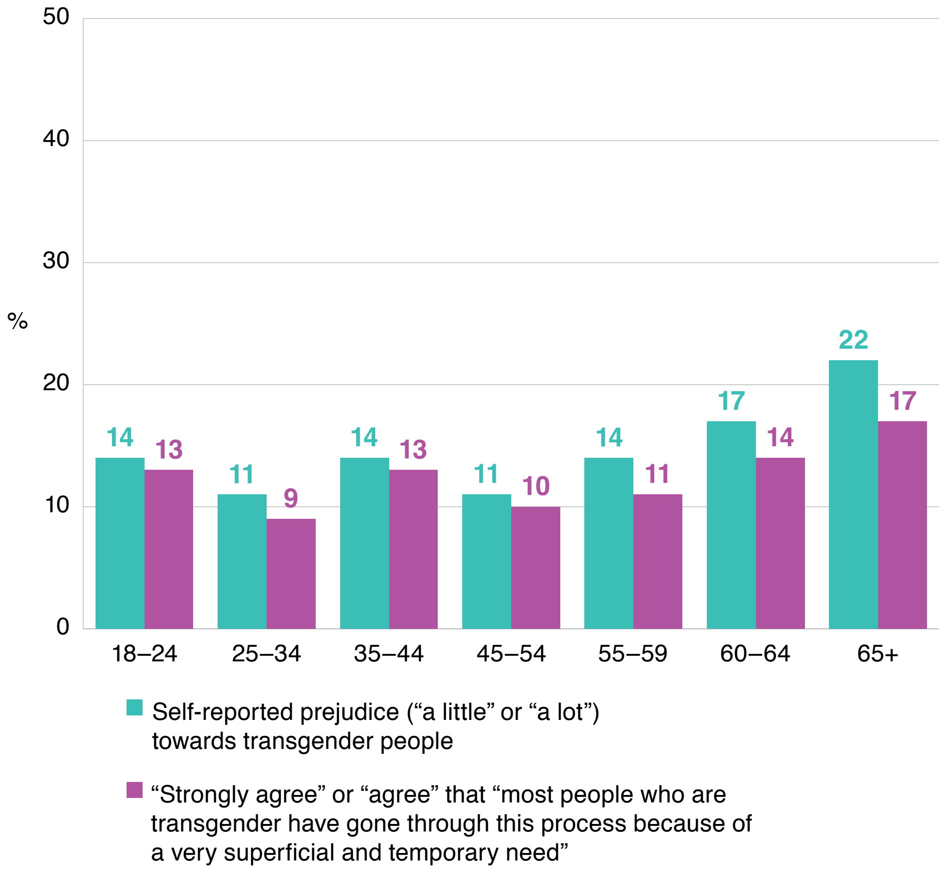
Attitudes to same-sex relationships also remain associated with the view that transgender people have gone through the process because of a very superficial and temporary need once demographic characteristics have been controlled for. Our analysis suggests that those who express the least negative attitudes towards same-sex relationships are the most likely to disagree that transgender people have gone through the process because of a very superficial and temporary need. In this instance however, sex, level of education and religious affiliation also remain significantly associated with attitudes towards transgender people, with women, those with a higher level of educational qualifications and those who do not affiliate with a non-Christian religion being more likely to disagree that transgender people have gone through the process because of a very superficial and temporary need. Full details of the regression model are presented in Table A.5 in the appendix to this chapter.

Finally, we explore whether the demographic profile of attitudes to transgender people reflects that of attitudes towards same-sex relationships. Building on previous analysis of BSA (Swales and Attar Taylor, 2017) we find that women, younger people, more highly educated people and the non-religious are all more likely to have positive attitudes to both transgender people and to same-sex relationships.

Women, younger people, more highly educated people and the non-religious are all more likely to have positive attitudes to both transgender people and to same-sex relationships

Younger people are less likely to agree that "most people who are transgender have gone through this process because of a very superficial and temporary need" and less likely to describe themselves as prejudiced against transgender people: 14% of those in the youngest age group indicate some level of prejudice compared with 22% of the oldest age group, while 54% of those in the youngest age group agree that prejudice is "always wrong" compared with 35% of those in the oldest age group.

Figure 2 Beliefs about transgender people, by age group



The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

A gender difference in attitudes also emerges, with women more likely than men to say that prejudice towards transgender people is "always wrong". This finding was also observed in BSA 34, which asked about how comfortable participants would be if a transgender person were using the same toilet as them: 72% of women said that they were "very" or "quite comfortable" with a transgender woman using a female toilet, compared with 64% of men who reported that they were "very" or "quite comfortable" with a transgender man using the male toilets (Swales and Attar Taylor, 2017).

Higher levels of education are associated with more positive views of transgender people. Less than one in ten people with a degree level qualification (8%) agree that transgender people go through the process because of a "superficial and temporary need", rising to around one in five (21%) of those without formal qualifications. Similarly, just 13% of the more highly educated group see themselves as prejudiced against transgender people, compared with 22% of those with no qualifications.

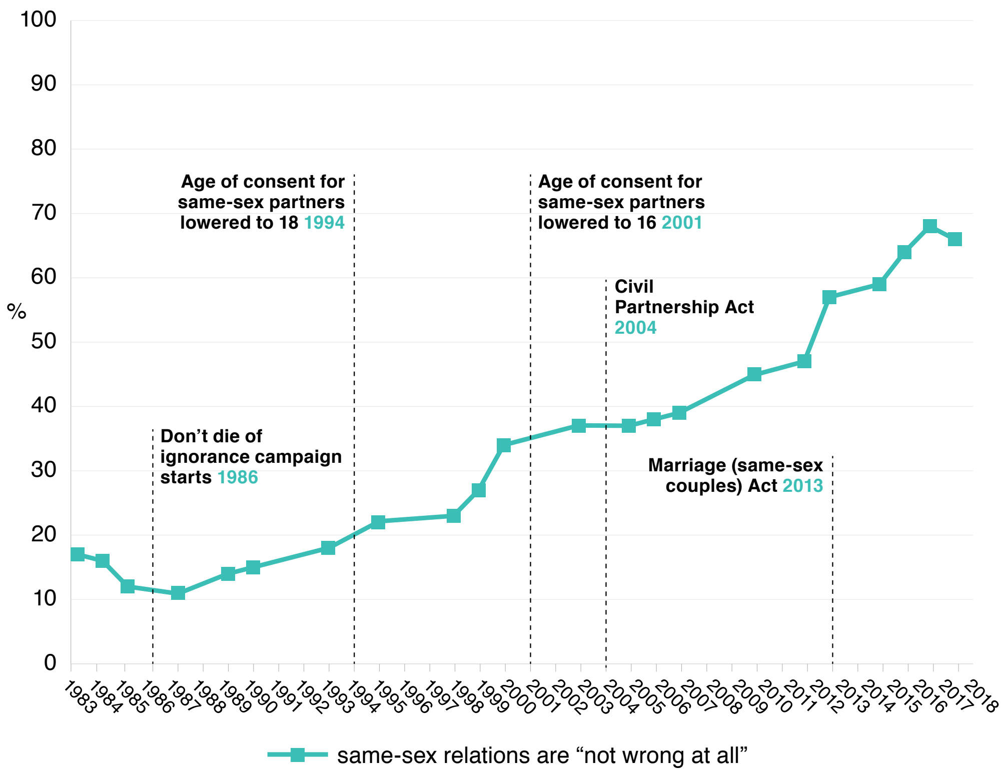
Similar differences in attitudes are observed by religious affiliation. Those with no religion (10%) are the least likely to agree that going through the process is because of a "superficial and temporary need" compared with 18% of other (non-Anglican or Roman Catholic) Christians and 18% of those belonging to a non-Christian religion. Similarly, 12% of those without a religion report some level of prejudice toward transgender people, rising to between 16%-20% for Christians and 22% for those in non-Christian religions. An association between religious observance and attitudes towards transgender people is also present, with those who attend a religious service less than twice per year significantly less likely to say that transitions are due to a "superficial and temporary need" than those who attend one or more religious services per week.

How have attitudes to LGBT people changed?

In 1983, fewer than one in five people said that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex were "not wrong at all", compared with two-thirds now

While we have only asked about attitudes to transgender people in the most recent years of BSA, we have been asking about people's attitudes towards sex between two adults of the same sex since the survey began. The time series illustrated in Figure 3 on attitudes to same-sex relationships is one of the most striking examples of liberalisation that BSA has recorded. In 1983, fewer than one in five people said that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex were "not wrong at all", compared with two-thirds now. This is not just a generational change: older people too have become more liberal in their views, and so have those without a religion.

Figure 3 Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are "not wrong at all", 1983-2018



The data on which Figure 3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

However, as with attitudes towards premarital sex, which we have seen follow a similar trajectory, this liberalisation of attitudes does appear to be slowing down. In the 30th BSA report, Park and Rhead predicted that the liberalisation observed between the 1980s and 2010s would continue but slow in pace (Park and Rhead, 2013). While the 34th report did not find any evidence of this (Swales and Attar Taylor, 2017), this year's BSA data show that the liberalisation of attitudes does appear to have decelerated. The proportion stating that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are "not wrong at all" has now remained at around two-thirds (64%, 68% and 66%) for the past three years, indicating that while social norms have changed, there is a significant minority of the population who remain uncomfortable with same-sex relationships, and as such we may have reached a point of plateau.

What might the time series on same-sex relationships suggest about the future pattern of attitudes to transgender people, given the link between the two in the minds of the public? Firstly, it may be that attitudes to transgender people follow a similar trajectory, and thus the proportion of the public who feel that transphobia is sometimes justified, or who feel uncomfortable with transgender people working in public services, will steadily decline over time. Secondly, it may be that progressive policymaking, including reforming the GRA, could itself influence the public to adopt more positive attitudes, as the progressive journey towards marriage equality has for same-sex and opposite-sex relationships.

Conclusions

While we have a new and radically transformed set of social norms in the field of sexual relations and gender, we also have a significant minority who feel differently about these issues

The changing legal framework for sexual relationships reflects a sustained process of liberalisation in public attitudes in this sphere. Indeed, given the prevalence of belief in the myth of common law marriage, and the growing rate of cohabitation in Britain, it seems reasonable to assume that this process of legal change will continue, bringing the law in England and Wales into line with that of Scotland by providing limited legal protections for cohabitees. In contrast, the Gender Recognition Act consultation contains proposals that are grounded in a more liberal view of transgender people than that of the general public who, despite being very keen not to be seen as personally prejudiced, are less clear that prejudice against transgender people is on principle wrong. However, there is a clear link between attitudes to transgender people and attitudes to same-sex relationships, where we have again seen a sustained liberalising trend. Given this, it seems likely that attitudes to transgender people will continue to change in a way that increasingly supports the rights of transgender people to live freely and without experiencing discrimination.

However, it is important to note that our time series data appear to suggest that this process of liberalisation is slowing down. While we have a new and radically transformed set of social norms in the field of sexual relations and gender, we also have a significant minority who feel differently about these issues, and that minority may become increasingly focused on ensuring that socially conservative views and voices are reflected in public discussion of gender and relationships.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

Table A.1 Logistic regression model of agreement that opposite-sex civil partnerships should be available

	Odds ratio	Standard error	p value
Marital status (married)			
Living with a partner	1.20	0.28	0.45
Separated/Divorced/ Dissolved	1.21	0.23	0.33
Widowed	0.80	0.15	0.22
Single	1.20	0.21	0.30
Sex (Male)			
Female	0.81	0.10	0.10
Age (18-24)			
25-34	1.49	0.48	0.22
35-44	1.17	0.33	0.58
45-54	1.22	0.36	0.50
55-64	1.16	0.36	0.62
65+	1.09	0.34	0.78
Highest education qualification (degree or higher)			
A level or equivalent	0.86	0.15	0.38
O level or equivalent	*0.65	0.11	0.01
No qualification	**0.46	0.09	0.00
Religion (no religion)			
Church of England/Anglican	0.82	0.14	0.25
Roman Catholic	**0.52	0.12	0.00
Other Christian	**0.44	0.07	0.00
Non-Christian	**0.20	0.06	0.00
Constant	**4.55	1.37	0.00
Unweighted base: 2083			

*= significant at 95% level

**= significant at 99% level

Table A.2 Logistic regression model of agreement that opposite-sex civil partnerships should be available (2)

	Odds ratio	Standard error	p value
Views on premarital sex (always wrong)			
Mostly wrong	2.01	1.04	0.18
Sometimes wrong	1.98	0.93	0.15
Rarely wrong	*2.59	1.18	0.04
Not wrong at all	**5.03	2.07	0.00
Sex (Male)			
Female	0.77	0.13	0.11
Age (18-24)			
25-34	1.96	0.73	0.07
35-44	1.63	0.55	0.15
45-54	1.49	0.55	0.29
55-64	1.67	0.64	0.18
65+	1.61	0.61	0.21
Marital status (married)			
Living with a partner	1.01	0.28	0.96
Separated/Divorced/ Dissolved	1.05	0.24	0.82
Widowed	0.81	0.20	0.39
Single	1.35	0.30	0.18
Highest education qualification (degree or higher)			
A level or equivalent	0.91	0.19	0.65
O level or equivalent	0.78	0.15	0.20
No qualification	0.62	0.16	0.06
Religion (No religion)			
Church of England/Anglican	1.01	0.21	0.96
Roman Catholic	*0.52	0.15	0.02
Other Christian	**0.49	0.09	0.00
Non-Christian	*0.42	0.15	0.02
Constant	0.72	0.39	0.54
Unweighted base: 1232			

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

The data on which Figure 1 is based are shown below.

Table A.3 Views on premarital sexual relations, 1983-2018

Year	**Premarital sexual relations "not wrong at all" (%)**	*Unweighted base*
1983	42	1761
1984	42	1675
1985	43	1804
1987	42	1437
1989	44	1513
1990	45	1397
1993	54	1484
1995	51	1172
1998	58	1075
1999	52	1052
2000	62	3426
2003	63	2139
2005	63	2102
2006	60	1093
2007	62	1030
2010	62	1081
2012	64	1103
2013	67	1097
2015	70	3245
2016	75	974
2017	75	3004
2018	74	2884

Table A.4 Logistic regression model of self-reported prejudice towards transgender people

	Odds ratio	Standard error	p value
Views on same-sex relationships (always wrong)			
Mostly wrong	0.91	0.20	0.67
Sometimes wrong	**2.07	0.47	0.00
Rarely wrong	**3.97	1.29	0.00
Not wrong at all	**9.12	1.87	0.00
Sex (Male)			
Female	**2.05	0.31	0.00
Age (18-24)			
25-34	1.24	0.46	0.57
35-44	1.14	0.41	0.71
45-54	1.20	0.43	0.61
55-64	1.03	0.34	0.93
65+	0.83	0.27	0.56
Highest education qualification (degree or higher)			
A level or equivalent	0.96	0.18	0.84
O level or equivalent	1.05	0.21	0.80
No qualification	0.84	0.17	0.38
Religion (no religion)			
Church of England/Anglican	1.06	0.19	0.76
Roman Catholic	0.85	0.21	0.49
Other Christian	1.03	0.22	0.89
Non-Christian	1.14	0.33	0.64
Constant	0.94	0.36	0.87
Unweighted base: 2632			

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

Table A.5 Logistic regression model of disagreement with the idea that transgender people had transitioned because of a "very superficial and temporary need"

	Odds ratio	Standard error	p value
Views on same-sex relationships (always wrong)			
Mostly wrong	0.92	0.27	0.77
Sometimes wrong	0.67	0.18	0.13
Rarely wrong	1.57	0.43	0.10
Not wrong at all	**3.86	0.76	0.00
Sex (Male)			
Female	**1.61	0.17	0.00
Age (18-24)			
25-34	0.92	0.23	0.73
35-44	1.25	0.30	0.37
45-54	1.29	0.31	0.28
55-64	1.26	0.30	0.33
65+	0.99	0.23	0.98
Highest education qualification (degree or higher)			
A level or equivalent	**0.52	0.08	0.00
O level or equivalent	**0.32	0.05	0.00
No qualification	**0.23	0.04	0.00
Religion (no religion)			
Church of England/Anglican	0.80	0.13	0.17
Roman Catholic	1.08	0.24	0.72
Other Christian	0.80	0.12	0.16
Non-Christian	*0.53	0.13	0.01
Constant	1.36	0.41	0.30
Unweighted base: 2574			

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

The data on which Figure 2 is based are shown below.

Table A.6 Views on transition process, by age

Age group	**"Strongly agree" or "agree" that most people who are transgender have gone through this process because of a very superficial and temporary need (%)**	*Unweighted base*
18-24 years	13	159
25-34 years	9	370
35-44 years	13	475
45-54 years	10	474
55-59 years	11	244
60-64 years	14	241
65+ years	17	915

Table A.7 Self-reported prejudice towards transgender people, by age

Age group	**Self-reported prejudice ("a little" and "a lot") towards transgender people %**	*Unweighted base*
18-24 years	14	159
25-34 years	11	370
35-44 years	14	475
45-54 years	11	474
55-59 years	14	244
60-64 years	17	241
65+ years	22	915

The data on which Figure 3 is based are shown below.

Table A.8 Views that same-sex relations is "not wrong at all", 1983-2018

Year	**"Not wrong at all" (%)**	*Unweighted base*
1983	17	1761
1984	16	1675
1985	12	1804
1987	11	1437
1989	14	1513
1990	15	1397
1993	18	1484
1995	22	1172
1998	23	1075
1999	27	1052
2000	34	3426
2003	37	2139
2005	37	2102
2006	38	1093
2007	39	1030
2010	45	1081
2012	47	1103
2013	57	1097
2015	59	3245
2016	64	974
2017	68	3004
2018	66	2884

Poverty and inequality

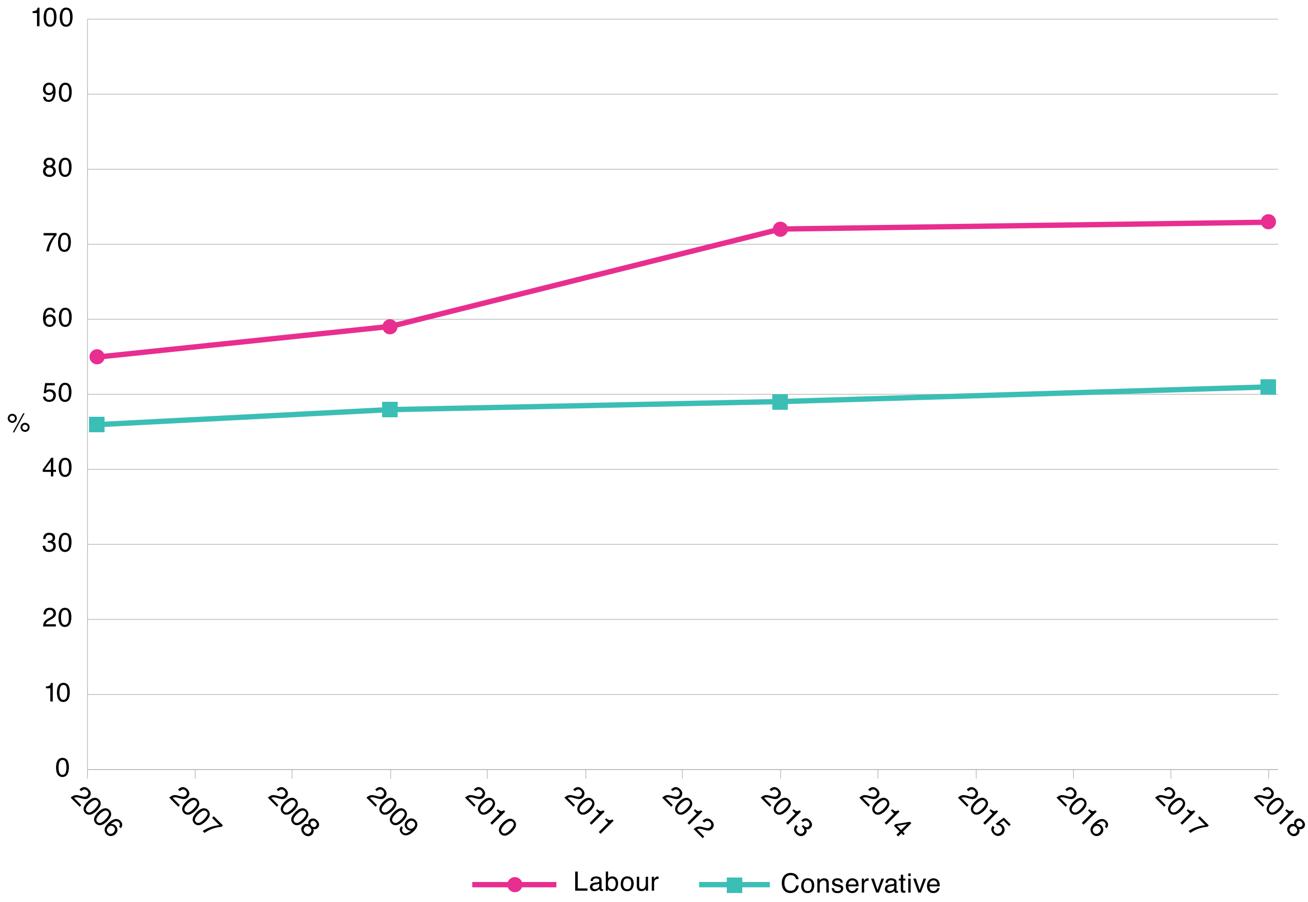
Have attitudes evolved in line with official trends or political and media discourse?

Current levels of poverty and inequality in the UK are similar to those reported around the time of the 2008 financial crisis, while political discourse and media coverage appear to suggest that they are unprecedented. Given this disconnect, this chapter examines how attitudes towards poverty and inequality in Britain are changing, and whether their evolution more closely aligns with official trends or developments in political and media discourse. On the whole, changes in perceptions of the scale, nature and acceptability of poverty and inequality more closely reflect trends in the portrayal of these concepts by politicians and the media, as opposed to the picture presented in official figures.

Spotlight

Labour Party supporters are much more likely than those supporting the Conservative Party to think there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain.

Perception that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain, by party political support, 2006–2018



Overview

Negative views have become more widespread

Negative perceptions regarding the scale and acceptability of poverty and inequality have become more widespread since the period before the 2008 financial crisis.

- 65% think there is “quite a lot” of poverty in Britain. 62% believe that poverty has increased over the past decade and 61% anticipate that it will increase further in the next decade.
- The view that there is “quite a lot” of poverty has increased by 13 percentage points since 2006, while perceptions that poverty has increased over the past decade and will increase over the next have increased by 30 and 18 percentage points respectively.
- In 2016, around half (53%) thought that large differences in income are acceptable to reward talents and efforts – a decline of 11 percentage points since 2008.

The views of Labour Party supporters have changed the most

The views of those sections of society most likely to be exposed to and influenced by political and media discourse have changed most markedly, while there is more limited evidence of divergent trends among those groups whose poverty rates are changing.

- 73% of Labour Party supporters think there is “quite a lot” of poverty in Britain, compared with 51% of Conservative Party supporters. The proportion of Labour Party supporters holding this view has increased by 28 percentage points since 2006, compared with a rise of 5 percentage points among Conservative Party supporters.
- Since 2006 there has been an 19 percentage point increase in the view that there is “quite a lot” of poverty in Britain among broadsheet readers, while there has been no change among tabloid readers.
- 66% of those with children in the household (for whom projections suggest poverty is set to rise) think poverty will increase over the next decade, compared with 51% of people who are retired (among whom poverty has declined). The popularity of this view has increased more markedly among those with children (a rise of 19 percentage points, compared with an 11 percentage point rise among those who are retired).

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Given the apparent disconnect between objective trends and public discourse, it is timely to examine how attitudes to poverty and inequality in Britain may be changing

Introduction

Rates of poverty and inequality in the UK today are broadly similar to those reported around the time of the 2008 financial crisis – although overall trends mask the fact that rates of poverty for particular groups have evolved in different ways (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019a). Yet political discourse and media coverage would appear to suggest that current levels of poverty and inequality are unprecedented. Political discourse, and that of the Labour Party in particular, increasingly presents poverty and inequality as a pervasive and growing problem requiring an immediate focus and resolution (Letter from Jeremy Corbyn to Theresa May, 2018). At the same time, media coverage of poverty and inequality, particularly in the context of welfare reform, has increased substantially over the past decade, reflecting the trend in the discourse of politicians (see, for example, Chauhan and Foster, 2014; Wells and Caraher, 2014).

Given the apparent disconnect between objective trends and public discourse, it is timely to examine how attitudes to poverty and inequality in Britain may be changing, and what might help to explain any observed change. In this chapter, we use data from the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey and European Social Survey (ESS) to examine changes in people's definitions of poverty and inequality, views on their acceptability and perceptions of their prevalence. Have attitudes remained broadly stable at the societal level, in line with trends in official statistics, perhaps with more pronounced changes in relation to and among those sections of society where poverty is increasing or is in decline? Or, does the public now perceive greater levels of poverty and inequality in society and increasingly take the view that these are unacceptable, in line with changing political and media discourse (with the evolution of views in this direction being most marked among those most exposed to and influenced by this discourse)? Reflecting on the answers to these questions, we conclude the chapter by considering their implications for potential approaches to poverty and inequality adopted by the main political parties in future.

Poverty and inequality: official trends and public discourse

We start our discussion by examining trends in levels of poverty and inequality over the past decade and in political and media discussion of these issues. On the basis of these trends, we consider how we might expect attitudes to poverty and inequality to have changed since the period immediately before the 2008 financial crisis.

Approaches to defining and measuring poverty and inequality remain highly contentious

Trends in official statistics

Approaches to defining and measuring poverty and inequality remain highly contentious – with both concepts being measured in a range of ways by the UK government and others. Currently the government measures ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ poverty, both before and after housing costs (BHC and AHC). Relative poverty is defined as a household having an income of below 60% of the median household income, with absolute poverty defined in relation to the 60% median income threshold from 2010-2011, adjusted in line with inflation, enabling analysis of trends over time. The most widely used measure of income inequality, meanwhile, is the Gini co-efficient (reported in Official Statistics), which measures inequality across the whole of society and provides a number to signify how diverse incomes are, while alternative approaches compare specific income groups or provide ratios to indicate how much people at one level of the income distribution have, compared with another.

These approaches to measuring poverty and inequality attract frequent criticism, with a tendency for politicians, the media and campaigners to report single measures selectively and in isolation (see for example Full Fact, 2015). In light of the limitations of these measures, a number of alternative approaches have been proposed. Most recently, the Social Metrics Commission (SMC) has been formed to,

> ***Develop a new approach to poverty measurement that both better reflects the nature and experiences of poverty that different families in the UK have, and can be used to build a consensus around poverty measurement and action in the UK. (Social Metrics Commission, 2019)***

The Commission published its recommendations for a new measure of poverty in September 2018 (Social Metrics Commission, 2018). On 17th May 2019, the Department for Work and Pensions released a statement indicating that, from the second half of 2020, the department would publish new experimental statistics, taking the Social Metrics Commission measure as a starting point (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019c).

In addition to this plethora of definitions, different methods are employed by politicians, the media and campaigners to quantify the populations experiencing poverty or inequality at any one time – including presenting ‘rates’ (the proportion of a population or group in poverty), absolute numbers (inevitably also impacted by population trends) and the composition of poverty (the proportionate size of a particular group, among the entire population of those in poverty).

It should be emphasised that current measures exclude certain elements, which many people are likely to regard as indicators of poverty and inequality – due to the fact that the official measures are based on annual incomes and only consider those in private households. These might include, among others, the proliferation and increasing use of food banks, the short-term hardship experienced by those with changing benefit circumstances (such as those moving to Universal Credit who currently have to wait five weeks until their first payment (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019b) and the documented rise in homelessness over the past eight years (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2017). Indeed, qualitative research has demonstrated that people do not think of poverty purely in terms of income, preferring to define this in relation to a person's ability to meet their basic needs (Hall et al, 2014). The new measure of poverty proposed by the Social Metrics Commission seeks to address these limitations to some extent – by taking account of all material resources, not just income, and by including an assessment of housing adequacy (by counting those sleeping rough as being in poverty) (Social Metrics Commission, 2018).

Taking the standard measures together, levels of poverty and inequality, at the population level, have remained relatively stable or have declined slightly since the time of the 2008 financial crisis

Accepting these limitations and the lack of consensus regarding their measurement, it is nevertheless clear that, taking the standard measures together, levels of poverty and inequality, at the population level, have remained relatively stable or have declined slightly since the time of the 2008 financial crisis. The latest statistics, for 2017-2018, indicate that the percentage of individuals with a relative low income has risen since 2013-2014 (to 17% BHC and 22% AHC) but remain virtually identical to those recorded in 2006-2007, before the onset of the financial crisis. On the other hand, absolute poverty has fallen over the same period for both BHC and AHC measures. Interestingly, analysis of the new measure of poverty developed by the Social Metrics Commission also suggests that the overall poverty rate has remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 21% and 24% over the past 15 years (Social Metrics Commission, 2018). Meanwhile, the Gini coefficient, measuring income inequality, has remained largely flat since its reduction between 2009-10 and 2010-2011, currently standing at 34% BHC and 39% AHC (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019a).

However, more detailed analysis and projections reveal that this overall picture of stability conceals a number of divergent trends. In this chapter, we focus on those which are most pronounced and consistent, and would thus be most likely to affect public perceptions. Most markedly, poverty rates for pensioners have declined over the past decade across all measures, following an earlier, even more marked, period of decline[1]. On the other hand, while the proportions of households with children in poverty are somewhat lower on relative measures than those seen a decade ago, on absolute measures, following a fall in the first part of the decade, these had risen by 2017-2018[2] - and, moreover, are predicted to rise

1 Since 2006-2007, poverty rates for pensioners have declined as follows: 23% to 18% (relative BHC); 19% to 16% (relative AHC); 23% to 15% (absolute BHC); 19% to 15% (absolute AHC) (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019a).

2 Poverty rates for households with children in 2017-2018 are very similar to those reported in 2006-2007: 22% and 22% (relative BHC); 31% and 30% (relative AHC); 23% and 18% (absolute BHC); 31% and 26% (absolute AHC) (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019a).

further. Recent analysis by the Resolution Foundation focusing on how poverty changes over the life-course, has projected that those born between 2016-2020 are expected to face the highest rates of relative child poverty to date, at close to 40% at the age of two (Rahman, 2019).

Political discourse and media coverage

However, despite a picture of relative stability (at the population level at least), political and media discourse and coverage would seem to suggest that poverty and inequality have reached unprecedented or problematic levels. While a number of Theresa May's early speeches as Prime Minister centred around the theme of inequality, this trend is particularly evident for the Labour Party, in its opposition to austerity and welfare reform. Its 2017 election manifesto stated, "After seven years of rising poverty and inequality, Labour will rebuild and transform our social security system" (The Labour Party, 2017), while in late 2018, its leader Jeremy Corbyn declared UK poverty levels as a "national emergency" (Letter from Jeremy Corbyn to Theresa May, 2018). There has similarly been a substantial focus on poverty and inequality from other actors in the political sphere, leading Philip Alston, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, to conclude in November 2018 that,

> ***…the full picture of low income well-being in the UK cannot be captured by statistics alone. Its manifestations are clear for all to see. The country's most respected charitable groups, its leading think tanks, its parliamentary committees, independent authorities like the National Audit Office and many others have all drawn attention to the dramatic decline in the fortunes of the least well-off in this country. (Alston, 2018)***

Logically, we might expect the media to reflect the considerable focus on poverty and inequality that has evolved in the political sphere. Research examining the representation of poverty in the UK media has primarily focused on its content and tone (finding it to focus on foreign policy, with domestic coverage most frequently featuring child and pensioner poverty, and to be largely negative) (Chauhan and Foster, 2014; Skippit and Tranchese, 2015). However, some attempts have been made to quantify media coverage of poverty; research conducted in 2007 showed poverty to be 'a marginal issue in mainstream media' (McKendrick et al, 2008), with commentary attributing this to the limited public awareness of the issue within the UK at the time (Hanley, 2009).

A small number of attempts have been made to quantify how coverage of poverty and related concepts in the print media has changed over time. A comparison of news coverage between two randomly chosen one-month periods in 2001 and 2011 found the number of articles covering poverty in four mainstream newspapers

Perceptions of the prevalence of poverty and its causes appear to react to economic circumstances, with people perceiving higher levels of poverty during and following periods of recession

to have risen from 112 to 162 (Chauhan and Foster, 2014). Meanwhile an analysis of coverage of benefit recipients identified two peaks, in the late 1990s and in 2010-2011 – the latest point at which data was collected (Baumberg et al, 2012). Alternatively, an analysis of newspaper coverage of food banks found no newspaper articles before 2008 across nine national UK titles, with few before 2012, after which the number increased dramatically (Wells and Caraher, 2014). Content analysis has also identified a tendency for poverty and related issues to be covered more frequently and sympathetically in the broadsheet and left-wing media (Sippit and Tranchese, 2015). The aforementioned analysis of articles on food banks in nine publications found 79% of these articles to be concentrated in three publications that were either left-leaning and/or broadsheets (ibid). Beyond print media, 2013 saw the emergence of a new genre of television programmes termed ‘poverty porn’, including ‘We pay your benefits’, ‘Benefits Britain’ and ‘Benefits Street’ (Jensen, 2014).

How might we expect the divergent trends in rates of poverty and inequality and their coverage in political and media discourse to impact on people’s attitudes to these issues – given what we know about how these attitudes have evolved in the past? Previous research has shown that perceptions of the prevalence of poverty and its causes appear to react to economic circumstances, with people perceiving higher levels of poverty and adopting a more sympathetic stance during and following periods of recession (Clery, Lee and Kunz, 2013). This might lead us to anticipate that the public perceived greater levels of poverty and inequality during and immediately after the 2008-2009 recession, with views levelling off after that, mirroring broad trends in poverty rates as officially recorded. However, we might also expect attitudes to reflect the fortunes of different sections of society – both in general and for the individuals affected. So, for instance, the marked decline in pensioner poverty might have led the public to perceive less poverty among this group and to be more accepting of it, while pensioners themselves might have experienced a particularly marked shift in attitudes.

On the other hand, there is substantial evidence of attitudes in this area moving in line with political and media discourse. During the late 1990s and 2000s, attitudes to welfare among Labour Party supporters changed dramatically, reflecting a shift in the policy position of ‘their’ party (Curtice, 2010). An analysis of attitudes to poverty up to 2011 identified the same pattern, with the views of supporters of different political parties becoming much more alike, primarily because of a shift in the views of Labour Party supporters (Clery, Lee and Kunz, 2013). Moreover, analysis of the media coverage of poverty has identified a link between exposure to certain coverage and individual attitudes, with those exposed to a greater number of stories about benefit fraud being more likely to vastly over-estimate its prevalence (Baumberg et al, 2012). We might therefore expect attitudes to move in line with political and media discourse, with its greater focus on poverty and inequality in Britain leading to

The recent rises in homelessness and food bank use, are more likely to serve as visible signs of poverty than longer-term trends in household income, captured in official measures

greater levels of public awareness and recognition of, and concern about, these issues, with this shift being particularly pronounced among those most exposed to or influenced by this discourse, be they supporters of the Labour Party or other opposition parties or those with higher levels of exposure to the media. On the other hand, the phenomena and trends discussed in political and media coverage related to poverty, such as the recent rises in homelessness and food bank use, are more likely to serve as visible signs of poverty, encountered in people's day-to-day lives, than longer-term trends in household income, captured in official measures, especially given that people tend to define poverty in relation to a person's basic needs, as noted previously. Consequently, these phenomena and trends may possess a greater power to shift attitudes than those reflected in official statistics, resulting in public attitudes to poverty and inequality, and media coverage of these issues, moving in tandem.

Poverty and inequality: definitions, acceptability and prevalence

To test these theories, we begin by examining how people's definitions of poverty and inequality and perceptions of their acceptability and prevalence have evolved over the past decade.

Definitions of poverty and inequality

Poverty and inequality are subjective constructs and, as noted above, there is an ongoing debate about their definition and measurement. To explore the public's understandings of the term 'poverty' we regularly ask respondents the following three questions:

> *Would you say that someone in Britain was or was not in poverty if*
>
> *…they had enough to buy the things they really needed, but not enough to buy*
>
> *the things most people take for granted?*
>
> *… they had enough to eat and live, but not enough to buy other things they needed?*
>
> *… they had not got enough to eat and live without getting into debt?*

Table 1 presents the responses given in 2018 and at several other points since the period immediately prior to the 2008-2009 recession. Quite clearly, people have different views about what constitutes poverty. Almost everyone, around nine in ten, thinks that someone would be in poverty "if they had not got enough to eat and live without getting into debt". This reflects the findings of qualitative research which has shown that the public tend to define poverty in relation to a person's ability to meet certain basic needs (Hall et al, 2014) – and may explain why the rise in food banks has received considerable attention from the media in the past decade, as they are a visible sign of 'poverty', as defined by the vast majority of the public. However, people are divided as to whether someone who met these criteria, but did not have enough "to buy other things they needed", would be in poverty; slightly more than half think this is the case. Finally, slightly fewer than three in ten think that someone who has "enough to buy the things they really need, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted" is in poverty.

Table 1 Views on different definitions of poverty, 2006-2018

	2006	2010	2013	2018	Change 2006-2018
Enough to buy the things they really needed, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted	%	%	%	%	
Was in poverty	22	21	19	28	+6
Was not in poverty	76	77	78	69	-7
Enough to eat and live, but not enough to buy other things they needed	%	%	%	%	
Was in poverty	50	54	47	55	+6
Was not in poverty	48	45	51	42	-6
Not enough to eat and live without getting into debt	%	%	%	%	
Was in poverty	89	91	87	88	-1
Was not in poverty	10	8	11	11	+1
Unweighted base	*3240*	*3297*	*3244*	*2884*	

Figures showing change between 2006 and 2018 in this table are calculated from the unrounded data, rather than the data rounded to the nearest whole number that are reported in the table. As a result, they will sometimes vary from the difference between the rounded figures by +/-1 point

The proportion who support the broadest view of poverty – that someone is in poverty if they do not have enough "to buy the things that most people take for granted" – has risen by 6 percentage points since 2006

Adherence to different definitions of poverty has remained relatively stable over the past decade (and indeed over the period since these questions were first asked in 1986), although there has been a slight rise in support for the more inclusive definitions. Specifically, the proportion who support the broadest view of poverty – that someone is in poverty if they do not have enough "to buy the things that most people take for granted" – has risen by 6 percentage points since 2006, while there has been an equivalent rise in the proportion thinking that the term 'poverty' can be applied to someone who has "enough to eat and live, but not enough to buy the other things they needed". This trend, while slight, may nevertheless be important for understanding attitudes to the prevalence of poverty, which we consider next. In addition to our hypotheses that views about poverty and inequality have remained stable (in line with trends, as officially measured) or that the public perceive a rise in poverty (in line with political and media discourse), we might add a third possibility – that people perceive a slight rise in poverty and are less accepting of it, because the situations they now define as constituting poverty have become less prescriptive.

Perceptions of prevalence of poverty and inequality

To measure perceptions of the extent of poverty in Britain, we ask:

> ***Some people say there is very little real poverty in Britain today. Others say there is quite a lot. Which comes closest to your view … that there is very little real poverty in Britain, or, that there is quite a lot?***

Around two-thirds think there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain

To place their responses in context, we also ask respondents whether they think poverty in Britain has been "increasing, decreasing or staying at about the same level" over the past ten years, and about what will happen in relation to levels of poverty in Britain over the next ten years.

As shown in Table 2, around two-thirds think there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain. A slightly lower proportion think that poverty has been increasing over the last ten years, and will increase further over the next ten years. Clearly, all of these views have gained substantially in popularity since the period before the financial crisis. The popularity of the view that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain, held by around half in 2006, rose steadily over the subsequent 12 years, by 13 percentage points. More markedly still, the view that poverty in Britain has been increasing over the last ten years rose by 30 percentage points over the same period, with all of this increase occurring by 2013 but being sustained until 2018. And, over the same period, the view that levels of poverty will increase over the next decade rose by 18 percentage points, with the bulk of this rise again occurring by the first half of the decade.

Table 2 Views on levels of poverty in Britain, 2006-2018

	2006	2009	2013	2018	Change 2006-2018
How much real poverty in Britain today	%	%	%	%	
Very little	45	39	35	31	-14
Quite a lot	52	57	62	65	+13
What has happened to poverty levels in the last 10 years	%	%	%	%	
Increasing	32	48	63	62	+30
Staying the same	23	14	8	8	-15
Decreasing	39	34	26	25	-14
What will happen to poverty levels over the next 10 years	%	%	%	%	
Increase	44	56	59	61	+18
Stay same	16	11	10	8	-8
Decrease	35	29	27	25	-9
Unweighted base	*3240*	*3421*	*3244*	*2884*	

See note to Table 1 regarding the calculation of change between years

74% of people who think that someone would be in poverty if they had enough to buy the things they really needed, but not the things most people take for granted, think there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain

These evolving perceptions of levels of poverty are clearly at odds with objective trends, as measured by official statistics. Rather they lend support to our second theory – that the rise in political and media discourse around poverty has influenced perceptions of its prevalence. Arguably, they could also logically result from the fact that people's definitions of poverty have become slightly broader than they have been in the past. In support of this theory, we find that the more inclusive a person's definition of poverty, the more likely they are to think there is a "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain (with the difference remaining relatively stable over time). For instance, 74% of people who think that someone would be in poverty if they had enough to buy the things they really needed, but not the things most people take for granted, think there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain, compared with 55% of those who think that this definition does not constitute poverty.

The timing of these shifts in attitudes is also interesting, given they largely occurred before the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the Labour Party in 2015 and its increasing focus on poverty and inequality. We know that views on the past, current and future prevalence of poverty become markedly more negative during and after periods of recession (Clery, Lee and Kunz, 2013); but what is surprising here (and at odds with changes in attitudes that followed the recession of the early 1990s) is that these more negative perceptions of prevalence have been sustained. It may be that the political and media focus on poverty has therefore prevented views on its prevalence returning to more expected levels.

However, this conclusion does not mean that actual trends in levels of poverty had no role to play in shifting attitudes. As noted previously, rates of poverty as measured by official statistics (and projections regarding future trends) have diverged for different sections of the population, with pensioners having fared particularly well and households with children facing a more negative outlook. It may be that actual trends in poverty for these groups have had some effect on the attitudes held towards them specifically. We can test this theory by examining two questions from the European Social Survey (ESS), asked in its 2008 and 2016 welfare module. Respondents were asked:

> ***What do you think overall about the standard of living of pensioners? Please tell me on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means extremely bad and 10 means extremely good.***
>
> ***What do you think overall about the standard of living of people who are unemployed? Please tell me on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means extremely bad and 10 means extremely good.***

For pensioners there has been a shift away from the view that their standard of living is "bad"

Table 3 presents responses to these questions, with a number between 0-3 being interpreted as a "bad" standard of living, numbers between 7-10 as a "good" standard of living and the intervening numbers as being "neither bad nor good". Around one quarter of people in each case felt that pensioners and people who are unemployed had a "bad" standard of living in 2016, with the most popular response in both cases (for around half) being categorized as "neither bad nor good". While, for people who are unemployed, these proportions are not substantially different to those seen in 2008, for pensioners there has been a shift away from the view that their standard of living is "bad"; more than one third expressed this view in 2008, compared with less than one quarter in 2016, a decline of 12 percentage points. These data therefore present some evidence that attitudes to the living standards of specific groups reflect objective trends in their fortunes.

Table 3 Views on standard of living for pensioners and people who are unemployed, 2008-2016

	2008	2016	Change 2008-2016
Pensioners	%	%	
Bad	36	24	-12
Neither bad nor good	45	46	+1
Good	18	28	+10
Unemployed	%	%	
Bad	26	29	+2
Neither bad nor good	53	53	0
Good	17	16	-1
Unweighted base	*2352*	*1959*	

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 4 (2008) and wave 8 (2016)
See also note to Table 1 regarding the calculation of change between years

Given that the findings so far lend overwhelming support to the view that attitudes have evolved in line with shifts in political and media coverage, and the fact that much of this discourse focuses on the unacceptability of poverty and inequality, we might also expect a rise in the view that poverty and inequality, and their current levels, are unacceptable.

Acceptability of poverty and inequality

Since the inception of BSA in 1983, we have asked respondents about their views of income inequality:

> ***Thinking of income levels generally in Britain today, would you say that the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is…***
>
> ***…too large, about right, or, too small?***

Currently, a substantial majority – 78% – say that the gap between those on high and low incomes is "too large", while almost everyone else (16%) thinks this is "about right"

Currently, a substantial majority – 78% – say that the gap between those on high and low incomes is "too large", while almost everyone else (16%) thinks this is "about right". Just 2% regard the gap as "too small". The proportion favouring the view that the income gap is too large has remained relatively stable across the lifetime of the survey, fluctuating between 72% and 85%. Along with objective measures of income inequality discussed previously, the proportion expressing this view has remained relatively stable over the past decade (76% took this view in 2006). On this basis, it is arguable that attitudes here align more closely with objective trends in inequality than political and media discourse around this issue – although the fact that a substantial majority support this view means there is less potential to see an upward shift in views.

The European Social Survey includes two measures relating to the acceptability of differences in income and living standards, which can be considered to further test this theory. Respondents are asked how far they agree or disagree with the following two statements:

> ***Large differences in people's incomes are acceptable to properly reward differences in talents and efforts***
>
> ***For a society to be fair, differences in people's standard of living should be small***

People are more divided about the acceptability of differences in incomes and living standards when asked their views in theory, rather than in terms of what is happening in practice

Table 4 presents responses to these statements given in 2008 and in 2016. The findings indicate that people are more divided about the acceptability of differences in incomes and living standards when asked their views in theory, rather than in terms of what is happening in practice. In 2016 around half agreed that "for society to be fair differences in people's living standards should be small", while one quarter disagreed with the view that "large differences in people's incomes are acceptable to properly reward differences in talent and efforts". Interestingly though, support for both views increased slightly between 2008 and 2016; the proportion agreeing that for a fair society differences in standards of living should be small rose by 4 percentage points between 2008 and 2016, while there has been a rise of 6 percentage points in disagreement with the view that large differences in income are acceptable to reward talents and effort. Perhaps because these questions measure people's hypothetical views, rather than their perceptions of what is currently happening, it is unsurprising that the extent of this change has been more muted than that witnessed with regard to levels of poverty. Nevertheless, these findings lend some support to the view that theoretical attitudes to inequality have moved in line with the increased political and media focus on the unacceptability of this phenomenon, largely with reference to levels of inequality in Britain today.

Table 4 Views about acceptability of differences in income and standards of living, 2008-2016

	2008	2016	Change 2008-2016
Large differences in income acceptable to reward talents and efforts	%	%	
Agree	64	53	-11
Neither	16	20	+4
Disagree	19	26	+6
For fair society, differences in standard of living should be small	%	%	
Agree	50	55	+4
Neither	21	24	+3
Disagree	27	21	-6
Unweighted base	*2352*	*1959*	

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 4 (2008) and wave 8 (2016)
See also note to Table 1 regarding the calculation of change between years

In the data presented thus far, we have seen a degree of inconsistency in trends in attitudes to poverty and inequality over the past decade. This is unsurprising, given that the questions reviewed measure attitudes to different concepts (poverty, inequality, the income gap and living standards) and variably measure hypothetical views (which we would anticipate being more entrenched) and perceptions of current developments (which we would expect to be more fluid). Nevertheless, where attitudes have shifted, we can conclude that these have largely followed the direction of political and media discourse rather than aligning with objective trends in levels of poverty and inequality. We can test this provisional conclusion further by examining how the attitudes of specific sections of society have evolved over the past decade.

Whose views have changed?

Political party support

Labour Party supporters adopt a broader definition of poverty than those who support the Conservative Party

Given that shifts in attitudes over the past decade lend most support to our theory that these have moved in line with political and media discourse, we first consider whether change has been concentrated among those most exposed to and likely to have been influenced by this discourse – namely Labour Party supporters and those with a high degree of exposure to media coverage of poverty and inequality.

Table 5 shows trends in the definitions of poverty ascribed to by supporters of the main two political parties. It is clear that Labour Party supporters adopt a broader definition of poverty than do those who support the Conservative Party: 36% of Labour Party supporters agree with the most inclusive definition of poverty (that someone is in poverty if they don't have enough to buy the things that most people take for granted), compared with 20% of Conservative Party supporters. There is a similar gap in support for the more stringent view (that someone is in poverty if they have enough to eat and live, but not to buy other things they need) while around nine in ten of both groups ascribe to the most stringent definition.

Table 5 Views on different definitions of poverty, by political party support, 2006-2018

% think is in poverty	2006	2009	2013	2018	Change 2006-2018
Enough to buy the things they really needed, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted	%	%	%	%	
Labour	23	24	25	36	+13
Conservative	18	16	14	20	+2
All	22	21	19	27	+6
Enough to eat and live, but not enough to buy other things they needed	%	%	%	%	
Labour	50	57	57	64	+14
Conservative	47	50	38	46	-2
All	50	54	47	55	+6
Not enough to eat and live without getting into debt	%	%	%	%	
Labour	90	92	90	86	-4
Conservative	90	91	87	89	-1
All	89	91	87	89	-1

The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
See also note to Table 1 regarding the calculation of change between years

However, this divergence in views has only emerged over the past decade – and primarily because of a shift in the views of Labour Party supporters. While the proportion of Conservative Party supporters agreeing with the most inclusive definition of poverty increased by just two percentage points between 2006 and 2018, the prevalence of this view increased by 13 percentage points among Labour Party supporters. Similarly, support for the view that someone is in poverty if they have enough to eat and live, but not enough to buy other things they need rose by 14 percentage points among Labour Party supporters, but declined by 2 percentage points among Conservative Party supporters. Interestingly, much of the shift towards the most inclusive definition of poverty among Labour Party supporters occurred after 2013, and while we cannot pinpoint the precise timing of the change, might be viewed as an effect of the shift in policy and discourse after the election of Jeremy Corbyn in 2015 (although Labour Party supporters' agreement with the middle definition increased more gradually over time).

Much of the shift towards the most inclusive definition of poverty among Labour Party supporters occurred after 2013

The view that there is currently "quite a lot" of poverty increased by 19 percentage points among Labour Party supporters, compared with 5 percentage points among Conservative Party supporters

Turning to views on current, past and future levels of poverty, presented in Table 6, we see stark differences in the views of supporters of the two parties. Labour Party supporters are much more likely than those supporting the Conservative Party to think there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain, that this has been increasing over the past ten years and that it is set to increase over the next ten years. However, we once again see that views on each of these measures have diverged over the past decade among supporters of the two parties. The view that there is currently "quite a lot" of poverty increased by 19 percentage points among Labour Party supporters, compared with 5 percentage points among Conservative Party supporters, while the view that poverty has been increasing in the last ten years rose substantially for both groups – but markedly more so for Labour Party supporters (38 percentage points, compared with 22 percentage points for Conservative Party supporters). However, views have diverged most in relation to future poverty levels; the proportion of Labour Party supporters who think poverty will rise in the next ten years has increased by 28 percentage points, compared with a 5 percentage point rise among Conservative Party supporters.

Table 6 Views on levels of poverty in Britain, by political party support, 2006-2018

	2006	2009	2013	2018	Change 2006-2018
Perception of poverty in Britain (% a lot)	%	%	%	%	
Labour	55	59	72	73	+19
Conservative	46	48	49	51	+5
All	52	57	62	65	+13
Last 10 years poverty increasing decreasing or stayed same (% increasing)	%	%	%	%	
Labour	32	48	72	70	+38
Conservative	28	44	53	49	+22
All	32	48	63	62	+30
Next 10 years poverty increase, decrease or stay the same (% increase)	%	%	%	%	
Labour	42	54	67	69	+28
Conservative	42	53	46	47	+5
All	44	56	59	61	+18

The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
See also note to Table 1 regarding the calculation of change between years

The timing of these shifts in attitudes is interesting, with the views of Labour and Conservative Party supporters appearing to diverge most markedly between 2009 and 2013. We have noted previously that, during and after recessions, views about the prevalence of poverty tend to become more negative. However, at this disaggregated level, we might also consider the potential impact of the political party in power on the attitudes of different party supporters. There is considerable evidence that people tend to rate the record of 'their' party more favourably than that of parties they do not support across a range of policy areas (see, for example Appleby and Roberts, 2014), and this tendency may explain to some degree why the views of Labour Party supporters became more negative around the time of the election of the coalition government in 2010.

Disagreement with the view that large differences in income are acceptable to reward talents and effort increased by 15 percentage points among Labour Party supporters between 2008 and 2016, compared with a rise of 5 percentage points among Conservative Party supporters

We see a similar pattern in views about the acceptability of poverty and inequality. Table 7 presents the items about the acceptability of differences in income and living standards, fielded on the European Social Survey, by political party support. Once again, we see that Labour Party supporters are markedly more opposed to differences in income and living standards – and that their views have diverged from those of Conservative Party supporters over time. Disagreement with the view that large differences in income are acceptable to reward talents and effort increased by 15 percentage points among Labour Party supporters between 2008 and 2016, compared with a rise of 5 percentage points among Conservative Party supporters. And, while agreement with the view that for society to be fair, differences in living standards should be small has risen by 14 percentage points among Labour Party supporters over the same period, it has declined by 5 percentage points among Conservative Party supporters.

Table 7 Views about acceptability of differences in income and standards of living, by political party support, 2008-2016

	2008	2016	Change 2008-2016
% disagree large differences in income acceptable to reward talents and efforts	%	%	
Labour	28	42	+15
Conservative	9	14	+5
All	19	26	+6
% agree for fair society, differences in standard of living should be small	%	%	
Labour	56	70	+14
Conservative	45	41	-5
All	50	55	+4

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 4 (2008) and wave 8 (2016)
The base for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter. See also note to Table 1 regarding the calculation of change between years

As noted previously, there has consistently been strong support for the view that the gap between those on high and low incomes is too

The substantial changes we have seen in attitudes to poverty and inequality over the past decade can largely, though not entirely, be attributed to the evolving views of Labour Party supporters

large, leading to little fluctuation on this measure. While Labour Party supporters are more likely to subscribe to this view, (this is the case for 83%, compared with 71% of Conservative Party supporters), the views of both groups, along with those of the population as a whole, have not changed significantly since 2006.

Overall then, the substantial changes we have seen in attitudes to poverty and inequality over the past decade can largely, though not entirely, be attributed to the evolving views of Labour Party supporters, reflecting the shifting discourse of their party. However, it is important to remember that political party allegiance is not static. It may be that some of this change can be explained by individuals, who increasingly perceive poverty in British society and regard it as unacceptable, having shifted their allegiance to the Labour Party from elsewhere, to better reflect their evolving views. These individual views could logically have been informed by other sources, such as the media. It is the role of the media which we consider next.

Media exposure

In this section, we consider both the extent and nature of media exposure to understand its effect on individual attitudes to poverty and inequality. Given the increasing media focus on poverty and inequality, we anticipate that those who engage with a wider range of types of media regularly are more likely to be influenced by the messages conveyed in the media on poverty and inequality. In addition, as noted previously, coverage of these topics is far more frequent and sympathetic in the broadsheet media, prompting us to examine whether shifts in attitudes have been particularly pronounced among those exposed to this section of the media.

Since the inception of the BSA survey[3], we have asked respondents whether they “normally read any daily morning newspaper at least three times a week”. Since 2010, we have also asked respondents how often they “watch all or part of a news programme on television”, and how often they “look online at a news or newspaper website”. To obtain a measure of media exposure, we added together the number of these types of media which respondents said they viewed “at least several times a week”. Overall, 14% do not view any media with this regularity, while 39%, 38% and 8% respectively viewed one, two, or all three types of media.

There are very few differences in the views expressed by those with different levels of media exposure and these have not shifted in distinct ways over time

Across the measures of attitudes to poverty and inequality we examined, there were very few differences in the views expressed by those with different levels of media exposure and these had not shifted in distinct ways over time. However, we have seen that much of the increase in coverage that may have prompted a shift in attitudes is likely to have been concentrated in certain sections of the media, primarily the broadsheet press, prompting us to consider

3 Comparable analysis was not possible for the European Social Survey, as media exposure was not measured consistently in 2008 and 2016.

whether the attitudes of those who engage with different sections of the media have evolved differently. Respondents who read a daily morning newspaper at least three times a week are asked to identify which newspaper this is, enabling their classification as tabloid or broadsheet readers. Since we introduced a measure of online newspaper readership in 2010, we have asked a similar follow-up question, enabling a comparable classification (although many readers view websites not associated with particular newspapers).

When examining attitudes to poverty and inequality along these lines, we find stark differences between readers of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers – many of which have only emerged over the past decade. In 2006, as shown in Table 8, readers of tabloid and broadsheet daily newspapers were not significantly different in their levels of support for the idea that there is “quite a lot” of poverty in Britain; over the subsequent decade their views diverged markedly, with the proportion supporting this view remaining the same among tabloid readers while increasing by 19 percentage points among broadsheet readers. Although data on online newspaper readership are only available alongside the poverty measures from 2013, we see similar patterns for readers of tabloid and broadsheet websites; over the five year period until 2018, the view that there is “quite a lot” of poverty in Britain increased by 2 percentage points among the former group and 15 percentage points among the latter.

Table 8 Views on levels of poverty in Britain, by broadsheet and tabloid readership, 2006-2018

Perception of poverty in Britain (% a lot)	2006	2009	2013	2018	Change 2006-2018
Newspaper readership	%	%	%	%	
Tabloid	55	56	62	55	0
Broadsheet	48	52	58	68	+19
	2006	**2009**	**2013**	**2018**	**Change 2013-2018**
Newspaper website	%	%	%	%	
Tabloid	n/a	n/a	62	64	+2
Broadsheet	n/a	n/a	62	76	+15

The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
See also note to Table 1 regarding the calculation of change between years
n/a = not asked

Similar trends are evident in the evolution of attitudes to past and future poverty levels among broadsheet and tabloid newspapers (both in their traditional form and online). On these measures, readers of tabloid newspapers were previously more likely to think that poverty in Britain had been increasing over the past ten years and is set to increase further. Forty-eight per cent of readers of daily tabloid newspapers in 2006 expected poverty to increase over the next decade, to compared with 35% of readers of broadsheet newspapers. However, by 2018 this picture had reversed – with 51% and 58% respectively taking this view – equating to an increase of 3 percentage points among tabloid readers and 24 percentage points among broadsheet readers. On the other hand, views on the acceptability of the income gap were almost identical in 2006 but, by 2018, had become markedly different, with the view that this is too large declining by 4 percentage points (to 74%) among readers of tabloid newspapers, while increasing by 10 percentage points (to 88%) among readers of broadsheet newspapers.

An individual's choice of newspaper is known to be associated with their level of education, as confirmed by BSA data for 2018, which indicates that 49% of readers of broadsheet titles have a degree, compared with 10% of readers of tabloid titles. Those with a greater number of educational qualifications have historically been more likely to perceive poverty in Britain than those with fewer qualifications; moreover, the degree of difference in views appears to have become more pronounced over time. For this reason, we cannot be certain whether the changing views among readers of tabloid and broadsheet newspaper are simply a product of their differing educational profiles (we seek to disentangle which characteristic is most important, in the final section of the chapter).

Moreover, as with political party affiliation, newspaper readership is not fixed. We may find that people who have become more concerned about poverty have changed from tabloid to broadsheet titles in the same way as those with similar concerns may have shifted their political allegiance to the Labour Party. Further, readership of daily newspapers itself is in continued decline, as readership of news online (which is harder to assign to a tabloid-broadsheet dichotomy) has increased[4] – so these shifts in attitudes might, to some extent, reflect such movement. Before seeking to disentangle the impact of political and media discourse, and their inter-relationships, further, we consider what role, if any, actual experiences of poverty may have played in these shifts in attitudes.

Experiences of poverty

While there is overwhelming evidence that attitudes to poverty and inequality have followed the direction of political and media discourse, it may be that objective trends have nevertheless had some part to play. We have already seen that views about the living standards of pensioners have followed the direction of trends in pensioner poverty over the past decade. To test this theory further, we examined shifts in attitudes among the two groups for whom objective changes in poverty rates have been (and, in the latter case, are expected to be) the most pronounced – pensioners and

4 50% of respondents read a daily newspaper several times a week in 2006, compared with 24% in 2018. Since 2010, the proportion who read a news or newspaper website with this regularity has increased from 29% to 53%.

People who are retired (among whom poverty rates have declined) are less likely to perceive a lot of poverty in Britain today compared with those with children in the household

households with children (Portes and Reed, 2018). At the outset, it should be noted that when we ask respondents about their "feelings about their household's income these days", those who feel that they are not living comfortably on their present incomes are consistently more likely to adopt a more inclusive definition of poverty and to perceive significant levels of poverty in Britain, than those who define themselves as living comfortably. We might therefore logically expect objective trends in poverty rates to have influenced the attitudes of the sections of society affected by them over the past decade.

It is therefore unsurprising to discover, as shown in Table 9, that people who are retired (among whom poverty rates have declined) are less likely to perceive a lot of poverty in Britain today or to view poverty as having been increasing or being set to increase, compared with those with children in the household (among whom trends are set to move in the opposite direction). However, despite these differences, the perceptions of these two groups have evolved in a very similar way over time. The only marked difference is in perceptions about future poverty levels, where the proportion expecting these to increase has risen by 19 percentage points among those in households with children, compared with a smaller rise of 11 percentage points among those who are retired. While comparatively small, this difference lends some support to the idea that trends in attitudes to poverty respond to objective changes in experiences of poverty among different sections of society.

Table 9 Views on levels of poverty in Britain, by retirement status and whether children in household, 2006-2018

	2006	2009	2013	2018	Change 2006-2018
Perception of poverty in Britain (% a lot)	%	%	%	%	
Retired	43	47	57	58	+15
Children in household	54	61	63	67	+13
All	52	57	62	65	+13
Last 10 years poverty increasing, decreasing or stayed same (% increasing)	%	%	%	%	
Retired	30	44	58	56	+26
Children in household	36	48	66	66	+30
All	32	48	63	62	+30
Next 10 years poverty increase, decrease or stay the same (% increase)					
Retired	40	51	52	51	+11
Children in household	47	59	62	66	+19
All	44	56	59	61	+17

The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
See also note to Table 1 regarding the calculation of change between years

Similarly, the move over the past decade to more inclusive definitions of poverty has been slightly more pronounced among those with children in the household, compared with people who are retired.

However, on attitudes to the acceptability of the income gap and living standards, where shifts at the population level have been more muted, there is little discernible difference in the evolving attitudes of people who are retired and those in households with children. And, even on the measure of the living standards of pensioners, the decline in the view that these are "bad" is only slightly more pronounced among those who would have experienced this shift – that is pensioners themselves, compared with the population as a whole. Taken together then, these data lend little support to the theory that changes in attitudes to poverty and inequality are the result of individuals' experiences of objective changes in these concepts.

We have seen that many characteristics are associated with attitudes to poverty and inequality, with the public having become more divided in their views since 2006 due to changes in attitudes concentrated to a considerable degree among specific sections of society. However, many of these characteristics are known to be inter-linked; for instance, people aged over 65 are more likely to support the Conservative Party (and vice versa) – with both characteristics being associated with the adoption of more prescriptive definitions of poverty and less negative views about current, past and future levels of poverty in Britain. In our final section, we seek to take account of such relationships to identify which set of characteristics are primarily associated with attitudes to poverty – those relating to individual experiences of poverty or those linked to levels of political and media exposure and influence.

Understanding shifts in attitudes

To understand which characteristics influence attitudes to poverty, once their relationships with each other are controlled for, and whether this has changed since the time of the financial crisis, we ran two logistic regression analyses for our measure of whether people think that there is "quite a lot" or "very little" poverty in Britain; one for 2006 and one for 2018. We included as our explanatory variables those characteristics which were measured using an identical format by the two surveys and which had been shown to significantly relate to perceptions of poverty levels in Britain. We also added sex, which is known to link to views on the prevalence of poverty (with women being more likely to think there is "quite a lot"). Full details of the models are presented in Tables A.6 and A.7 in the appendix to this chapter.

In Table 10, we present, for 2006 and 2018, the specific characteristics that were found to be significant, once their links with other characteristics had been controlled for – in each case, compared to the reference category presented in brackets in the left-hand column. A (+) sign indicates a positive association between that characteristic and the view that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain, whereas a (-) sign denotes a negative association. Those characteristics which we are most confident are associated with views on the prevalence of poverty have been emboldened.

An individual's definition of poverty is consistently associated with their perception of its prevalence

A number of themes are evident. As we would expect, an individual's definition of poverty is consistently associated with their perception of its prevalence, with those who support a more inclusive definition being more likely to think there is "quite a lot" of poverty. Sex is also consistently associated with attitudes to poverty, although education only emerged as significant in 2018, and we can be less confident about this association than is the case for many of the other factors. Neither of the characteristics associated with the individual's own experience of poverty (age, as a proxy for being retired, and having a child in the household) were associated with perceptions of its prevalence in 2018, although age was significantly associated with attitudes in 2006. This is somewhat surprising; given that poverty levels have reduced most markedly for pensioners across the past two decades, we might have expected their views on its prevalence to have become more distinct.

Being a supporter of the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats or any other party is positively associated with the perception that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain, compared with being a supporter of the Conservative Party

Instead, it is the characteristics linked with exposure to the political and media discourse around poverty that are consistently associated with perceptions of its prevalence in 2018, and more markedly so than was the case in 2006. Being a supporter of the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats or any other party is positively associated with the perception that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain, compared with being a supporter of the Conservative Party. Meanwhile, reading a tabloid newspaper several times a week is negatively associated with this view, although this relationship has reversed since 2006 when this association was positive. This analysis confirms the importance of the latter set of factors in influencing attitudes to poverty in 2018, and the fact that their role in this regard has increased since 2006.

Table 10 Characteristics influencing views about level of poverty, 2006-2018

Type of characteristic	2006	2018
Characteristics associated with own experience of poverty		
Age	**Being aged 65+(-)**	
Whether there is a child in household		
Characteristics associated with political and media discourse around poverty		
Political party identification (Being a Conservative Party supporter)	**Being a Labour Party Supporter (+)** Being a Liberal Democrat Party supporter (+)	**Being a Labour Party supporter (+) Being a Liberal Democrat Party supporter (+) Being a supporter of another political party (+)**
Type of newspaper read (does not read a paper)	**Reads tabloid newspaper (+)**	**Reads tabloid newspaper (-)**
Definition of poverty		
Definition of poverty (Person who does not have enough to buy things most people take for granted is in poverty)	**Does not support broad definition (-)**	**Does not support broad definition (-)**
Other demographic characteristics		
Highest educational qualification		Having a qualification at O-level or equivalent (-)
Sex	**Being female (+)**	**Being female (+)**

Conclusions

Evidence from the British Social Attitudes and European Social Surveys reveals that there has been a marked and largely consistent shift in attitudes to poverty and inequality over the past decade, with definitions becoming slightly more inclusive, and with both phenomena being more widely regarded as prevalent and unacceptable than in the past. These trends are at odds with objective trends in poverty and inequality, as measured by official statistics, and largely align with the direction of political and media discourse. This link is further confirmed by the fact that attitudes have shifted most markedly among those exposed to and influenced by this discourse, and the fact that political identification and media exposure have a comparatively bigger role in explaining attitudes than they did a decade ago. However, there is some evidence that attitudes have responded to objective trends in poverty, although, by comparison, these responses appear fairly muted.

What do these trends mean for political parties and policy makers? Clearly, the public are likely to have more of an appetite for

Any policy implementation that leads to an overall reduction in poverty levels, as officially monitored, may not necessarily reduce the widespread perception that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain and that this is on the rise

policies aimed at addressing poverty and inequality than they did a decade ago, although it appears that Labour Party supporters are substantively more supportive of this agenda than their Conservative counterparts. However, any policy implementation that leads to an overall reduction in poverty levels, as officially monitored, may not necessarily reduce the widespread perception that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in Britain and that this is on the rise. Our data suggests that public perceptions of poverty have become divorced from current official measures, although it will be interesting to see whether this divergence is reversed when the new measure of poverty, developed by the Social Metrics Commission, is introduced as an experimental statistic from 2020. Meanwhile, it may be that policy makers need to instead identify and devise policies that address the issues highlighted by politicians and campaigners and in media discourse around poverty relating to people's basic needs – such as short-term deprivation, homelessness and food bank use, in order to regain a more positive view among the public.

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Appendix

The bases for Table 5 are shown below.

A.1 Views on different definitions of poverty, by political party support, 2006-2018

	2006	2009	2013	2018
Enough to buy the things they really needed, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Labour	*1063*	*1011*	*1052*	*1001*
Conservative	*843*	*943*	*818*	*866*
All	*3240*	*3297*	*3244*	*2884*
Enough to eat and live, but not enough to buy other things they needed				
Labour	*1063*	*1011*	*1052*	*1001*
Conservative	*843*	*943*	*818*	*866*
All	*3240*	*3297*	*3244*	*2884*
Not enough to eat and live without getting into debt				
Labour	*1063*	*1011*	*1052*	*1001*
Conservative	*843*	*943*	*818*	*866*
All	*3240*	*3297*	*3244*	*2884*

The bases for Table 6 are shown below.

Table A.2 Views on levels of poverty in Britain, by political party support, 2006-2018

	2006	2009	2013	2018
Perception of poverty in Britain	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Labour	*1063*	*905*	*1052*	*1001*
Conservative	*843*	*961*	*818*	*866*
All	*3240*	*3421*	*3244*	*2884*
Last 10 years poverty increasing, decreasing or stayed same				
Labour	*1063*	*905*	*1052*	*1001*
Conservative	*843*	*961*	*818*	*866*
All	*3240*	*3421*	*3244*	*2884*
Next 10 years poverty increase, decrease or stay the same				
Labour	*1063*	*905*	*1052*	*1001*
Conservative	*843*	*961*	*818*	*866*
All	*3240*	*3421*	*3244*	*2884*

The bases for Table 7 are shown below.

Table A.3 Views about acceptability of differences in income and standards of living, by political party support, 2008 and 2016

	2008	2016
% disagree large differences in income acceptable to reward talents and efforts	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Labour	*430*	*359*
Conservative	*402*	*388*
All	*2352*	*1959*
% agree for fair society, differences in standard of living should be small		
Labour	*430*	*359*
Conservative	*402*	*388*
All	*2352*	*1959*

The bases for Table 8 are shown below.

Table A.4 Views on levels of poverty in Britain, by broadsheet and tabloid readership, 2006-2018

	2006	2009	2013	2018
Newspaper readership	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Tabloid	*1055*	*1043*	*776*	*413*
Broadsheet	*493*	*433*	*391*	*307*
Newspaper website				
Tabloid	*n/a*	*n/a*	*272*	*287*
Broadsheet	*n/a*	*n/a*	*322*	*444*

n/a = not asked

The bases for Table 9 are shown below.

Table A.5 Views on levels of poverty in Britain, by retirement status and whether children in household, 2006-2018

	2006	**2009**	**2013**	**2018**
Perception of poverty in Britain (% a lot)	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Retired	*774*	*854*	*959*	*930*
Children in household	*832*	*1007*	*807*	*722*
All	*3240*	*3421*	*3244*	*2884*
Last 10 years poverty increasing, decreasing or stayed same (% increasing)				
Retired	*774*	*854*	*959*	*930*
Children in household	*832*	*1007*	*807*	*722*
All	*3240*	*3421*	*3244*	*2884*
Next 10 years poverty increase, decrease or stay the same (% increase)				
Retired	*774*	*854*	*959*	*930*
Children in household	*832*	*1007*	*807*	*722*
All	*3240*	*3421*	*3244*	*2884*

Table A.6 Predictor of perception there is "quite a lot" of poverty in 2006, logistic regression

	Odds ratio	Standard error	p value
Age (16-34)			
35-44	1.13	0.14	0.324
45-54	0.98	0.13	0.856
55-64	0.99	0.14	0.967
65+	**0.55	0.09	0.000
Political Party (Conservative)			
Labour	**1.37	0.14	0.002
Liberal Democrat	*1.39	0.18	0.014
Other party	1.37	0.27	0.108
None	1.09	0.15	0.525
Other/DK/Ref	1.08	0.20	0.696
Highest education qualification (degree or higher)			
Higher education below degree	1.11	0.20	0.581
A level or equivalent	1.04	0.17	0.811
O level or equivalent	0.91	0.14	0.528
CSE or equivalent	1.20	0.24	0.351
Foreign or other	0.60	0.24	0.212
No qualification	0.88	0.13	0.402
Enough to buy the things they really needed, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted (is in poverty)			
Was not	**0.39	0.04	0.000
Don`t know	0.58	0.17	0.070
Sex (Male)	**1.35	0.11	0.000
Has children under 17 in household (Yes)			
Doesn't have a child under 17	1.05	0.11	0.674
Don't know	1.10	0.70	0.887
Paper type (None)			
Popular (tabloid)	**1.33	0.12	0.003
Quality (Broadsheet)	0.99	0.12	0.931
Other	0.95	0.58	0.936
Constant	**1.70	0.33	0.006
Unweighted base: 2974			

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

Table A.7 Predictor of perception there is “quite a lot” of poverty in 2018, logistic regression

	Odds ratio	Standard error	p value
Age (16-34)			
35-44	1.12	0.19	0.506
45-54	1.28	0.21	0.130
55-64	1.13	0.21	0.501
65+	0.83	0.15	0.293
Political Party (Conservative)			
Labour	**2.22	0.27	0.000
Liberal Democrat	**1.76	0.37	0.008
Other party	**3.23	0.69	0.000
None	1.20	0.22	0.323
Other/DK/Ref	*1.55	0.33	0.045
Highest education qualification (degree or higher)			
Higher education below degree	1.03	0.20	0.874
A level or equivalent	1.21	0.20	0.261
O level or equivalent	*1.56	0.27	0.011
CSE or equivalent	1.17	0.23	0.409
Foreign or other	**0.30	0.12	0.003
No qualification	0.79	0.14	0.173
Enough to buy the things they really needed, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted (is in poverty)			
Was not	**0.43	0.06	0.000
Don`t know	0.97	0.40	0.945
Sex (Male)	**1.56	0.17	0.000
Has children under 17 in household (Yes)			
Doesn't have a child under 17	1.12	0.16	0.432
Don’t know	0.67	0.35	0.445
Paper type (None)			
Popular (tabloid)	**0.68	0.10	0.007
Quality (Broadsheet)	1.19	0.20	0.293
Other	1.31	0.67	0.596
Constant	*1.69	0.40	0.028
Unweighted base: 2601			

**=significant at 95% level*

***=significant at 99% level*

The EU Debate

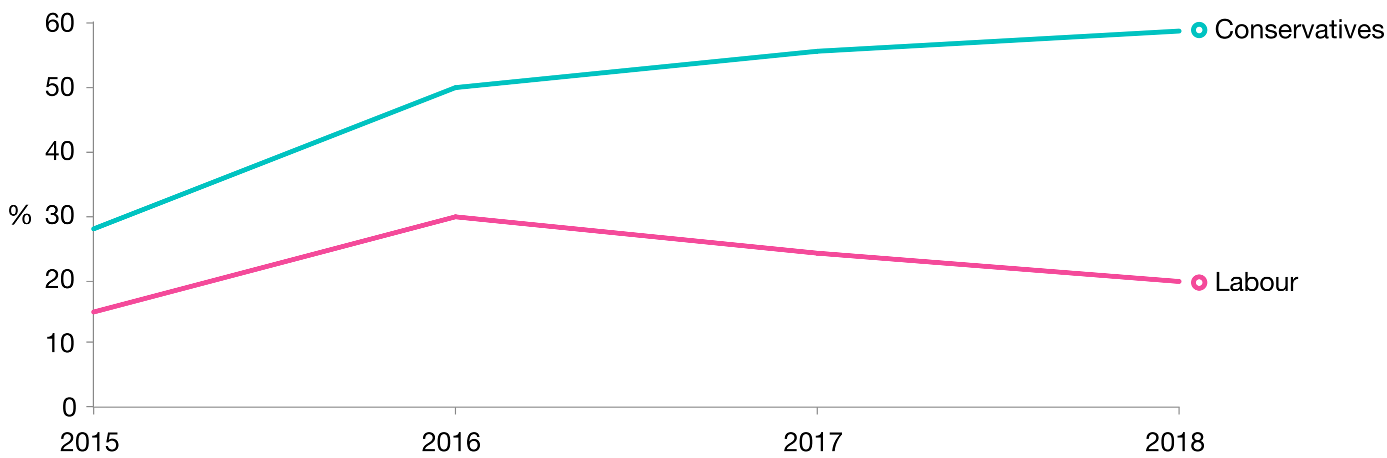
Has Brexit Polarised Britain?

It is often claimed that attitudes towards Brexit have ‘polarised’. But what might be meant by that claim? It could simply mean that few people think that leaving the EU will not make much difference either way to Britain’s future. But it could also mean that support for leaving varies markedly by social background, sense of identity, or underlying values, as well as people’s perceptions of the consequences of Brexit. Or it could be that the country has divided into strongly committed ‘Remainers’ and strongly committed ‘Leavers’. This chapter assesses the evidence for each of these possibilities.

Spotlight

After increasing between 2015 and 2016, support for leaving the EU has subsequently fallen among Labour supporters. In contrast it has continued to rise among those who back the Conservative Party.

Support for leaving the EU by party identification



Overview

Differences in support for Brexit have widened

Britain is more divided in its attitudes towards leaving the EU than it was before the EU referendum.

- Among those aged 55 and over, support for leaving the EU is 21 points higher now than it was in 2015; among those aged under 35 there has only been a 7-point increase.
- Over the same period support for leaving the EU has risen by 18 points among those with a weak European identity, but by only 2 points among those with a strong European identity.

Many people feel more strongly about Brexit than they feel about any political party

Far more people identify strongly as a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver' nowadays than do so as a strong supporter of a political party.

- Only 8% say that they are a 'very strong' supporter of a political party.
- As many as 40% say that they are either a 'very strong Remainer' or a 'very strong Leaver'.

Strong Brexit identifiers have very different expectations of post-Brexit Britain

Strong Remainers and strong Leavers have diametrically opposed views about the consequences of leaving the EU.

- 85% of 'very strong Remainers' think that Britain's economy will be worse off as a result of Brexit. 71% of 'very strong Leavers' believe it will be better off.
- 74% of 'very strong Remainers' reckon that Britain will have less influence in the world as a result of leaving the EU. Only 6% of 'very strong Leavers' agree with them.

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Introduction

It has now become a common observation that attitudes towards Brexit have become 'polarised'. But what is meant by that term is less commonly specified. Perhaps the most obvious meaning is that the public is sharply divided between those who think that leaving the EU will be beneficial and those who think it will be damaging, leaving relatively few who think that it will not make much difference either way. However, what could also be meant is not that the distribution of attitudes has polarised but that different sections of society have come to have diametrically opposed views about the merits of leaving the EU, leading the country to look fragmented and divided. But if there is a sharp social division about Brexit, then we might reckon that it is likely to be underpinned by attitudinal differences too. We might anticipate that people's differences of opinion about Brexit reflect differences of outlook not only about what they think the consequences of Brexit might be, but also, given the prominence of debates about the implications of EU membership for immigration and sovereignty (Clarke et al., 2017), in terms of people's sense of identity and the values that they uphold. Indeed, the Brexit debate might have even come to reflect broader disagreements about what kind of country Britain is and should be, and what role it can and should seek to occupy in the world – a debate in which the participants reflect and articulate very different world views to which they feel strongly committed and attached.

In this chapter, we assess the extent to which Brexit has polarised Britain. In so doing, we bear in mind that holding a referendum about an issue can usually be expected to raise its salience in people's minds and, as they think through how they should vote, sharpen voters' understanding of the issues at stake (Curtice and Tipping, 2018). However, that should be no more than a temporary effect, whose ripples disappear as soon as the referendum has been held and the issue fallen away from the media headlines. Yet the Brexit referendum was not a one-off event. The majority decision to leave the EU instigated a round of talks with the European Union about the terms and conditions under which the UK would leave, and created a need to reach an agreement on what the UK's future relationship with the EU should be. That requirement has ensured that, in practice, far from disappearing from the headlines, Brexit has been the subject of continuing discussion and debate, with many of the issues that were first raised during the referendum being regularly revisited. As a result, rather than diminishing, the divisions that emerged among voters during the referendum might have been maintained and reinforced – and perhaps even exacerbated. This chapter is particularly concerned with what might have happened after the referendum, focusing on the period of the first phase of the negotiations that were undertaken with a view to securing the UK's exit from the EU at the end of March 2019.

We begin by looking at how the overall distribution of attitudes towards EU membership and the perceived consequences of leaving has evolved before and since the EU referendum. We then look at the extent to which those in different demographic groups differ in their level of support for Brexit. Thereafter we examine the extent to which supporters and opponents of Britain's departure from the EU differ not only in their views about the anticipated consequences of Brexit, but also more broadly in their sense of identity and values. Finally, we assess the strength of voters' commitment and attachment to the views that they hold.

Long-term trends in attitudes towards the EU

Since 1992, British Social Attitudes (BSA) has ascertained attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU on a regular basis by asking the following question:[1]

> ***Do you think Britain's long-term policy should be...***
> ***...to leave the European Union,***
> ***to stay in the EU and try to reduce the EU's powers,***
> ***to leave things as they are,***
> ***to stay in the EU and try to increase the EU's powers,***
> ***or, to work for the formation of a single European government?***

1 From 2016 onwards, the introduction to the question has read: 'Leaving aside the result of the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, what do you think Britain's policy should be..'. The wording of the third answer option was also amended to 'stay in the EU and try to keep the EU's powers as they are'.

Table 1 Attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU, 1992-2018

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	10	11	11	14	19	17	14	13	17	14	15	15
Stay but reduce EU's powers	30	27	25	23	39	29	36	43	38	38	35	32
Leave things as are	16	22	20	20	19	18	23	20	19	21	23	27
Stay and increase EU's powers	28	22	28	28	8	16	9	11	10	10	12	11
Work for single European government	10	9	8	8	6	7	8	6	7	7	7	6
Unweighted base	*2855*	*1461*	*1165*	*1227*	*1180*	*1355*	*1035*	*1060*	*2293*	*1099*	*3435*	*2293*

	2004	2005	2006	2008	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Leave the EU	18	16	15	20	30	26	24	22	41	36	34
Stay but reduce EU's powers	38	36	36	35	37	39	38	43	35	33	33
Leave things as are	23	24	27	24	16	19	18	19	16	19	20
Stay and increase EU's powers	7	10	9	9	9	6	10	8	4	4	4
Work for single European government	5	4	4	3	2	3	4	3	2	3	3
Unweighted base	*3199*	*4268*	*1077*	*1128*	*1103*	*2147*	*971*	*1105*	*1965*	*2009*	*2926*

Until 2008, fewer than one in five indicated in response to this question that Britain should leave the EU (see Table 1). That said, from 1996 onwards the modal response was that Britain should attempt to remain in the EU but reduce the powers of the institution, an indication of a seemingly relatively sceptical mood about Britain's EU membership. However, by 2012 when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition was in office – and support for the United Kingdom Independence Party had increased – support for leaving the EU had risen to between a quarter and three in ten.

However, after the EU referendum had been held in 2016, support for leaving was much higher. Although at 41%, the proportion who backed leaving in response to this relatively nuanced question was lower than the 52% recorded when voters were faced with the binary choice that appeared on the EU referendum ballot paper, it was still much higher than had ever previously been recorded. And while the figure in the subsequent two years has been somewhat lower, it is evident that the EU referendum resulted in a much higher long-term level of support for leaving the EU than had previously been in evidence in our surveys. Britain has certainly emerged from the Brexit process much more doubtful about being part of the EU than it had been just 10 years previously.

Perceived consequences of leaving the EU

But is there any sign that the public have come to be more sharply divided about the implications of Brexit? Are they more likely either to say that leaving the EU will be good or bad for Britain? Of this there is some sign in expectations of the economic impact of Brexit (see the top half of Table 2). At 26%, the proportion who think that leaving the EU will not make much difference to the British economy is 6 percentage points lower now than it was in 2015. All of this fall occurred between 2015 and 2017 and has since simply been maintained. However, when voters are asked about the implications of leaving the EU for unemployment (see the bottom half of Table 2), by far the most common response (given by 44%) is that it will not make much difference, just as was the case in 2015.

At the same time, we might also note that despite the increase in support for leaving the EU we have seen occurred in the wake of the referendum, there is little sign that voters are more optimistic now about the economic consequences of Brexit than they were beforehand. Rather, what is striking in the case of perceptions of the impact of Brexit on unemployment is that there has been a 12-point increase between 2015 and 2018 in the proportion who think that unemployment will be higher as a result of leaving the EU. Conversely, there has been a 10-point fall in the proportion who think it will be lower. These trends were already in evidence between 2015 and 2017, but they have become stronger during the last 12 months.

Table 2 Perceptions of economic consequences of leaving the EU, 2015–2018

	2015	2017*	2018*	Change 2017–2018	Change 2015–2018
Impact of leaving EU on the economy	%	%	%		
Better off	24	26	25	0	+1
Won't make much difference	31	25	26	0	-6
Worse off	40	45	45	0	+5
Impact of leaving EU on unemployment	%	%	%		
Higher	25	32	37	+4	+12
Won't make much difference	46	44	44	0	-2
Lower	24	20	14	-6	-10
Unweighted base	*1105*	*1025*	*958*		

**The wording of the relevant questions, full details of which are given in the appendix to this chapter, was amended slightly in 2017*

Figures showing change between 2017 and 2018 and between 2015 and 2018 in this table are calculated from the unrounded data, rather than the data rounded to the nearest whole number that are reported in the table. As a result, they will sometimes vary from the difference between the rounded figures by +/-1 point

Meanwhile, as the top half of Table 3 reveals, there is some sign that the proportion who think that leaving the EU will not make much difference to the amount of influence that Britain has in the world is also somewhat lower now than it was before the referendum. Even so, this is still the view of nearly two in five. Meanwhile, at 37%, the proportion who think that leaving the EU will not make much difference to the level of immigration into Britain (see the bottom half of Table 3) is actually slightly higher than the 31% who expressed that view in 2015 – though in this instance, given that very few think that immigration is likely to be higher as a result of leaving the EU, such a view might not be thought necessarily to be a neutral response.

Table 3 Perceptions of consequences of leaving the EU for Britain's influence in the world and for the level of immigration, 2015–2018

	2015	2017*	2018*	Change 2017–2018	Change 2015–2018
Impact of leaving EU on influence in the world	%	%	%		
More influence in the world	17	26	22	-4	+5
Won't make much difference	44	38	39	+2	-5
Less influence in the world	36	35	36	+1	0
Impact of leaving EU on immigration	%	%	%		
Higher	9	5	8	+2	-1
Won't make much difference	31	39	37	-2	+5
Lower	57	54	54	0	-3
Unweighted base	*1105*	*1025*	*958*		

**The wording of the relevant questions, full details of which are given in the appendix to this chapter, was amended slightly in 2017*

See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

Here too we might also note that, despite the long-term increase in support for leaving the EU, there is only modest evidence that voters have become more optimistic about the consequences of leaving. True, as compared with 2015 the proportion who think that leaving the EU will leave Britain with more influence in the world is, at 22%, just 5 points higher than it was in 2015. Even here, however, it seems that this view is somewhat less common now than it was 12 months earlier, suggesting that the Brexit process has not necessarily helped sustain that expectation. But more broadly, perhaps, we should note that, with the exception of its impact on unemployment, the overall balance of opinion on the consequences of leaving the EU looks little different from how it appeared before the referendum. On the basis of this evidence, at least, it is difficult to sustain the view that Britain has become markedly more polarised about Brexit than it was before the EU referendum ever took place.

Social polarisation?

However, what picture emerges if we look at the demography of attitudes towards what Britain's relationship with the EU should be? Have the views of those in different social groups diverged in their attitudes towards EU membership? Previous research on voting behaviour in the EU referendum has demonstrated that the biggest demographic differences in how people voted were age and education (Curtice, 2017). Younger people and university graduates voted heavily for Remain while older people and those with few, if any, educational qualifications largely backed Leave. In Table 4 we use the question on attitudes towards the EU that we introduced at Table 1 to track how the level of support for leaving the EU has evolved since 2015 within each age group and educational category.

Even before the referendum, support for leaving was already higher in 2015 among those aged 55 or over than it was among younger people. Yet since then support for that view has grown much more among this group than it has among younger voters. Moreover, far from diminishing once the referendum was over, the difference between younger and older voters has, if anything, grown since the referendum. In the last 12 months alone, support for leaving the EU has, at 49%, held steady among those aged 55 and over, while it has dropped slightly, to 19% and 31% respectively, among those aged 18-34 and 35-54.

Table 4 Support for leaving the EU, by age group and highest educational qualification, 2015–2018

% favouring leaving the EU	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change 2017–2018	Change 2015–2018
Age group						
18-34	11	33	23	19	-4	+7
35-54	24	34	34	31	-4	+7
55+	28	53	49	49	0	+21
Highest educational qualification						
Degree	13	20	19	18	-1	+5
Higher education below degree/ A-level	19	38	33	38	+6	+19
CSE/O-level	27	54	50	41	-9	+14
None	29	57	54	43	-11	+14

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

University graduates have always been least likely to support leaving the EU, while those with few, if any qualifications are most likely to be in favour. Nevertheless, the gap between these two groups is wider now than it was before the referendum. As many as 43% of those without any qualifications now support leaving the EU, whereas only 18% of graduates do so, a difference of 25 points. In contrast, in 2015 the equivalent gap was just 16 points. That said, after widening by the time of the referendum to as much as 37 points, and despite remaining almost as high (35 points) in 2017, the gap has now narrowed somewhat (to 25 points). So, although the degree of polarisation by age is as strong as it ever has been, there is some evidence that the division by educational background may have diminished somewhat during the course of the Brexit negotiations.

Different expectations?

But have these somewhat strengthened demographic differences in attitudes towards the EU been accompanied by a sharpening of the relationship between people's views of the consequences of leaving the EU and their support for leaving or staying? Are those who think that Brexit will result in beneficial outcomes now more clearly committed, relatively speaking, to leaving the EU than was the case before the referendum? As a first step in addressing this issue in Table 5 we show how the relationship between people's attitudes towards the economic consequences of leaving the EU and support for leaving the EU has developed since 2015.

Table 5 Support for leaving the EU, by perceptions of the economic consequences of leaving the EU, 2015–2018

% favouring leaving the EU	2015	2017	2018	Change 2017–2018	Change 2015–2018
Impact of leaving EU on Britain's economy					
Better off	59	77	71	-6	+13
Won't make much difference	20	42	35	-8	+15
Worse off	3	9	10	+1	+8
Impact of leaving EU on unemployment					
Higher	11	23	13	-10	+2
Won't make much difference	23	44	45	+1	+22
Lower	34	41	47	+6	+12

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter
See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

Those who think that Britain's economy would be better off as a result of leaving the EU were already much more likely in 2015 to support leaving the EU (59%) than were those who thought that the economy would be worse off (3%). Even so by 2017 the gap had become even bigger; as many as 77% of those who thought the economy would be better off now said that they favoured leaving the EU, compared with just 9% of those who thought we would be worse off. However, some of that increased divergence has not been sustained in the last 12 months, during which period support for leaving has fallen somewhat among those who think leaving the EU will be economically beneficial, while holding steady among those who believe it will bring adverse consequences. Overall, it would seem safest to conclude that even before the referendum support for leaving the EU was already quite heavily polarised on the basis of what people reckoned the economic consequences of Brexit would be, and that this still remains the case even though more than two years have passed since the referendum was held.

However, in the case of the anticipated consequences of leaving the EU for unemployment, the link with people's attitudes towards EU membership does seem to have strengthened somewhat. Support for leaving the EU among those who think that unemployment will be higher as a result of leaving is now little different from what it was in 2015. In contrast, support for leaving among those who think that unemployment will be lower has grown by as much as 12 points since then. Moreover, around half of that increase has occurred in the last 12 months. That said, the largest increase in support for leaving the EU (a rise of 22 points) has occurred among those who think that leaving the EU will not make much difference to unemployment. Thus, in effect the divergence on this subject has come to be one simply between those who think that unemployment will go up and those who do not. Meanwhile, we should also bear in mind that the relationship between support for leaving and expectations of the implications of leaving for unemployment was weaker before the referendum than the equivalent relationship with the perceived consequences for the economy generally, and thus there was perhaps more scope in the first place for attitudes to diverge further during the course of the Brexit process.

Table 6 Support for leaving the EU, by perceptions of the consequences of leaving the EU for Britain's influence in the world and for the level of immigration, 2015-2018

% favouring leaving the EU	2015	2017	2018	Change 2017-2018	Change 2015-2018
Impact of leaving EU on Britain's influence in the world					
More	54	68	68	0	+14
Won't make much difference	24	40	35	-5	+10
Less	5	7	10	+3	+5
Impact of leaving EU on immigration					
Higher/won't make much difference	13	31	27	-4	+14
Lower	29	40	39	-2	+10

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

Support for leaving the EU was already quite strongly related to perceptions of the consequences of leaving the EU for Britain's influence in the world in 2015, albeit not to the same extent as expectations of the impact on the economy in general (see the top half of Table 6). Thus, given what we have seen so far, it is perhaps not surprising to discover that in this case attitudes may have subsequently diverged somewhat, but not to any great degree. Support for leaving the EU is now 14 points higher among those who think that Britain will have more influence in the world as a result of leaving, compared with 5 points higher among those who think the country's influence will be diminished. However, in so far as attitudes may have polarised, it also looks as though any such pattern has been reversed somewhat during the last 12 months.

Even though in 2015 support for leaving the EU varied relatively little according to people's expectations of what leaving would mean for immigration, there is no sign that this relationship has subsequently strengthened (see the bottom half of Table 6). Support for leaving the EU has increased more or less regardless of where people stand on immigration. But here the debate is not so much about whether or not immigration will fall if Britain leaves the EU but rather about whether such a development is desirable or not. That this is indeed the case is evident in Table 7. In this table, we divide voters into three groups according to the answer they gave when they were asked to use a zero to ten scale to indicate whether they thought migrants who come to Britain from other countries (a) "undermine or enrich Britain's cultural life", and (b) are "good or bad for Britain's economy".

Even in 2015, those who thought that migration undermined Britain's cultural life were already markedly more likely to back leaving the EU (see the top half of Table 7). As many as 37% of this group were in favour of leaving the EU, compared with just 9% of those who reckoned the country's cultural life has been enriched by migration. Yet, even though support for leaving is now 10 points higher among the latter set of voters, the gap between the two groups is now sharper, thanks to the fact that the equivalent increase among those who think that Britain's cultural life is undermined has been as much as 29 points. In the case of the economic consequences of migration, however, the evidence of divergence is less strong, though, at 15 points, the increase in support for leaving since 2015 has been rather greater among those who think that migration has been bad for the economy than it has been among those who think it has been good (6 points). In both cases, however, the strengthening of the link between people's views about migration and their attitude towards leaving the EU occurred wholly in the period between 2015 and 2017. In the last 12 months, the heightened level of polarisation has simply been maintained.

Table 7 Support for leaving the EU, by attitudes towards the cultural and economic consequences of immigration, 2015-2018

% favouring leaving the EU	2015	2017	2018	Change 2017-2018	Change 2015-2018
Perceived impact of migrants on Britain's cultural life					
Undermined (0-3)	37	62	66	0	+29
Neither (4-6)	19	40	34	-2	+15
Enriched (7-10)	9	18	19	-3	+10
Perceived impact of migrants on Britain's economy					
Bad (0-3)	43	57	57	+4	+15
Neither (4-6)	17	46	44	-6	+26
Good (7-10)	10	20	17	+1	+6

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

A difference of national identity?

But perhaps in order to identify and understand the polarisation that may have resulted from Brexit we need to extend our focus beyond what might or might not be thought to be the immediate consequences of leaving the EU. In so far as the debate about Britain's membership of the EU is a debate about whether the UK should to some extent at least share its sovereignty with the rest of the EU, it might be expected to reflect people's sense of European identity. Those who feel a strong sense of European identity (that perhaps they perceived in common with those of a similar outlook living in the rest of the EU) might be expected to be more likely to be opposed to Britain leaving the EU than are those who do not feel strongly European. Moreover, we might well anticipate that this link has been strengthened in voters' minds as a result of the Brexit process.

Table 8 Support for leaving the EU, by strength of European identity, 2015-2018

% favouring leaving the EU	2015	2017	2018	Change 2017-2018	Change 2015-2018
Strength of European identity					
1-3 (weak)	30	51	48	-3	+18
4	14	30	31	+1	+18
5-7 (strong)	9	14	12	-2	+2

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

In Table 8 the strength of people's European identity is measured by asking people to use a scale of 1 to 7 to indicate how strongly "European" they feel. For our purposes here, we have divided respondents into those who give themselves a score of between 1 and 3, suggesting a weak identity; those who pick the mid-point of 4, and those who opt for a score of 5 to 7, indicating a strong identity. The table reveals that support for leaving the EU increased by no less than 21 points between 2015 and 2017 among those with a weak European identity, whereas among those with a strong identity the increase was just 5 points (see also Curtice and Tipping, 2018). That divergence has largely been maintained, though it has not increased further in the last 12 months. There seems little doubt that Brexit has indeed engendered a degree of polarisation of outlook based on how European people feel.

This is not the only evidence that feelings of and about identity have come to divide voters more than they did before the referendum. A further indication is obtained if we look at people's perceptions of the extent to which membership of the EU is thought to represent a 'threat' to the sense of British identity that might be thought to define and distinguish those who live here from those living in the rest of the EU. Those who think that membership of the EU "undermines Britain's distinct identity" might be expected to be more likely to favour leaving the EU.

Even in 2015, this was already a subject on which voters were inclined to take one view or the other. On the one hand, 47% agreed that "being a member of the European Union undermines Britain's distinctive identity" but on the other hand 30% disagreed, leaving just one in five (20%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing. The proportion who agree with the proposition has now fallen to 35%, while as many as 41% now disagree. However, the proportion who neither agree nor disagree has, at 21%, not changed significantly.

What, however, has altered is the relationship between people's answers to this question and their views on EU membership. As Table 9 reveals, support for leaving the EU was already much higher in 2015 among those who felt that being a member of the EU undermined Britain's distinctive identity. As many as 41% of this group backed leaving the EU at this time, whereas support among other voters was in single figures. Nevertheless, support for leaving has increased much more – by 25 points – among those who are concerned about the impact of membership on Britain's identity, than it has among those who are relatively unconcerned, where the increase has been just 6 points. This divergence was already fully in evidence in 2017; the last 12 months have simply seen the more polarised position maintained.

Table 9 Support for leaving the EU, by perceived impact of EU membership upon British identity, 2015-2018

% favouring leaving the EU	2015	2017	2018	Change 2017-2018	Change 2015-2018
EU undermines Britain's distinctive identity					
Agree	41	64	66	+2	+25
Neither	7	28	27	-1	+20
Disagree	3	10	9	-1	+6

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

Yet further evidence of the polarisation of attitudes by identity is to be found by comparing the views of those living in England who have a strong sense of English identity with the outlook of those for whom their British identity is more important. It has long been apparent that those with a strong English identity are less likely to embrace the greater social diversity that may be occasioned by immigration, a product perhaps of the fact that in England at least, the idea of creating a 'multicultural' society has been associated with Britishness rather than Englishness (Curtice and Seyd, 2001; Jeffery et al., 2014.). Certainly, it has repeatedly been shown that those with a strong English identity were more likely to vote to Leave the EU than were those with a strong British identity (Curtice, 2017).

Table 10 Support for leaving the EU, by Moreno National Identity, 2015–2018

% favouring leaving the EU	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change 2017–2018	Change 2015–2018
National identity						
English, not British	36	69	62	54	-8	+18
More English than British	23	47	45	53	+8	+30
Equally English and British	19	42	36	35	-1	+16
More British than English	21	38	34	33	-1	+12
British, not English	22	33	27	24	-3	+2

Note: Table based on respondents living in England only. Those who said 'Other' are not shown but are included in the denominator on which these percentages are based

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

The evolution since 2015 of the relationship in England between whether people regard themselves as primarily English or primarily British, as measured by the Moreno scale (Moreno, 2006), and support for leaving the EU is shown in Table 10[2]. Support for leaving has increased most among those who regard themselves are either "English, not British" (by 18 points) or "More English than British" (by 30 points), whereas it has hardly grown at all among those who regard themselves are "British, not English". As a result, what in 2015 was still a relatively weak relationship is now much stronger. Over half of those who feel primarily English support leaving the EU, whereas among those who say they are "British, not English", only around a quarter (24%) do so. Here too, however, it appears that the polarisation of views occurred between 2015 and 2017 and since then has simply been maintained at its heightened level.

A different set of values?

Earlier we showed that support for leaving the EU has become more closely linked to people's attitudes towards the economic and cultural consequences of immigration. Immigration is an issue where people's views do not reflect so much whether they are 'left-wing' or 'right-wing', but rather, whether they are, on the one hand, 'libertarian' or 'socially liberal' in outlook, or, on the other hand, 'authoritarian' or 'socially conservative'. Libertarians are comfortable with the prospect of a diverse society in which people may follow a variety of moral or religious codes, engage in different cultural practices, and feel attached to different symbols. Authoritarians, in contrast, value a greater measure of social homogeneity on the grounds that it promotes social cohesion. Unsurprisingly, libertarians tend to be more supportive of immigration, and thus we would expect them to be more likely to oppose leaving the EU (Curtice, 2017; Curtice and Tipping, 2018).

Table 11 Support for leaving the EU, by placement on libertarian-authoritarian scale, 2015-2018

% favouring leaving the EU	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change 2017-2018	Change 2015-2018
Placement on libertarian-authoritarian scale						
Libertarian	12	21	17	19	+2	+7
Neither	18	45	35	37	+1	+18
Authoritarian	36	63	55	52	-3	+17

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

2 Note that in 2015 the cell size for both 'More English than British' and 'More British than English' is less than 100 and thus should be treated with caution.

Each year, BSA asks its respondents a series of six questions designed to assess where they stand on the 'libertarian'/'authoritarian' dimension (see Appendix for more details). In Table 11 we divide respondents into the third most 'liberal' on the resulting scale, the third most 'authoritarian', and the third who sit in the middle. We can see that, even in 2015, support for leaving the EU was, at 36%, markedly higher among 'authoritarians' than it was among 'libertarians' (12%). However, by 2017 the gap had widened somewhat. So, once again, there is evidence of a degree of polarisation, albeit one that has simply been maintained rather than increased further during the last year.

A more polarised Britain?

We have, then, uncovered considerable evidence that the Brexit process has served to polarise attitudes towards the EU. The link between social background and attitudes towards membership of the EU is stronger than it was before the referendum. Attitudes towards immigration and some of the consequences of leaving the EU now identify more accurately who is more likely to support leaving than was previously the case – and where that has not been the case then sometimes (for example, perceptions of the economic consequences of leaving) there was already a strong relationship in place. Meanwhile, there are strengthened relationships too between support for leaving the EU and both people's sense of identity and their broader libertarian or authoritarian values. True, for the most part, there is little evidence that this polarisation has increased further during the last 12 months as the Brexit negotiations have continued, but equally, there is little sign either that it has eased. If the referendum served initially to polarise attitudes towards the EU, the subsequent Brexit process has served to ensure that the legacy of the referendum is still in evidence even though polling day has long since come and gone.

The consequences of polarisation: a new sense of Brexit identity?

We have, then, uncovered a picture whereby people from different social backgrounds, and people with different attitudes, values and identities now disagree more sharply with each other about whether or not Britain should leave the EU. Yet we have also found that this does not necessarily mean that the overall balance of expectations of the consequences of leaving the EU has changed markedly. This picture of sharp division but apparent relative stability of attitudes is very different from the portrayal of the British electorate that has become commonplace in recent years. Ever since the 1970s, academic research into voting behaviour in Britain has identified three key developments. First, the traditional link between someone's social class and the way that they vote has weakened (Evans and Tilley, 2017). Being middle class or working class has become less likely to mean that someone votes Conservative or Labour respectively. Second, voters appear to have become more volatile in their views – they are less likely to vote the same way from one election to the next (Fieldhouse et al., forthcoming), not least perhaps because they think there is not necessarily a great deal of difference between the parties (Curtice and Simpson, 2018) and, consequently, elections have simply come to be about choosing which party can best manage the country (Clarke et al., 2009). Third, in tandem with the above developments fewer and fewer voters seem to feel strongly committed to any one political party, and thus identify themselves as being a 'Conservative' or a 'Labour supporter' (Sanders, 2017). In short, the electorate is portrayed as not being sharply divided, not being strongly committed to any one party, and thus as potentially volatile in the choices they make at the ballot box.

The prevalence and strength of partisan identity (often known as 'party identification') has been tracked continuously by BSA since 1987. In order to ascertain whether someone does or does not identify with a political party, the survey asks first:

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

If someone does not say 'Yes' in response to this question, they are then also asked:

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

If someone says 'Yes' in response to either of these two questions they are asked to state with which party they identify – and then with reference to the party that they name:

> *Would you call yourself very strong (party), fairly strong, or not very strong?*

Table 12 shows the pattern of response to the last of these questions for selected years (mostly election years) since 1987, together with the proportion who in each year did not respond positively to either of our initial two questions. Even 30 years ago, only around one in ten regarded themselves as a very strong identifier with a political party, while just one in three considered themselves to be a fairly strong identifier – a combined tally of 44%. Nevertheless, by 2001 that total had fallen to just 33%, and has not shown any consistent sign of increasing since. Meanwhile, whereas in 1987 only around a quarter (26%) indicated that they neither supported nor were closer to any political party, by 2010 this figure had reached 41%, and it still stands as high as 39% in our most recent survey. In short, very strong identifiers have long been a relative rarity, yet the prevalence and strength of party identification have fallen yet further during the course of the last 30 years.

Table 12 Prevalence and strength of party identification, 1987-2018

	1987	1991	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018
Strength of party identification	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very strong	11	8	10	7	7	7	9	8	10	8
Fairly strong	33	33	26	26	26	26	28	27	29	27
Not very strong	29	32	32	34	31	41	26	28	25	26
None	26	26	32	31	37	41	37	37	36	39
Unweighted base	*2847*	*2918*	*1355*	*3287*	*4268*	*3297*	*4328*	*2942*	*3988*	*3879*

But what might we expect to happen if we pose a similar set of questions about whether someone is a ‘Remainer’ or a ‘Leaver’? On the one hand, there seems very little reason to anticipate that many voters should think of themselves in that way. Neither label existed before the EU referendum, and, unlike party identity, neither refers to a permanent political organisation whose activities and utterances can help sustain someone’s sense of identity. On the other hand, if the low level of party identification to be found nowadays in the British electorate has been occasioned by the absence of sharp ideological and demographic differences between the parties, then the fact that the electorate do appear to have been polarised by the Brexit referendum – and remain so some two years after the original ballot – might have created the conditions for people to form a bond and identify with one side or the other in the continuing Brexit debate.

In order to ascertain which expectation is closer to the truth, in our most recent survey we asked a series of questions that mimic as closely as possible the questions asked on BSA about party identity. We ask first:

> ***Thinking about Britain’s relationship with the European Union, do you think of yourself as a ‘Remainer’, a ‘Leaver’, or do you not think of yourself in that way?***

If someone says they do not think of themselves in that way we then ask:

> ***Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one side or the other?***

After which, if someone declares themselves to be a 'Remainer' or a 'Leaver', we ask:

> ***Would you call yourself a very strong (Remainer/Leaver), fairly strong or not very strong?***

In fact, we first asked this sequence of questions in the summer of 2018 on a different survey, NatCen's mixed mode random probability panel, which is conducted among those who have participated in a previous BSA survey and have indicated a willingness to respond either over the internet or by phone to further follow-up surveys (Curtice, 2018; Jessop, 2018). As the first column in Table 13 shows, the results of this exercise suggest a remarkably high proportion of voters – 44% – either say that they are a very strong Remainer or else a very strong Leaver, while only just over one in ten indicate that they do not regard themselves as either a Remainer or a Leaver at all. From this evidence, it appears that there is a level of commitment among voters to one or either side in the Brexit debate that has long been absent so far as party politics is concerned.

Table 13 Two measures of the prevalence and strength of Brexit identity, 2018

	NatCen Panel	BSA
Strength of Brexit identity	%	%
Very strong	44	40
Fairly strong	33	34
Not very strong	12	14
None	11	12
Unweighted base	*2090*	*3879*

Source: Panel: NatCen Mixed Mode Random Probability Panel, June/July 2018

However, although NatCen's mixed mode random probability panel is designed to be as representative of the population as possible, it might still be thought that those who are willing to respond to a survey on a regular basis are more likely to have firmly held political views and loyalties than are voters in general – and that perhaps these results exaggerate the extent to which people identify as a Remainer or a Leaver. Nevertheless, as Table 13 also shows, in practice the pattern of answers on our latest BSA survey, for which we interviewed a new sample of respondents for the first time, is much the same. No less than two in five (40%) say that they are a very strong Remainer or a very strong Leaver, only slightly below the 44% who gave such a response on the panel. It now seems that there is little doubt that the Brexit process has elicited a strength of commitment and identity that has hitherto long been absent among the British electorate so far as party politics is concerned. Indeed, according to the British Election Study, which has tracked the prevalence and strength of party identification over an even longer period than BSA, the proportion of voters who say they identify very strongly with one or other of the political parties has not been as high as 40% since the 1960s (Sanders, 2017).

This sense of Brexit identity is in evidence on both sides of the debate about the UK's membership of the EU, though it is somewhat stronger among those who identify as a Remainer than it is among those who claim to be a Leaver (see also Curtice, 2018; Evans and Schaffner, 2019). As many as half (50%) of all those who say they are a Remainer say that their attachment to that side of the argument is 'very strong'. Among Leavers the equivalent figure is only just over two in five (41%). Conversely, nearly one in five Leavers (19%) say their identity is not a very strong one, compared with around one in eight (13%) Remainers. The somewhat greater strength of identity among Remainers may reflect a sense of loss that some voters feel at the prospect of leaving the EU (Evans and Schaffner, 2019).

But if this sense of Brexit identity is indeed analogous to the identity that some express in respect of a political party, it should, perhaps, exhibit a similar demographic pattern as party identity. It has repeatedly been found that older people are both more likely to have a party identity and to say that they identify strongly with a party. That pattern is indeed found in our latest survey (see the top half of Table 14). It seems that party identification begins to develop in late childhood or early adulthood and is then gradually reinforced as people progress through their twenties and thirties – although the pattern in our data will also reflect the fact that the decline in partisan identity has been particularly evident in younger generations.

But is this pattern also in evidence in the case of Brexit identity? After all, in contrast to party identity, Brexit identity has emerged suddenly in the wake of the EU referendum, rather than being the product of a long-running social and political process that mostly influences people when they are relatively young.

In practice, much the same pattern is in evidence (see the bottom half of Table 14). Whereas nearly half (47%) of those aged 65 and over say that they are a very strong Remainer or a very strong Leaver, only three in ten (30%) of those aged between 18 and 24 make the same claim. Conversely more than one in three (37%) of those aged 18-24 either do not identify with one side or the other in the Brexit debate or say that they only do so "not very strongly". This is true of only around one in five (21%) of those aged 65 and over.

Table 14 Prevalence and strength of party identification and Brexit identification by age, 2018

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Strength of party identification	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very strong	7	4	7	8	9	12
Fairly strong	28	26	26	24	26	31
Not very strong	18	19	21	26	31	33
None	47	51	45	41	33	22
Strength of Brexit identification	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very strong	30	37	39	39	44	47
Fairly strong	32	35	39	32	33	31
Not very strong	22	13	11	16	10	13
None	15	16	12	13	12	8
Unweighted base	*218*	*508*	*624*	*624*	*658*	*1203*

Indeed, a strong Brexit identity is more common among those who have a strong party identity. As Table 15 shows, two-thirds (67%) of those who identify very strongly with a political party also identify very strongly as a Remainer or a Leaver, whereas only just over a quarter (27%) of those who do not identify with a party claim a very strong Brexit identity. Strength of Brexit identity is also related to whether or not someone says that they are interested in politics (another phenomenon which is more common among older people). No less than 69% of those that say they have a "great deal" of interest in politics indicate that they are a very strong Remainer or Leaver, compared with just 14% of those who say they do not have any interest in politics at all.[3] Although the explanation may in part be that the debate about Brexit has fuelled the interest of some voters in politics, it is also likely that a strong sense of Brexit identity has been more likely to have taken hold among those who were already more likely to have a sense of political identity and commitment. To that extent at least the phenomenon rests in part on older foundations than just the EU referendum and its aftermath.

3 Further analysis also shows that those with a very strong Brexit identity are both more likely to read a newspaper and to follow the news online, though they are not more likely to follow the news via social media.

Table 15 Strength of Brexit identity, by strength of party identity, 2018

	Strength of party identity			
	Very strong	**Fairly strong**	**Not very strong**	**None**
Strength of Brexit identity	%	%	%	%
Very strong	67	50	42	27
Fairly strong	19	38	36	31
Not very strong	6	6	16	19
None	8	5	6	22
Unweighted base	*258*	*782*	*805*	*1046*

What divides Brexit identifiers?

But is the widespread sense of a strong Brexit identity that we have uncovered a reflection of the polarised nature of the Brexit debate? If it is, we should find that those who have a very strong Brexit identity have particularly distinct views. We should be able to show that very strong Remainers and very strong Leavers have very different views from each other both about the kind of Brexit they would prefer and about what they think the consequences of leaving the EU will be. Moreover, in so far as people's Brexit identity reflects their feelings about their sense of who they are and with whom they identify more generally, we might expect the division between the two groups to be particularly sharp when we look at aspects of the Brexit debate that touch upon people's social identities – such as (and above all) their sense of national identity. Much as it once was argued that it was those with the strongest sense of being either middle or working class who were most likely to say they identified strongly as either Conservative or Labour respectively (Butler and Stokes, 1974), so we might anticipate that now it is those with the strongest sense of European identity who are most likely to say that they are a very strong Remainer.

This does indeed prove to be the case. Over a half (52%) of those who claim to have a strong European identity also identify as a very strong Remainer, while another one in five (21%) say they are a fairly strong Remainer. Consequently, as Table 16 shows, those with a strong European identity account for more than three-fifths (63%) of all very strong Remainers. Meanwhile, fairly strong Remainers are evenly divided between those with a strong European identity and those with a weak one, whereas among those who are not very strong Remainers, those with a weak European identity are easily the more common (though it should be noted that the sample size of this group is less than 100 and so the figures should be treated with caution). In short, very strong Remainers are distinguishable from other Remainers, let alone those who identify as a Leaver, by their strong sense of European identity.

Table 16 Strength of European identity, by strength and direction of Brexit identity, 2018

		European identity		
		Strong	**Weak**	*Unweighted Base*
Remainers				
Very strong	%	63	23	*245*
Fairly strong	%	40	41	*170*
Not very strong	%	32	47	*59*
Leavers				
Very strong	%	10	78	*154*
Fairly strong	%	14	62	*142*
Not very strong	%	11	77	*76*
No Brexit identity	%	25	38	*111*

Not that the pattern is symmetrical. Not very strong Leavers are just as unlikely as very strong Leavers to have a strong European identity. A weak sense of European identity is commonplace among all those who identify as a Leaver. So too is a strong sense of British identity. While four in five (81%) of very strong Leavers say (on a 1 to 7 scale) that they are strongly British, so also do three-quarters (75%) of not very strong Leavers. (Indeed, even as many as 69% of very strong Remainers fall into this category too). However, very strong Leavers do emerge as distinctive when respondents are posed the question we introduced earlier about whether being a member of the EU undermines Britain's distinctive identity. As Table 17 shows, no less than 87% of very strong Leavers agree that it does, well above the equivalent figure of 57% among those who are not very strong Leavers – and almost diametrically opposite to the position among very strong Remainers, just 8% of whom agree. So, among Leavers, a very strong identity is not so much a reflection of a strong British or weak European identity as of a distinctive concern about whether being an EU member serves to undermine British identity.

Table 17 Perceived impact of EU membership on Britain's distinctive identity, by strength and direction of Brexit identity, 2018

% agree that 'being a member of the EU undermines Britain's sense of Britain's distinctive identity'	Remainers	Leavers
Strength of Brexit identity		
Very strong	8	87
Fairly strong	19	68
Not very strong	20	57

Note: Among those without any Brexit identity, 19% agreed with the proposition

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

Both very strong Remainers and very strong Leavers also emerge as having very different views when we look at another perceived consequence of EU membership, that is, the impact that it has on "Britain's right to be an independent country that makes its own laws". This perhaps is not surprising given what we have learnt so far; after all, attitudes to questions of sovereignty often reflect people's sense of national identity. In any event, as Table 18 shows, very strong Remainers are very distinctive in that nearly three-fifths of them (58%) disagree that EU membership undermines Britain's right to make its own laws. Among every other group, including even fairly strong Remainers, there is at least a degree of concern about what EU membership means for sovereignty.

Table 18 Perceived impact of EU membership on Britain's ability to make its own laws, by strength and direction of Brexit identity, 2018

'Being a member of the European Union undermines Britain's right to be an independent country that makes its own laws'		Agree	Disagree	*Unweighted Base*
Remainers				
Very strong	%	22	58	*245*
Fairly strong	%	39	34	*170*
Not very strong	%	59	14	*59*
Leavers				
Very strong	%	93	3	*154*
Fairly strong	%	90	3	*142*
Not very strong	%	73	7	*76*
No Brexit identity	%	35	21	*111*

If very strong Remainers and very strong Leavers have different views about the impact that EU membership currently has on the UK, they also have very distinct perspectives about the impact that leaving the EU will have on Britain's influence in the rest of the world (see Table 19). Nearly three-quarters (74%) of very strong Remainers think Britain will have less influence in the world as a result of leaving the EU, more than twice the proportion (31%) among not very strong Remainers. Meanwhile, very strong Leavers are the only group among whom more than a half (57%) believe that leaving will result in Britain having more influence – again more than twice the proportion among those who only identify weakly as a Leaver. It seems that nothing divides very strong Remainers and very strong Leavers more than the question of whether leaving the EU means that Britain will be able to 'stand tall' as a country, with its sovereignty intact at home and its influence enhanced abroad, or whether it will come to strike a diminished figure on the political stage.

Table 19 Perceived impact of leaving the EU on Britain's influence in the world, by strength and direction of Brexit identity, 2018

Impact of leaving the EU on Britain's influence in the world.		**More**	**Less**	*Unweighted Base*
Remainers				
Very strong	%	4	74	*245*
Fairly strong	%	15	45	*170*
Not very strong	%	11	31	*59*
Leavers				
Very strong	%	57	6	*154*
Fairly strong	%	42	13	*142*
Not very strong	%	27	13	*76*
No Brexit identity	%	11	14	*111*

However, very strong Remainers and very strong Leavers are not only very different in their attitudes towards symbolic issues such as identity and Britain's standing in the world. They also have very distinctive views about the economic consequences of Brexit, a subject which we saw earlier has long served to polarise voters (see Table 20). Most very strong Remainers (85%) believe that leaving the EU will make Britain's economy worse off, while among very strong Leavers (71%) the predominant view is that the economy will be better off. At the same time, very strong Leavers are around twice as likely as not very strong Leavers to believe that Britain's economy will be better off as a result of Brexit. Equally, the near consensus among very strong Remainers that leaving the EU will be economically damaging stands in marked contrast to the mood among not very strong Remainers, only slightly less than half of whom (48%) are of the same view. Their concern about the economic consequences of Brexit may also help explain why very strong Remainers are by far and away the group most likely to say that the UK should definitely allow EU citizens to come freely to the UK in return for UK firms being able to sell goods and services freely in the EU (61%). Conversely, very strong Leavers are the only group where a majority (56%) say that the UK either definitely or probably "should not allow EU citizens to come freely to the country".

Table 20 Perceived impact of leaving the EU on Britain's economy, by strength and direction of Brexit identity, 2018

As a result of leaving the EU Britain's economy will be…		**Better off**	**Worse off**	*Unweighted Base*
Remainers				
Very strong	%	4	85	*245*
Fairly strong	%	13	60	*170*
Not very strong	%	13	48	*59*
Leavers				
Very strong	%	71	7	*154*
Fairly strong	%	48	16	*142*
Not very strong	%	34	21	*76*
No Brexit identity	%	17	18	*111*

The consequences of polarisation: stability?

Voters with a strong sense of party identity are expected to be more stable in their preferences and attitudes. This is because they filter new information through a partisan lens that means that the information is interpreted in a way that is consistent with their prior beliefs (Hobolt and Tilley, 2019). We might wonder, therefore, whether the fact that many voters have come to identify strongly with Remain or Leave helps to explain the relative stability of public attitudes that we have also uncovered.

Given that our survey consists of a group of voters whom we had not interviewed before, we cannot address this question directly. We do not know which of our respondents has or has not changed their minds about whether, for example, leaving the EU will be good or bad for Britain's economy, or whether it would increase or diminish the country's influence in the world. However, as we discussed earlier, each of our respondents was asked not only how they would vote if another EU referendum were to be held now, but also how they had voted in the referendum in 2016 itself. If those with a strong sense of Brexit identity are more likely to be stable in their views about Brexit then we would anticipate that those who say they are a very strong Remainer or very strong Leaver are more likely than other voters to say that they would vote Remain or Leave again.

To examine whether this is the case, we confine our attention to those who participated in the 2016 referendum and whose current Brexit identity (that is, whether they are a Remainer or a Leaver) is consistent with how they voted in 2016. As Table 21 shows, almost everyone who says that they are a very strong Remainer or Leaver says that in another referendum they would vote the same way as they did in 2016. In contrast, among those who say that their Brexit identity is not very strong, only around three-quarters indicate that they would vote the same way. If in addition we look at the small group of voters who say they do not have a Brexit identity at all, only just over half (53%) say that they would vote the same way again.

Table 21 Reported willingness to vote same way as in 2016, by strength of Brexit identity, 2018

% would vote same way as in 2016	Brexit identity		
	Remainer	**Leaver**	**All**
Strength of Brexit identity			
Very strong	99	97	98
Fairly strong	95	86	90
Not very strong	80‡	70‡	74

Note: respondents whose current identity is different from how they voted in 2016 are excluded, as are those who did not vote in 2016

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

‡ The base size for this figure is <50 so these results need to be treated with some caution

This analysis is far from definitive. Some of those who have changed their minds since 2016 about how they would vote in a referendum may also have changed the side with which they identify and how strongly they do so. As a result, the figures in Table 21 will to some degree overstate the stability of voters' choices. However, the fact that, despite this limitation, those who currently evince a less strong sense of Brexit identity are somewhat less likely to say that they would vote the same way is certainly consistent with the argument that one of the reasons why attitudes towards Brexit have often appeared relatively stable during the Brexit process is that many voters have been viewing developments through a strong partisan lens.

The consequences of polarisation: party division?

If Britain is now more polarised in its views about leaving the EU, we might wonder whether this polarisation is also in evidence in the country's party system. True, during the referendum itself, the leaderships of all the major parties apart from UKIP were in favour of remaining in the UK. That might be felt to give little reason to anticipate that supporters of the two major parties should have diverged from each other in their level of support for leaving the EU. But since then, the vision for Britain's future relationship with the EU presented by the Conservative government has widely been characterised as 'harder' than that proposed by the Labour party, who have also not ruled out the possibility that the question of whether the UK leaves the EU should be revisited in a second referendum (Evans and Menon, 2017). This might mean that Labour has found it easier to attract the support of those who would prefer to remain in the EU, while the Conservatives have seemed the more attractive prospect to those who wish to leave – and especially so for those who feel most strongly about the merits of remaining or leaving. Such a development, for which there certainly seemed to be evidence in the pattern of voting in the 2017 election (Curtice and Simpson, 2018), would mean that the views of Conservative and Labour supporters have diverged too.

This is, indeed, what has happened. In Table 22 we use the measure of party identity that we introduced earlier to chart the level of support for leaving the EU among each party's identifiers between 2015 and 2018. In 2015, apart from UKIP identifiers, only a minority of each party's identifiers supported leaving the EU, albeit that support was higher among Conservative supporters (28%) than their Labour counterparts (15%). Although in the immediate wake of the referendum, support for leaving had increased among both sets of supporters, at 22 points the increase was a little greater among Conservatives than Labour identifiers (15 points). But attitudes diverged yet further in the wake of the 2017 election and have continued to do so more recently. As a result, support for leaving the EU is now nearly three times as high among those who identify as Conservative (59%) as it is among those who consider themselves to be Labour (20%). The polarisation of attitudes towards Brexit has also come to be reflected in the pattern of support for Britain's two largest parties.

Table 22 Support for leaving the EU, by party identification, 2015-2018

% favouring leaving the EU	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change 2017-2018	Change 2015-2018
Conservative	28	50	56	59	+3	+31
Labour	15	30	24	20	-4	+5
Liberal Democrat	8‡	23	12	16	+4	+9
UKIP	60‡	96	97‡	93‡	-4	+33

The sample sizes on which the figures in this table are based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

See also note to Table 2 regarding the calculation of change between years

‡ The base size for this figure is <50 so these results need to be treated with some caution

This is also apparent if we look at the party identity of very strong Remainers and very strong Leavers. Among the former, as many as 44% identify with the Labour party, while just 13% think of themselves as a Conservative. Meanwhile, no less than 47% of very strong Leavers think of themselves as a Conservative, while just 16% say that they are Labour. In contrast, identification with the two parties is relatively even among not very strong Remainers and Leavers. Those who feel most strongly about Brexit also have very different views about who they would like to run Britain.

Conclusions

People in Britain have long disagreed with each other about the merits of Britain's membership of the EU. However, the EU referendum and the subsequent Brexit negotiations have seen the country become more sharply divided in its attitudes. An individual's social background, their sense of national identity, and their broader social values now distinguish supporters and opponents of EU membership more sharply than they did before the EU referendum. Moreover, although the heightening of this division might originally have been occasioned by the referendum campaign, there is little sign so far of the development being reversed. Rather, it seems that the subsequent debate about the terms under which the UK should leave the EU has served to maintain and reinforce the divergence. As a result, it might be felt that those who back staying in the EU and those who wish to leave now represent two rather different segments of British society.

Indeed, many voters themselves appear implicitly to recognise this characterisation by their ready willingness to identify themselves as a 'Remainer' or as a 'Leaver'. As a result, these two perspectives on Britain's future now appear to motivate and engage voters much more than do the country's political parties, albeit that, gradually, the division between Remainers and Leavers has come increasingly to be reflected in the pattern of support for the parties. The debate about Brexit has come to represent much more than an argument about the practical consequences of leaving the EU; rather, it has created two camps with quite different perspectives on Britain and its place in the world. It may well prove not the easiest division to heal.

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Appendix

The full wording for the questions presented in Tables 2 and 3 is shown below.

2015 wording:

> ***If Britain were to leave the EU, do you think Britain's economy would be better off, worse off, or wouldn't it make much difference? (Please choose a phrase from the card.)***
>
> ***(A lot better off, A little better off, Wouldn't make much difference, A little worse off, A lot worse off)***

2017 and 2018 wording:

> ***From what you have seen and heard so far, do you think that as a result of leaving the EU Britain's economy will be better off, worse off, or won't it make much difference? (Please choose a phrase from the card.)***
>
> ***(A lot better off, A little better off, Won't make much difference, A little worse off, A lot worse off)***

2015 wording:

> ***And if Britain were to leave the EU, do you think unemployment in Britain would be higher, lower, or wouldn't it make much difference? (Please choose a phrase from the card.)***
>
> ***(A lot higher, A little higher, Wouldn't make much difference, A little lower, A lot lower)***

2017 and 2018 wording:

> ***And from what you have seen and heard so far, do you think that as a result of leaving the EU unemployment in Britain will be higher, lower, or won't it make much difference? (Please choose a phrase from the card.)***
>
> ***(A lot higher, A little higher, Won't make much difference, A little lower, A lot lower)***

2015 wording:

If Britain were to leave the EU, do you think Britain would have more influence in the world, less influence, or wouldn't it make much difference? Please choose a phrase from the card.

(A lot more influence, A little more influence, Wouldn't make much difference, A little less influence, A lot less influence)

2017 and 2018 wording:

From what you have seen and heard so far, do you think that as a result of leaving the EU Britain will have more influence in the world, less influence, or won't it make much difference? Please choose a phrase from the card.

(A lot more influence, A little more influence, Won't make much difference, A little less influence, A lot less influence)

2015 wording:

(If Britain were to leave the EU,) do you think immigration to Britain would be higher, lower, or wouldn't it make much difference? (Please choose a phrase from the card.)

(A lot higher, A little higher, Wouldn't make much difference, A little lower, A lot lower)

2017 and 2018 wording:

(From what you have seen and heard so far,) do you think that as a result of leaving the EU immigration to Britain will be higher, lower, or won't it make much difference? (Please choose a phrase from the card.)

(A lot higher, A little higher, Won't make much difference, A little lower, A lot lower)

Unweighted bases for Table 4 are shown below

Table A1 Support for leaving the EU, by age group and highest educational qualification, 2015-2018

Unweighted bases	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**
Age group				
18-34	*222*	*398*	*422*	*557*
35-54	*366*	*662*	*692*	*959*
55+	*515*	*899*	*893*	*1404*
Highest educational qualification				
Degree	*260*	*470*	*530*	*761*
Higher education below degree/A-level	*293*	*537*	*560*	*759*
CSE/O-level	*280*	*514*	*512*	*737*
None	*248*	*390*	*361*	*612*

Unweighted bases for Table 5 are shown below

Table A2 Support for leaving the EU, by perceptions of the economic consequences of leaving the EU, 2015-2018

Unweighted bases	**2015**	**2017**	**2018**
Impact of leaving EU on Britain's economy			
Better off	*271*	*280*	*259*
Won't make much difference	*355*	*261*	*240*
Worse off	*416*	*443*	*412*
Impact of leaving EU on unemployment			
Higher	*264*	*317*	*324*
Neither	*524*	*473*	*442*
Lower	*256*	*196*	*146*

Unweighted bases for Table 6 are shown below

Table A3 Support for leaving the EU, by perceptions of the consequences of leaving the EU for Britain's influence in the world and for the level of immigration, 2015-2018

Unweighted bases	**2015**	**2017**	**2018**
Impact of leaving EU on Britain's influence in the world			
More	*177*	*280*	*223*
Won't make much difference	*386*	*386*	*381*
Less	*382*	*342*	*321*
Impact of leaving EU on immigration			
Higher/Won't make much difference	*442*	*464*	*424*
Lower	*620*	*541*	*510*

Unweighted bases for Table 7 are shown below

Table A4 Support for leaving the EU, by attitudes towards the cultural and economic consequences of immigration, 2015-2018

Unweighted bases	**2015**	**2017**	**2018**
Perceived impact of migrants on Britain's cultural life			
Undermined (0-3)	*377*	*260*	*167*
Neither (4-6)	*389*	*347*	*366*
Enriched (7-10)	*323*	*411*	*415*
Perceived impact of migrants on Britain's economy			
Bad (0-3)	*313*	*187*	*190*
Neither (4-6)	*453*	*377*	*350*
Good (7-10)	*325*	*452*	*402*

Unweighted bases for Table 8 are shown below

Table A5 Strength of European identity, by support for leaving the EU, 2015-2018

Unweighted bases	**2015**	**2017**	**2018**
Strength of European identity			
1-3 (weak)	*636*	*545*	*469*
4	*200*	*161*	*166*
5-7 (strong)	*261*	*309*	*311*

Unweighted bases for Table 9 are shown below

Table A6 Support for leaving the EU, by perceived impact of EU membership upon British identity, 2015-2018

Unweighted bases	**2015**	**2017**	**2018**
Undermines Britain's distinctive identity			
Agree	*548*	*445*	*358*
Neither	*216*	*204*	*200*
Disagree	*307*	*360*	*374*

Unweighted bases for Table 10 are shown below

Table A7 Support for leaving the EU, by Moreno national identity, 2015-2018

Unweighted bases	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**
National identity				
English, not British	*183*	*261*	*258*	*381*
More English than British	*97*	*172*	*177*	*241*
Equally English and British	*399*	*723*	*725*	*1065*
More British than English	*85*	*139*	*165*	*242*
British, not English	*111*	*216*	*222*	*338*

Unweighted bases for Table 11 are shown below

Table A8 Support for leaving the EU, by placement on libertarian-authoritarian scale, 2015-2018

Unweighted base	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**
Placement on libertarian-authoritarian scale				
Libertarian	*330*	*483*	*530*	*796*
Neither	*307*	*581*	*596*	*672*
Authoritarian	*305*	*469*	*480*	*820*

Unweighted bases for Table 17 are shown below

Table A9 Perceived Impact of EU Membership on Britain's distinctive identity, by strength and direction of Brexit Identity, 2018

Unweighted bases	**Remainers**	**Leavers**
Strength of Brexit identity		
Very strong	*245*	*154*
Fairly strong	*170*	*142*
Not very strong	*59*	*76*

Unweighted bases for Table 21 are shown below

Table A10 Reported willingness to vote same way as in 2016, by strength of Brexit identity, 2018

Unweighted bases	Brexit identity		
	Remainer	**Leaver**	**All**
Strength of Brexit identity			
Very strong	*187*	*135*	*322*
Fairly strong	*117*	*119*	*136*
Not very strong	*27*	*48*	*75*

Unweighted bases for Table 22 are shown below

Table A11 Support for leaving the EU, by party identification, 2015-2018

Unweighted bases	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**
Conservative	*311*	*536*	*495*	*737*
Labour	*266*	*484*	*624*	*822*
Liberal Democrat	*36*	*87*	*94*	*142*
UKIP	*38*	*58*	*24*	*29*

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Emergency care

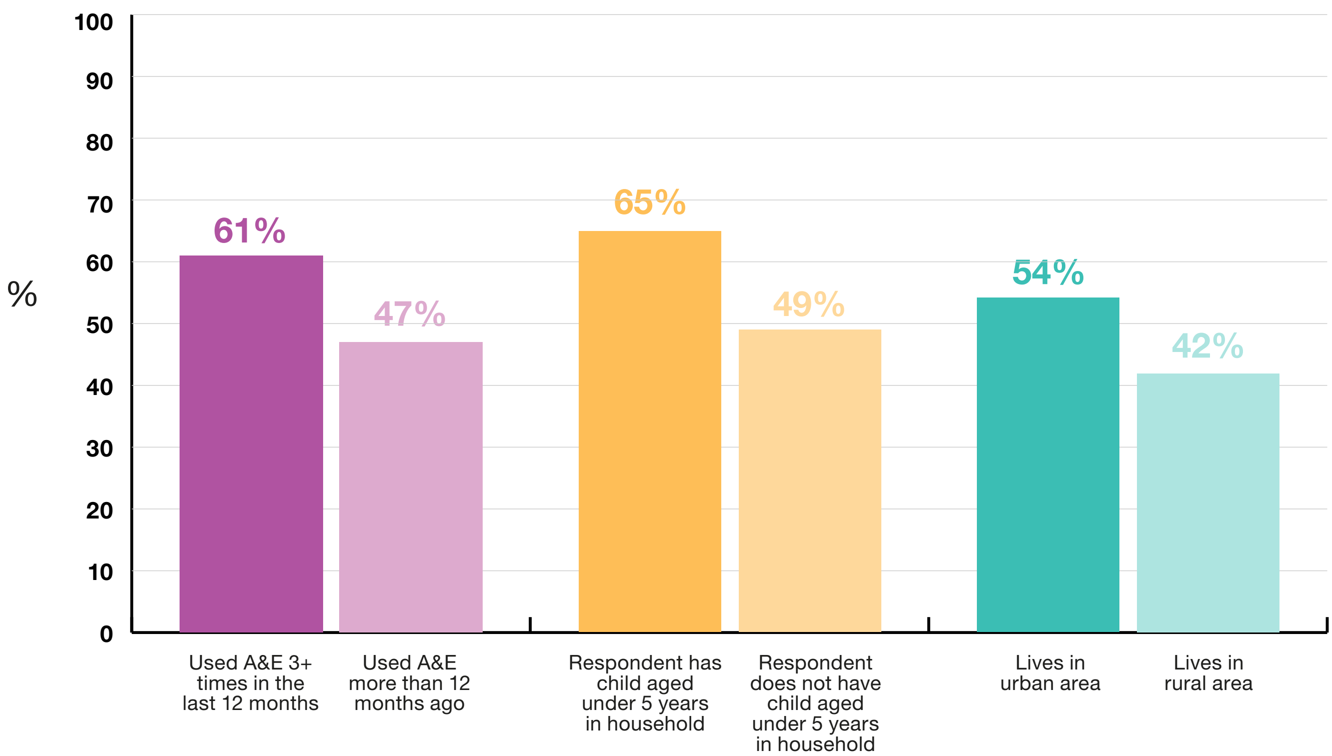
What do attitudes tell us about demand for services and how it might be reduced?

Rising demand for emergency health services in Britain is well documented and may be having an impact on the quality of service provision such as waiting times. This chapter explores attitudes towards calling 999 for an ambulance and going to A&E. It considers whether people share policy makers' concerns about over-use of these services and whether public attitudes and perceptions suggest strategies put forward to tackle this issue might be successful.

Spotlight

Half (51%) say they find it hard to get a GP appointment; the level of agreement varies for different groups in the population.

Those who agree "it is hard to get an appointment with a GP at my GP surgery"



Overview

Most think people over-use emergency care

Attitudes chime with policy makers' concerns about the over-use of A&E and 999 ambulances.

- Nearly everyone thinks that too many people use A&E and 999 ambulances when they are not needed: 86% say people use A&E unnecessarily and 86% say the same about 999 ambulances.

Views of NHS services may help explain A&E demand

Views about the advantages of A&E and negative perceptions of GP services may attract people to A&E services.

- 36% prefer NHS services where no appointment is needed; the proportion rises to 48% of those living in the most deprived areas and 48% of those with no educational qualifications.
- 51% find it hard to get a GP appointment, suggesting access is an issue for many. This is a view held by 65% of parents with a child under 5 in the household, and 61% of those who have visited A&E three or more times in the previous 12 months.

Strategies have potential to reduce high demand

There is considerable scope to increase public use of online tools to help tackle demand, while awareness of services could be improved in certain groups.

- 58% of those with internet access say they would look online to help understand a health problem, while 47% would use the internet to decide what to do about it.
- While most people are aware of the services available when they have an unexpected health problem and how to access them, those aged 18-24 have lower levels of awareness, particularly about how to access a GP out of hours (64% would know how to do this, compared with 81% overall). This group would benefit from better knowledge of the different options.

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Introduction

Policy makers and service providers are concerned about demand for emergency health services. Between 2009-10 and 2015-16, the number of ambulance calls increased from 8 million to 11 million in England (National Audit Office, 2017). The Care Quality Commission, a body monitoring quality of services in England, concluded that "Winter 2017/18 saw an unprecedented demand for health and care support services. Emergency departments bore the brunt of this demand" (Care Quality Commission, 2018). Emergency health services have struggled to meet demand due to workforce recruitment difficulties and not receiving increases in resources to match the increases in demand (National Audit Office, 2017). This is likely to have affected waiting times for patients. For example, in January 2019 it was reported that the proportion of patients spending more than four hours in A&E was at the highest level recorded since the data collection began (Nuffield Trust, 2019) while the 85% of patients seen within four hours in April this year was considerably below the current target of 95%, which hasn't been met since July 2015.[1]

Among those who call 999 for an emergency ambulance or attend A&E, a sizeable proportion ultimately do not require the emergency care these services are established to deliver. A recent study using routine data in England showed that 15% of A&E use was classified as 'non-urgent' – with the implication that these people could have been treated at an alternative service such as general practice (O'Keefe et al, 2018). A recent study of staff perceptions of reasons why people attend A&E identified concerns about demand from the 'worried well' (Mason et al, 2017).

A recent study using routine data in England showed that 15% of A&E use was classified as 'non-urgent'

The international research literature on demand for emergency health services identifies a number of reasons for increasing demand. These include: poor access to, and low confidence in, primary care; anxiety and the need to seek reassurance from emergency health services; being told to go by family, friends, or healthcare professionals; convenience in terms of location; not having to make appointments; opening hours; individual patient factors such as cost; and perceived need for ambulance or hospital care, treatment, or investigations (Coster et al, 2017). Lack of awareness of alternative services has also been identified as a factor affecting use of A&E services (Penson et al, 2012).

What is less clear is what the public thinks about these issues. Do people share policy makers' concerns about over-use of emergency health services? How prevalent are the attitudes or considerations identified in the literature which may explain higher demand for emergency healthcare? In addition to answering these questions, we examine whether these attitudes are held disproportionately by those

1 Data tables for A&E admissions can be found here: https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/ae-attendances-and-emergency-admissions-2019-20/

who have made greater use and, on account of their characteristics, are likely to make greater use of emergency care in the future.

NHS England, Scotland and Wales have policies and initiatives to manage demand for emergency health services and promote responsible use of these services. These include improving the use of digital tools, increasing self-care including use of pharmacies, and increasing the awareness of alternative services. All three of these strategies rely on changing people's behaviour or knowledge. Therefore, attitudes towards and practices in these areas are highly relevant in assessing whether such strategies are likely to be successful. In this chapter, we seek to establish what people already know, or do, in terms of using digital tools, self-care and awareness of alternative services. In doing so, we ask whether a better understanding of such knowledge, attitudes and behaviours would suggest any refinements to these strategies – albeit particular subgroups to be targeted, or certain policy responses where there is greater scope for expansion than others.

To set the scene, we begin by assessing what the literature and recent data tell us about which groups in the population use emergency health services most. Drawing on a new set of questions that explore attitudes to emergency care, we then turn to examine attitudes towards emergency care. This section has two main objectives. The first is to assess the extent to which the public is concerned about demand – and thus, whether its attitudes chime with those of policy makers. The second is to establish the prevalence and distribution of preferences for and attitudes about healthcare services to see whether the attitudes noted in the literature towards increasing demand are found in the general population as a whole, and in groups more likely to use emergency care. In the final section, we look at some of the policy responses suggested to tackle the problem, and for each, assess the extent to which attitudes, knowledge and practices suggest these might be successful strategies to pursue. Throughout the chapter, we look at how our findings vary both for those who have made recent use of emergency care and for some of the subgroups that are known to make higher use of it.

Who uses emergency health services?

Use of emergency health services varies over the life course

We already know that use of emergency health services varies over the life course. In Scotland in 2015/16, although representing about 5% of the Scottish population, children under five accounted for 10% of emergency contacts (National Records of Scotland, 2017; National Services Scotland, 2017[2]). Analysis of data collected in London has shown that a third of children attending A&E get reassurance only rather than investigations, and many could be managed without attending an A&E (Viner et al, 2017). As people move into young

2 Data tables for emergency health service usage can be found here: https://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Emergency-Care/Emergency-Department-Activity/Statistics/

adulthood, rates remain high; young people aged 18-29 are more likely than older working-age groups to use A&E and less likely to visit their GP (BBC, 2018), while other research has shown that those aged 16-44 are more likely to use A&E for non-urgent reasons (O'Keefe et al, 2018). Sex is also important in understanding use of emergency healthcare. Men are more likely to self-refer to A&E and, among the under 65s, less likely to visit a GP (National Services Scotland, 2017; BBC, 2018).

Social and economic circumstances also seem to play a role in choices to access emergency care. People living in deprived communities make higher use of emergency health services than would be expected. For example, twice as many contacts to emergency health services are made by individuals living in Scotland's most deprived areas, compared with the least deprived (National Services Scotland, 2017). Similarly, use of ambulance services for non-urgent conditions is higher in deprived areas (Booker et al, 2015). A review of international research found that people from deprived communities may prefer to access A&E over GPs (Coster et al, 2017) and health professionals have expressed concerns that these communities seem more likely to want immediate access to services, even after taking their higher levels of illness into account (O'Cathain et al, 2014). There are also potential differences across urban and rural populations shaped both by the availability of transport to an A&E and attitudes to using services, with health professionals believing that urban populations have higher expectations of instant access (O'Cathain, 2014).

To measure recent use of emergency health services, primarily to enable us to test our assumption that recent experiences of specific services are correlated with attitudes towards them (a relationship that has been found for NHS satisfaction previously (Appleby, Robertson and Taylor, 2015), we ask respondents when they last saw or spoke to someone at an A&E department, either for themselves or someone else, along with a comparable question about the 999 ambulance service[3]. For those who have used each of these services in the past 12 months, we ask how many times they have done this. The responses provided overall and for sub groups where significant variations in levels of use were identified are presented in the appendix to this chapter. Overall, one third of people (32%) report using A&E services for themselves or someone else in the previous 12 months and 6% have done so three or more times. Fewer people (13%) report using 999 ambulances in the previous 12 months, compared with A&E. Reflecting the literature, both services have been used more frequently by young adults, while A&E services have been used more frequently by parents with a child under five in the

One third of people (32%) report using A&E services for themselves or someone else in the previous 12 months

3 It should be noted that these questions were not designed to capture *over-use* of services: we do not have any data on why people attended, nor whether this was the 'correct' clinical course of action. They were also not designed to precisely measure prevalence of use overall or for specific sub groups. More precise data on levels of use of emergency services can be obtained from the Health Survey for England, which has a larger sample size than BSA, meaning its sub group analysis has greater statistical power.

household. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those reporting a long-term health condition are more likely to have used each of the services in the past 12 months; this is also the case for those living in urban areas, compared with those living in rural areas[4]. While use of ambulances is higher among those living in more deprived areas, in contrast to the literature and to other data sources this is not the case for use of A&E (please see note 1 on this in the appendix to this chapter). Unsurprisingly, the group most likely to report using 999 ambulance services at least once in the previous 12 months are those who rate their health as "poor".

The group most likely to report using 999 ambulance services are those who rate their health as "poor"

Throughout the remainder of the chapter, we consider how the recent use of emergency care might inform and be influenced by attitudes both to these services and the available alternatives. However, in doing so, we note that our analysis cannot be used to explain *over-use* of these services (i.e. which isn't medically needed or urgent), as our variable simply measures recent use.

Views about emergency health services

We next look at attitudes to emergency health services in a number of different ways. We start by examining overall views of services, looking at how levels of satisfaction with A&E have changed over time. We move on to examine current views about over-use of A&E and 999 ambulances, to see whether people are concerned about the issue of high demands on these services. Finally, we present a number of attitude statements about A&E and general practice, to assess whether there is any evidence that people's perceptions about the different services may suggest a preference for emergency provision.

Satisfaction with A&E

Since 1999, the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey has tracked satisfaction with A&E services. Given the rising demand for emergency health services in recent years, increases in average waiting times in A&E departments and decreases in meeting targets to deal with all patients within four hours[5], we can use this time series to see whether these trends may have led to rising concern about these services in recent years. We ask respondents:

> ***From your own experience, or from what you have heard, please say how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the way in which each of these parts of the National Health Service runs nowadays…***
>
> ***…accident and emergency departments?***

4 Our variable identifying urban/rural areas in Scotland is not directly comparable with the variable for England and Wales, and due to the small sample size in these subgroups in Scotland, the analysis in this chapter is restricted to England & Wales for this variable. The same applies to the variable for IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) in Wales and Scotland, and again, the analysis in this chapter is restricted to England for that variable.

5 For more details please see King's Fund analysis of A&E waiting times, available at https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/urgent-emergency-care/urgent-and-emergency-care-mythbusters

Satisfaction with A&E has remained fairly stable. Around half (53%) report that they are satisfied

As shown in Table 1, satisfaction with A&E has remained fairly stable[6]. Around half (53%) report that they are satisfied (either "very" or "quite" satisfied) with the service (this proportion has not changed significantly since 2015), while the proportion who are "very satisfied" has fluctuated somewhat, but has generally been higher in the last ten years than it was in the 2000s – the figure in our latest survey stands at 20%.

Table 1 Satisfaction with NHS A&E services, 1999-2018

	1999	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	**52**	**52**	**43**	**43**	**45**	**46**	**51**	**46**	**51**	**53**
Very satisfied	15	15	13	13	14	13	16	15	16	17
Quite satisfied	37	36	30	30	31	33	35	31	35	36
Neither	**17**	**15**	**18**	**17**	**17**	**17**	**20**	**22**	**21**	**19**
Dissatisfied	**24**	**29**	**32**	**32**	**31**	**31**	**22**	**24**	**21**	**21**
Unweighted base	*3143*	*3426*	*2188*	*2287*	*2293*	*3199*	*3193*	*2143*	*3078*	*3358*
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Satisfied	**59**	**61**	**54**	**59**	**53**	**58**	**53**	**54**	**52**	**53**
Very satisfied	20	19	18	18	16	17	21	20	19	20
Quite satisfied	39	42	36	41	37	41	32	34	34	32
Neither	**16**	**16**	**18**	**16**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**18**	**23**	**18**
Dissatisfied	**21**	**19**	**21**	**21**	**23**	**18**	**22**	**24**	**23**	**24**
Unweighted base	*3421*	*3297*	*1096*	*1103*	*1063*	*971*	*1062*	*974*	*1002*	*973*

6 For more details see King's Fund and Nuffield Trust analysis of the full set of BSA NHS satisfaction data, available at https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-03/Public_satisfaction_with_NHS_social_care_in_2018.pdf)

Are people concerned about over-use of services?

While the overall question about satisfaction shows little movement in recent years, it does not tell us what people think about the demands placed on emergency care. We addressed this gap by developing questions explicitly about over-use, asking respondents whether they agree or disagree that:

> *I think too many people use A&E when they do not need to*
>
> *I think too many people call 999 for an ambulance when they do not need to*

Eighty-six per cent think too many people use A&E when they do not need to

Overall, most people agree with these two statements. Eighty-six per cent think too many people use A&E when they do not need to, while an identical proportion think this in relation to calling 999 for an ambulance. Interestingly, there is little variation by whether the respondent has used these services in the last 12 months, suggesting that experience of the service is not influencing attitudes towards over-use, and that simply holding (or not holding) these views may not be affecting people's use of these services.

Unsurprisingly, we consequently find few substantial or consistent differences in the views of groups defined by the demographic and area-based characteristics known to be associated with greater use of emergency care. Overall, these data suggest that the public is in step with policy makers on this issue, in terms of there being widespread agreement that people use services when they do not need to.

Do perceptions of health services suggest a preference for emergency health services?

As discussed previously, a recent review of the international research literature on demand for emergency health services has identified the importance of the attraction of aspects of emergency care such as convenience in terms of location, not having to make appointments, and opening hours, as well as concerns about primary care such as poor access and low confidence (Coster et al, 2017). However, hitherto we have not known how prevalent these perceptions are among the public, nor how they vary for groups with different characteristics. To understand how preferences for aspects of A&E vary, we pose a range of statements to people about what type of service they prefer – asking them to agree or disagree with each one:

> *I prefer NHS services where I don't need to make an appointment*
>
> *I think doctors at A&E know more than GPs*
>
> *I prefer A&E to a GP because I can get tests done quickly e.g. blood tests, x-rays*

Over one third (36%) of people agree that they prefer NHS services where they do not need an appointment

The responses provided overall and for groups defined by demographic characteristics, for which significant differences were identified, are presented in Table 2. The most popular statement is the preference for not making appointments: over one third (36%) of people agree that they prefer NHS services where they do not need an appointment (30% disagree). Smaller proportions think that A&E doctors are more knowledgeable than GPs (19% agree, 36% disagree), or prefer A&E as they can get tests done quickly (17% agree, 48% disagree).

As shown in Table 2, levels of agreement with all three statements vary by subgroup: the key groups attracted to attributes of A&E departments are those considering themselves to be in poor health, people with no qualifications and those living in urban or deprived areas. Specifically, 43% of those who regard themselves as being in poor health, 48% of those living in the most deprived areas and 48% of those with no educational qualifications say they prefer NHS services when they do not need to make an appointment. The same set of characteristics are associated with the view that A&E doctors know more than GPs; most strikingly, this is held by 32% of those with no educational qualifications (compared with 14% of graduates). Frequent users – that is, those who have visited A&E three or more times in the past 12 months – are more likely than less frequent or non-users to agree with these perceived advantages of A&E, although differences are not statistically significant for the statement "I prefer NHS services where I do not have to make an appointment".

The view that A&E doctors know more than GPs is held by 32% of those with no educational qualifications (compared with 14% of graduates)

Overall, while the fact that only minorities agree with each of these statements might suggest that they are unlikely to be a key driver of high demand for A&E services, it is worth noting the far higher proportions of certain subgroups – who themselves are more likely to use A&E – who hold these attitudes.

Table 2 Perceived advantages of A&E services, by socio-demographic characteristics and use of A&E

	% agree "I prefer NHS services where I don't need to make an appointment"	% agree "A&E doctors know more than GPs"	% agree "I prefer A&E to a GP because I can get tests done quickly"	*Unweighted base*
All	36	19	17	*2309*
Self-rated health				
Excellent	31	18	17	*223*
Very good	33	16	13	*725*
Good	37	20	18	*799*
Fair	45	25	21	*360*
Poor	43	26	20	*163*
Highest educational qualification				
Degree	30	14	13	*640*
A-levels or equivalent	33	16	16	*616*
GCSEs or equivalent	38	19	16	*590*
No qualification	48	32	26	*427*
Urban or rural area (England & Wales)				
Urban	37	21	19	*1613*
Rural	30	15	8	*492*
Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile (England)				
1 - (20% most deprived areas)	48	28	29	*351*
2	37	21	20	*354*
3	31	19	13	*397*
4	30	16	11	*470*
5 - (20% least deprived areas)	27	15	11	*426*
Use of A&E services				
3 or more times in the past 12 months	40	29	27	*129*
1-2 times in the past 12 months	37	20	20	*584*
Last used more than 12 months ago	34	16	13	*1196*
Never used A&E	39	23	20	*390*

As many of these characteristics associated with attitudes towards A&E are themselves correlated, we undertook multivariate analysis, in the form of logistic regression, to examine whether personal or area-based characteristics or frequency of use are better predictors of having positive attitudes about A&E. The results of these analyses are presented in the appendix to this chapter (Tables A.3-A.5). After controlling for the other characteristics shown in Table 2, having no formal educational qualifications and living in a deprived area were both still associated with preferring NHS services where appointments are not needed, feeling that tests are done more quickly (and believing that A&E doctors know more) though for deprivation the association was weaker – just missing the cut-off for significance – for the latter statement). No other characteristic was consistently associated with all three statements. After controlling for the social and area-based characteristics shown in Table 2, frequency of use of A&E in itself is no longer significantly associated with any of the three statements.

Around half (51%) of people agree that it is hard to get an appointment with a GP

Although the numbers using 999 ambulances frequently are too smal to have sufficient statistical power, indications are that levels of use of 999 ambulances varied similarly according to attitudes to NHS services.

While perceived advantages may attract people to A&E, alternatively, people may choose emergency health services because they do not feel they will get the treatment that they need from general practice. To test this theory, we ask respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following two statements about their experience of GPs – one about access, and one about confidence in GP's knowledge – both factors identified in the literature as being related to rising demand for emergency care (Coster et al, 2017):

It is hard to get an appointment with a GP at my GP surgery

I do not have much confidence in GPs at my GP surgery

Overall, as shown in Table 3, around half (51%) of people agree that it is hard to get an appointment with a GP (33% disagree) and around one in ten (11%) do not have much confidence in GPs at their surgeries (while 65% disagree with this view). The proportions of different demographic groups agreeing with the two statements vary significantly. Negative views of general practice are most common among parents of a child aged under five in the household. Nearly two thirds of this group think it is hard to get an appointment with their GP, while 20% do not have much confidence in their GP. Those reporting poor health, with lower or no educational qualifications, or living in urban or more deprived areas, are also more likely to have negative views of GP services.

Negative views of general practice are most common among parents of a child aged under five in the household

We also find a strong relationship between frequent recent use of A&E and experiences of GPs, with those who have used A&E services most frequently being more likely to report negative attitudes. 57% of those who have visited A&E once in the previous 12 months and 61% of those who have been three or more times feel it is hard to get an appointment with their GP, compared with 47% of those who have last seen their GP more than 12 months ago. Similarly, 26% of those who have visited A&E three or more times in the past 12 months say they do not have much confidence in their GPs, compared with 9% of those who have not visited A&E within that timeframe. While it is not clear if recent experience of A&E influences attitudes about GPs, a review as part of this wider research project concluded that, conversely, negative experiences of GPs sent people to emergency care when they didn't clinically need to go (publication forthcoming). This is an area where further research would be helpful.

Table 3 Perceived disadvantages of GP services, by socio-demographic characteristics and use of A&E

	% agree "It is hard to get an appointment with my GP"	% agree "I do not have much confidence in GPs at my surgery"	*Unweighted base*
All	51	11	*2309*
Self-rated health			
Excellent	46	11	*223*
Very good	49	7	*725*
Good	53	11	*799*
Fair	52	16	*360*
Poor	61	19	*163*
Respondent has child aged under 5 years in household			
Yes	65	20	*223*
No	49	10	*2075*
Highest educational qualification			
Degree	45	8	*640*
A-levels or equivalent	54	12	*616*
GCSEs or equivalent	55	11	*590*
No qualification	52	16	*427*
Urban or rural area (England & Wales)			
Urban	54	12	*1613*
Rural	42	6	*492*
Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile (England)			
1 – (20% most deprived areas)	59	18	*351*
2	52	12	*354*
3	51	10	*397*
4	47	7	*470*
5 – (20% least deprived areas)	47	8	*426*
Use of A&E services			
3 or more times in the past 12 months	61	26	*129*
1-2 times in the past 12 months	57	13	*584*
Last used more than 12 months ago	47	9	*1196*
Never used A&E	51	10	*390*

Again we undertook multivariate analysis (in the form of logistic regressions) to examine whether demographic or area-based characteristics, or use of A&E are more closely associated with negative views of GP services The results are presented in the appendix to this chapter (Tables A.6 and A.7).

The regression analysis confirmed that after controlling for the other factors in Table 3, people with lower or no educational qualifications, parents of children under 5, and people living in urban areas were more likely to agree with both these statements. For the second statement – lacking confidence in the GPs at their local surgery – this was also the case for people who say their health is poor and those living in the most deprived areas. For both statements, being a frequent user of A&E (3+ times in the last 12 months) was still associated with these negative perceptions of GPs, even after controlling for the other characteristics shown in Table 3. For some, the perception or experience of their local GP surgery may be acting as a 'push factor' towards A&E over and above their personal or area-based circumstances. Our analysis cannot confirm the direction of this relationship, nor shed light on the way in which attitudes may influence decisions about which source of healthcare provision people choose. However, other related research as part of this wider research project is investigating these research questions[7].

At the overall level, the most striking finding is that as many as half the population perceive access to GP appointments to be difficult, suggesting that this issue is widespread.

Do attitudes and behaviours support policy responses to managing demand?

In this final section we consider policy responses to managing demand for emergency health services

In this final section we consider policy responses to managing demand for emergency health services. NHS England, Scotland and Wales have developed policies and initiatives to manage demand for emergency healthcare and to promote responsible use of these services. In this section, we examine three policy responses – improving the use of digital (online) tools, increasing self-care, and raising awareness of alternative services – through the lens of people's attitudes and current behaviours, to see what light these can shed on the likely success or otherwise of these initiatives.

Improving the use of digital tools

NHS England aims to increase access to digital help for health and health care[8] and NHS Scotland promotes the introduction of apps for self-care (Pulling Together, 2015). These initiatives are built on the

7 This wider research project was funded by the National Institute for Health Research and involved interviewing recent users of the ambulance service, A&E and GPs for unexpected health problems about why they made contact with a service and why they chose that specific service. The report will be published later in 2019.

8 NHS England's transforming digital health website can be found here: https://www.nhs.uk/transformation/

assumption that people will become 'digital health citizens' (Powell, 2019) by taking on new roles and responsibilities to use the internet and digital tools to facilitate diagnosis, treatment and finding the most appropriate service to contact. The literature indicates that there are different types of digital citizens: learners (to understand health better), pragmatists (to decide whether it is worth seeing a doctor), sceptics (to solve health problems doctors seem not to be able to), worriers (who find online information frightening), delegators (who use it as a source of information), and a-digitals (who do not see the internet as suitable for health care) (Powell, 2019). Concerns have been expressed about inequity in terms of access to digital sources, and initiatives have been established to address inequities. NHS Digital has funded a programme to widen digital participation and reduce inequity.[9]

BSA allows us to track internet access over time, as well as to examine current inequity of access. The proportion of people who do not have access to the internet (whether at home, work or elsewhere) has continued to decline, falling most recently from 14% in 2015 to 9% in 2018. Most of this digital exclusion is among the older population with 29% of those aged 65+ currently reporting not having access to the internet.

More specifically, we wanted to assess the prevalence of turning to online resources both to help understand what health problems might be and then to help make decisions about where to seek help or care (a behaviour that is associated with 'digital learners' and 'digital pragmatists' (Powell, 2019). To do this, we ask the following questions:

> ***Now imagine you have an unexpected health problem that is not life threatening. How likely, if at all, is it that you would…***
>
> ***…look on the internet to decide what the problem might be?***
>
> ***…look on the internet to decide what to do?***

It should be noted that our questions did not ask *which* online resources people use; these could be highly variable in their reliability. In our analysis, we excluded respondents who do not have internet access, as otherwise the patterns we find, to a large extent, simply reflect the fact that some groups are disproportionately less likely to have access to the internet.

We find that there is a gap between the likelihood of using the internet to investigate what a health problem might be (58%) and going online to decide what to do (47%)

The overall responses to these questions, and those provided by groups defined by demographic and area-based characteristics, are presented in Table 4. Overall, we find that there is a gap between the likelihood of using the internet to investigate what a health problem might be (58%) and going online to decide what to do (47%). Younger age groups are much more likely to say they would both use the internet to investigate a health problem and to decide what to do. Those aged 18-24 are twice as likely to both research a health

9 Details of the 'NHS Widening Digital Participation' programme can be found here: https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/projects/nhs-widening-digital-participation-phase2#phase1

Those aged 18-24 are twice as likely to both research a health problem online (62%) and to use the internet to decide what to do (47%), compared with those aged 75+

problem online (62%) and to use the internet to decide what to do (47%), compared with those aged 75+ (30% and 23% respectively). However, other characteristics are also associated with using the internet to decide what a health problem might be and what to do about it. Women, parents of children aged under five in the household, those with higher educational qualifications and those living in urban areas are all more likely to indicate that they would use the internet for both of these purposes.

Table 4 Likelihood of using the internet to investigate a non-life threatening health problem among people with internet access, by socio-demographic characteristics

	% likely to use the internet to decide what the problem might be	% likely to use the internet to decide what to do	*Unweighted base*
All with access to the internet	58	47	*2542*
Age			
18-24	62	47	*167*
25-34	72	61	*378*
35-44	67	53	*460*
45-54	56	46	*449*
55-64	51	42	*470*
65-74	45	33	*406*
75+	30	23	*207*
Sex			
Male	54	44	*1111*
Female	62	49	*1431*
Respondent has child aged under 5 years in household			
Yes	72	59	*298*
No	56	44	*2229*
Highest educational qualification			
Degree	71	57	*742*
A-levels or equivalent	57	46	*708*
GCSEs or equivalent	52	42	*684*
No qualification	42	34	*368*
Urban or rural area (England & Wales)			
Urban	61	49	*1825*
Rural	53	43	*495*

Base: all respondents with internet access

It seems clear from this evidence that there is considerable potential to expand the use of digital tools for those who have internet access (alongside the plans already in place to address digital inequity).

There are two parts to this. First, there is the gap between those who look online in the first place, but do not use the internet to work out what to do, which could be addressed (although we found these two behaviours to be highly correlated, suggesting a focus on this gap would have fairly limited impact). Second, there are many people who have internet access but who do not currently use it for working out what a medical problem is or what to do about it. Further research in this area might be helpful in order to find out what sites and tools people use, and whether there are any particular barriers that are stopping people using digital tools at the moment.

Increasing use of self-care

NHS England aims to promote self-care generally[10] and to increase patients' ability to manage their own health and wellbeing[11]. NHS Scotland aims to increase self-care by promoting health literacy and increasing awareness and use of pharmacists to reduce demand for other health services.[12]

We explore which types of people feel most confident and which struggle with aspects of caring for their health problems by asking about three different aspects of self-care: confidence in decisions about whether a health problem requires medical attention; having support networks when ill; and whether or not people would take medication for pain. Specifically, we ask respondents:

> ***When you have an unexpected health problem that is not life threatening, how confident, if at all, would you say you are in deciding when you need to go to a doctor, and when you can look after a health problem yourself?***
>
> ***Do you have family, friends or a partner who could look after you if you have an unexpected health problem that is not life threatening?***
>
> ***Now imagine that you have an unexpected pain that is not life threatening. How likely, if at all, is it that you would take medication to stop the pain?***

Most people report being confident that they know when to see a doctor regarding a health problem (90%)

The responses provided overall and for groups defined by demographic characteristics of interest are presented in Table 5. Most people report being confident that they know when to see a doctor regarding a health problem (90%) with little variation across sub-groups. Only young people (aged 18-24) have lower levels of confidence (81%, not shown in the table), presumably as they make the transition to adulthood.

Large majorities – slightly more than four in five – also report that they

10 For details see: https://www.england.nhs.uk/2017/11/encouraging-people-to-embrace-self-care-for-life/

11 For details see: https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/patient-participation/self-care/patient-activation/

12 For details see: https://www.gov.scot/publications/main-report-national-review-primary-care-out-hours-services/pages/0/

The largest difference is between those living in the most deprived areas, of whom 76% say they have friends and family to look after them, compared with 91% of those in the most affluent areas

have family or friends to look after them, if they have a non-life-threatening health problem; or that they would be likely to take medication to stop an unexpected pain. We might expect certain groups to be less likely to have family and friends who could look after them, including those who are older, who would also be more likely to live on their own, to experience poor health and so on. While 85% of people say that they could rely on friends and family, this falls slightly to 80% among those aged 75+. This is similarly lower among those who live on their own (73%) – also likely to be older – those who report being in poor health (78%), those with a limiting health problem or disability (81%) and those with no qualifications (80%). Interestingly, the largest difference is between those living in the most deprived areas, of whom 76% say they have friends and family to look after them, compared with 91% of those in the most affluent areas.

For the measure of being likely to take medication to stop an unexpected pain that is not life threatening, there are few differences by demographic characteristics. Only men and those considering themselves to be in excellent health are a little less likely to say they would take medication in these circumstances (78% and 73% respectively).

Table 5 Attitudes to self-care, by socio-demographic characteristics

	% has family or friends who can provide care	**% confident deciding when to see a doctor**	*Unweighted base (for both questions)*	**% would take medication to stop pain**	*Unweighted base*
All	85	90	*2309*	81	*2906*
Sex					
Male	84	89	*974*	78	*1257*
Female	86	91	*1335*	83	*1649*
Highest educational qualification					
Degree	90	94	*640*	83	*763*
A-levels or equivalent	86	92	*616*	78	*760*
GCSEs or equivalent	82	90	*590*	81	*750*
No qualification	80	85	*427*	81	*582*
Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile (England)					
1 – (20% most deprived areas)	76	83	*351*	80	*487*
2	83	91	*354*	85	*476*
3	86	92	*397*	80	*474*
4	89	94	*470*	81	*566*
5 – (20% least deprived areas)	91	92	*426*	79	*507*
Self-rated health					
Excellent	89	88	*223*	73	*223*
Very good	91	95	*725*	81	*725*
Good	84	91	*799*	83	*799*
Fair	82	89	*360*	82	*360*
Poor	78	86	*163*	84	*163*

There is little evidence here to suggest changing the current strategies for increasing the use of self-care – although, given most people already have confidence in self-care, any improvement as a result of these strategies may not be extensive. The one notable gap we found is in terms of support from family and friends when ill, which is lower for people living in deprived areas, but which government initiatives around improving self-care do not – and could not easily – aim to address.

Awareness of services

Lack of awareness of alternative services has been identified as a factor in the use of emergency healthcare for minor problems (Penson et al, 2012). NHS policy makers address this through their Choose Well campaigns, offering information to people to help them access the service most appropriate to their needs[13] as well as to raise awareness of the range of services available locally[14].

We ask a range of questions to understand whether people feel they know about the health services available to them. Our approach covers both existing knowledge and being able to find out the information, as, in practice, the ability to find such information is more important than knowing these details at the outset. We ask respondents to:

> ***Imagine that you have an unexpected health problem that is not life threatening. You have decided that you need to get help quickly from a health service. How confident, if at all, are you that…***
>
> ***…you know the range of NHS services you can use, for example, walk in centres, chemist or pharmacy, or calling 111?***
>
> ***…you know, or can easily find out, when NHS services are open?***
>
> ***…you know, or can easily find out, what tests are available at different NHS services, for example x-rays and blood tests?***
>
> ***…you know, or can easily find out, how to contact a GP when GP surgeries are closed?***

Around eight in ten are confident they could find out what tests are available at different NHS services and know, or could easily find out, how to contact a GP when GP surgeries are closed

Responses to these questions are presented in Table 6. Nine in ten people report knowing the range of NHS services they can use and are confident that they could find out which NHS services are open, when they have an unexpected health problem that is not life threatening. Around eight in ten are confident they could find out what tests are available at different NHS services and know, or could easily find out, how to contact a GP when GP surgeries are closed.

13 For instance, see http://www.choosewellwales.org.uk/home
14 See http://www.choosewellmanchester.org.uk

Differences emerge in people's knowledge and confidence to access the right services when they need them. Access to the internet is clearly associated with knowing which NHS services are available and the ability to find out when NHS services are open or what tests are available. While overall 91% of people feel they could easily find out when NHS services are open, this falls to 82% among those who do not have access to the internet. Similarly, while 78% of people feel confident they could find out what tests are available this falls to 72% among those with no internet access. Internet access also partly, but not entirely, accounts for lower confidence in finding out when NHS services are open among those aged 75+, in poor health or with no qualifications (86% - not shown in the table).

There are no differences by internet access in knowing (or being able to find out) how to access a GP out of hours. Here, it appears that experience of using services as an adult is most relevant. Only 64% of those aged 18-24 feel confident they know how to access a GP out of hours compared with 81% overall. Similarly, only 71% of 18-24 year olds feel they could find out what tests are available, compared with 78% overall.

Otherwise, although there are no differences by sex in feeling confident about finding out when NHS services are open or what tests are available, men are less confident than women that they know or can find out how to access a GP out of hours (76% compared with 85%).

Men are less confident than women that they know or can find out how to access a GP out of hours

Taken together, while confidence and awareness overall are high, both young adults and men might benefit from improved knowledge about the alternative services available (and especially how to access a GP out of normal working hours) – particularly as we know that both groups have relatively high use of emergency care.

Table 6 Awareness of NHS services, by internet access and socio-demographic characteristics

	% confident they know the range of NHS services they can use	% confident can easily find out when NHS services are open	% confident could find out what tests are available	% confident know or could find out how to contact a GP out of hours	*Unweighted base*
All	90	91	78	81	*2906*
Has internet access					
Has access	91	92	78	81	*2542*
Does not have access	83	82	72	79	*364*
Age					
18-24	85	89	71	64	*169*
25-34	91	94	78	82	*384*
35-44	91	92	76	84	*467*
45-54	90	93	79	81	*469*
55-64	93	92	78	86	*508*
65-74	93	92	83	86	*499*
75+	87	84	77	79	*405*
Self-rated health					
Excellent	94	96	81	83	*223*
Very good	92	93	79	83	*725*
Good	90	93	81	84	*799*
Fair	90	90	75	75	*360*
Poor	90	87	80	88	*163*
Sex					
Male	89	91	77	76	*1257*
Female	92	92	78	85	*1649*

Conclusions

A minority of people hold attitudes or beliefs that make A&E attractive and the key alternative to this service – general practice – problematic

The pressure on emergency health services is clearly a concern to policy makers and those who deliver the services. Our findings have confirmed that some groups of the population, historically known to make high use of emergency health services, continue to do so, notably parents of a child aged under 5 in the household. What is also apparent is that the public's views tie in with policy makers' concerns about the potential misuse of emergency health services, in so far as there is widespread agreement that both A&E and 999 ambulances are used by too many people when they are not needed. However, there is no evidence that these views, in themselves, are related to use of emergency healthcare.

There are also issues of access or convenience: over a third of people say they prefer a service where there is no need to make an appointment, while half think it is hard to get a GP appointment

Attitudes towards the perceived advantages or disadvantages of different health services may be playing a role in demand for emergency care. A minority of people hold attitudes or beliefs that make A&E attractive and the key alternative to this service – general practice – problematic. One area that appears to be particularly important is people's perceptions of doctors' knowledge levels: people in poor health, living in urban areas and socially deprived communities are more likely to believe that A&E doctors know more than GPs, and are more likely to lack confidence in their GPs. There are also issues of access or convenience: over a third of people say they prefer a service where there is no need to make an appointment, while half think it is hard to get a GP appointment. Taken together, these findings suggest that challenging beliefs held by some social groups about A&E, along with improving access to general practice, might help to manage demand for emergency health services (Tammes, 2017). This is an area where the findings would be greatly enhanced by more in-depth research which develops a better understanding of the different ways that attitudes and perceptions may contribute to decision making around seeking medical care. A related qualitative study addressing this objective is being undertaken as part of the research project of which this set of questions forms a part.

Policy makers are focussing on three strategies to help manage demand – promoting digital tools, self care and awareness of alternative services. Awareness of alternative services, their opening times and the tests they offer is high but initiatives could focus more on men and young adults' knowledge base, particularly how to contact a GP out of hours, because both of these groups have been shown to make high use of A&E. However, our findings suggest that there is still a considerable way to go with the promotion of digital tools because only around half of the population with access to the internet currently look online to diagnose their problems or decide where to go to have them dealt with. Some social groups are more likely to do this such as women, people in urban areas, young adults and parents of a child aged under five. More needs to be done to encourage middle aged and older people, men and those living in rural areas to use digital tools if these are proven to help people make good choices.

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Appendix

Note 1

The 2015 Health Survey for England[15] showed a significant relationship between use of A&E and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). People in more deprived areas were more likely to have attended A&E as a patient – for example, 11% of those in the most deprived quintile had attended 1-2 times in the last 12 months, compared with 8% of those in the least deprived quintile (and 9% of all respondents).

Table A.1 Accessed A&E services in the previous 12 months, by demographic characteristics

	% used service at least once	% used service three times or more	*Unweighted base*
All	32	6	*2906*
Age*			
18-24	32	6	*169*
25-34	40	9	*384*
35-44	38	6	*467*
45-54	34	6	*469*
55-64	29	4	*508*
65-74	23	3	*499*
75+	21	6	*405*
Respondent has child aged under 5 years in household			
Yes	54	13	*300*
No	29	5	*2591*
Whether has long term health condition or disability			
No	31	5	*1766*
Yes, but not limiting	30	5	*586*
Yes and limiting	40	9	*541*
Urban or rural area (England & Wales)			
Urban	33	6	*2064*
Rural	27	4	*578*

*Please note the BSA sample does not include residents in institutions such as care or nursing homes, which means the age profile of A&E use shown here does not reflect use among those (typically) older people

15 NatCen Social Research, University College London, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health. (2017). Health Survey for England, 2015. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 8280, http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8280-1

Table A.2 Used a 999 ambulance in the previous 12 months, by socio-demographic characteristics

	% used service at least once	% used service three times or more	*Unweighted base*
All	13	2	*2906*
Whether has long term health condition or disability			
None	12	2	*1766*
Yes, but not limiting	13	2	*586*
Yes and limiting	21	4	*541*
Self-rated health			
Excellent	6	*	*223*
Very good	10	1	*725*
Good	14	2	*799*
Fair	18	3	*360*
Poor	22	4	*163*
Urban or rural area (England & Wales)			
Urban	14	3	*2064*
Rural	11	1	*578*
Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile (England)			
1 - (20% most deprived areas)	17	3	*487*
2	16	3	*476*
3	13	2	*474*
4	11	2	*566*
5 - (20% least deprived areas)	11	1	*507*

The multivariate analysis technique used for the models is a logistic regression. The results for 5 separate models are shown in Tables A.3 to A.7. The dependent variables for the first three models are three separate attitude statements about positive attributes of A&E; for the last two models the dependent variables are two attitude statements about negative perceptions of GPs (precise wording shown in the table titles).

Table A.3 Agree with "I prefer NHS services where I don't need to make an appointment", logistic regression

	Odds Ratio	Standard error	p value
Perceived health (Excellent)			
Very good	1.13	0.23	0.55
Good	1.37	0.27	0.11
Fair	1.39	0.33	0.17
Poor	1.22	0.32	0.46
Usage of A&E services (Never)			
More than 12 months ago	1.09	0.16	0.55
1-2 times	1.10	0.18	0.54
3 times or more	1.37	0.31	0.15
Highest education (Degree or higher degree)			
A-levels or equivalent	1.02	0.17	0.93
GCSEs or equivalent	1.30	0.21	0.11
No qualification	**2.01	0.35	0.00
Area (Urban)			
Rural	0.84	0.12	0.21
Deprivation quartile (least deprived)			
Most deprived	**2.09	0.42	0.00
Second most deprived	1.36	0.26	0.11
Third most deprived	1.13	0.22	0.55
Second least deprived	1.08	0.19	0.69
Constant	0.28	0.08	0.00

Weighted base: 1,859

Unweighted base: 1,865

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

Table A.4 Agree with "I prefer A&E to a GP because I can get tests done quickly", logistic regression

	Odds Ratio	Standard error	p value
Perceived health (Excellent)			
Very good	0.93	0.26	0.80
Good	1.12	0.27	0.64
Fair	1.02	0.31	0.95
Poor	0.91	0.30	0.77
Usage of A&E services (Never)			
More than 12 months ago	0.72	0.17	0.17
1-2 times	1.01	0.25	0.98
3 times or more	1.46	0.52	0.29
Highest education (Degree or higher degree)			
A-levels or equivalent	1.14	0.28	0.58
GCSEs or equivalent	1.08	0.29	0.79
No qualification	*1.92	0.54	0.02
Area (Urban)			
Rural	*0.54	0.13	0.01
Deprivation quartile (least deprived)			
Most deprived	**2.52	0.75	0.00
Second most deprived	1.61	0.42	0.07
Third most deprived	1.13	0.30	0.66
Second least deprived	0.90	0.23	0.69
Constant	0.15	0.05	0.00

Weighted base: 1,845

Unweighted base: 1,850

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

Table A.5 Agree with "A&E doctors know more than GPs", logistic regression

	Odds Ratio	Standard error	p value
Perceived health (Excellent)			
Very good	0.81	0.21	0.42
Good	0.95	0.24	0.84
Fair	1.13	0.30	0.64
Poor	1.16	0.39	0.67
Usage of A&E services (Never)			
More than 12 months ago	*0.68	0.13	0.05
1-2 times	0.77	0.17	0.23
3 times or more	1.27	0.44	0.49
Highest education (Degree or higher degree)			
A-levels or equivalent	1.16	0.21	0.40
GCSEs or equivalent	1.32	0.26	0.16
No qualification	**2.67	0.58	0.00
Area (Urban)			
Rural	0.79	0.13	0.16
Deprivation quartile (least deprived)			
Most deprived	*1.58	0.37	0.05
Second most deprived	1.21	0.25	0.36
Third most deprived	1.21	0.29	0.42
Second least deprived	1.01	0.22	0.96
Constant	0.22	0.07	0.00
Weighted base: 1,834			
Unweighted base: 1,840			

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

Table A.6 Agree with "I do not have much confidence in GPs at my GP surgery", logistic regression

	Odds Ratio	Standard error	p value
Perceived health (Excellent)			
Very good	0.78	0.26	0.46
Good	1.06	0.34	0.86
Fair	1.35	0.53	0.44
Poor*	2.48	0.96	0.02
Usage of A&E services (Never)			
More than 12 months ago	0.81	0.21	0.42
1-2 times	0.91	0.26	0.75
3 times or more	**2.75	0.86	0.00
Highest education (Degree or higher degree)			
A-levels or equivalent	*1.93	0.51	0.01
GCSEs or equivalent	1.71	0.48	0.06
No qualification	**2.44	0.75	0.00
Area (Urban)			
Rural*	0.54	0.14	0.02
Respondent has child aged under 5 years in household (No)			
Yes	**2.38	0.62	0.00
Deprivation quartile (least deprived)			
Most deprived	1.47	0.42	0.18
Second most deprived	1.05	0.32	0.88
Third most deprived	1.08	0.36	0.82
Second least deprived	0.81	0.26	0.51
Constant	0.06	0.03	0.00
Weighted base: 1,856			
Unweighted base: 1,871			

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

Table A.7 Agree with "It is hard to get an appointment with a GP at my GP surgery", logistic regression

	Odds Ratio	Standard error	p value
Perceived health (Excellent)			
Very good	1.14	0.27	0.59
Good	1.16	0.27	0.51
Fair	1.07	0.31	0.81
Poor	1.70	0.59	0.13
Usage of A&E services (Never)			
More than 12 months ago	0.98	0.16	0.91
1-2 times	1.37	0.25	0.09
3 times or more*	*1.78	0.50	0.04
Highest education (Degree or higher degree)			
A-levels or equivalent	1.37	0.22	0.05
GCSEs or equivalent	*1.39	0.21	0.03
No qualification	1.28	0.26	0.23
Area (Urban)			
Rural	**0.63	0.10	0.01
Respondent has child aged under 5 years in household (No)			
Yes	**1.75	0.31	0.00
Deprivation quartile (least deprived)			
Most deprived	1.23	0.24	0.28
Second most deprived	1.05	0.20	0.79
Third most deprived	1.11	0.20	0.55
Second least deprived	0.95	0.17	0.78
Constant	0.68	0.20	0.18
Weighted base: 1,865			
Unweighted base: 1,881			

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

Technical details

In 2018, the sample for the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey was split into four equally-sized portions. Each portion was asked a different version of the questionnaire (versions A, B,C and D). Depending on the number of versions in which it was included, questions were thus asked either of the full sample (3,879 respondents) or of a random quarter, half or three-quarters of the sample.

Sample design

The BSA survey is designed to yield a representative sample of adults aged 18 or over. Since 1993, the sampling frame for the survey has been the Postcode Address File (PAF), a list of addresses (or postal delivery points) compiled by the Post Office.[1]

For practical reasons, the sample is confined to those living in private households. People living in institutions (though not in private households at such institutions) are excluded, as are households whose addresses were not on the PAF.

The sampling method involved a multi-stage design, with three separate stages of selection.

Selection of sectors

At the first stage, postcode sectors were selected systematically from a list of all postal sectors in Britain. Before selection, any sectors with fewer than 500 addresses were identified and grouped together with an adjacent sector; in Scotland all sectors north of the Caledonian Canal were excluded (because of the prohibitive costs of interviewing there). Sectors were then stratified on the basis of: 36 sub-regions; population density, (population in private households/ area of the postal sector in hectares), with variable banding used in order to create three equal-sized strata per sub-region; and ranking by percentage of homes that were owner-occupied.

This resulted in the selection of 395 postcode sectors, with probability proportional to the number of addresses in each sector.

Selection of addresses

Twenty-six addresses were selected in each of the 395 sectors or groups of sectors. The issued sample was therefore 395 x 26 = 10,270 addresses, selected by starting from a random point on the list of addresses for each sector, and choosing each address at a fixed interval. The fixed interval was calculated for each sector in order to generate the correct number of addresses.

The Multiple-Occupancy Indicator (MOI) available through PAF was used when selecting addresses in Scotland. The MOI shows the number of accommodation spaces sharing one address. Thus, if the MOI indicated more than one accommodation space at a given address, the chances of the given address being selected from the list of addresses would increase so that it matched the total number of accommodation spaces. The MOI is largely irrelevant in England and Wales, as separate dwelling units (DUs) generally appear as separate entries on the PAF. In Scotland, tenements with many flats tend to appear as one entry on the PAF. However, even in Scotland, the vast majority (99.9%) of MOIs in the sample had a value of one. The remainder had MOIs greater than one. The MOI affects the selection probability of the address, so it was necessary to incorporate an adjustment for this into the weighting procedures (described below).

Selection of individuals

Interviewers called at each address selected from the PAF and listed all those eligible for inclusion in the BSA sample – that is, all persons currently aged 18 or over and resident at the selected address. The interviewer then selected one respondent using a computer-generated random selection procedure. Where there were two or more DUs at the selected address, interviewers first had to select one DU using the same random procedure. They then followed the same procedure to select a person for interview within the selected DU.

Weighting

The weights for the BSA survey correct for the unequal selection of addresses, DUs and individuals, and for biases caused by differential non-response. The different stages of the weighting scheme are outlined in detail below.

Selection weights

Selection weights are required because not all the units covered in the survey had the same probability of selection. The weighting reflects the relative selection probabilities of the individual at the three main stages of selection: address, DU and individual. First, because addresses in Scotland were selected using the MOI, weights were needed to compensate for the greater probability of an address with an MOI of more than one being selected, compared with an address with an MOI of one. (This stage was omitted for the English and Welsh data.) Secondly, data were weighted to compensate for the fact that a DU at an address that contained a large number of DUs was less likely to be selected for inclusion in the survey than a DU at an address that contained fewer DUs. (We used this procedure because in most cases where the MOI is greater than one, the two stages will cancel each other out, resulting in more efficient weights.) Thirdly, data were weighted to compensate for the lower selection probabilities of adults living in large households, compared with those in small households.

At each stage the selection weights were trimmed to avoid a small number of very high or very low weights in the sample; such weights would inflate standard errors, reducing the precision of the survey estimates and causing the weighted sample to be less efficient. A small proportion (typically less than 1%) of the selection weights were trimmed at each stage.

Non-response model

It is known that certain subgroups in the population are more likely to respond to surveys than others. These groups can end up over-represented in the sample, which can bias the survey estimates. Where information is available about non-responding households, the response behaviour of the sample members can be modelled and the results used to generate a non-response weight. This non-response weight is intended to reduce bias in the sample resulting from differential response to the survey.

The data were modelled using logistic regression, with the dependent variable indicating whether or not the selected individual responded to the survey. Ineligible households[2] were not included in the non-response modelling. A number of area-level and interviewer observation variables were used to model response. Not all the variables examined were retained for the final model: variables not strongly related to a household's propensity to respond were dropped from the analysis.

The variables found to be related to response, once controlled for the rest of the predictors in the model, were: region, type of dwelling, whether there were entry barriers to the selected address, the relative condition of the immediate local area and the relative condition of the address. The model shows that response increases if there are no barriers to entry (for instance, if there are no locked gates around the address and no entry phone) and if the general condition of the address is better than other addresses in the area, rather than being about the same or worse. Response is also higher for flats than detached houses, and increases if the relative condition of the immediate surrounding area is mainly good. The full model is given in Table A.1.

Table A.1 The final non-response model

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Odds
Region			73.999	11	.000	
Inner London	(baseline)					
North East	.446	.158	8.002	1	.005	1.562
North West	.248	.134	3.455	1	.063	1.282
Yorkshire and The Humber	.531	.140	14.495	1	.000	1.701
East Midlands	.498	.142	12.283	1	.000	1.645
West Midlands	-.021	.141	0.022	1	.881	0.979
East of England	.222	.138	2.597	1	.107	1.249
Outer London	.025	.138	0.032	1	.857	1.025
South East	.080	.133	0.365	1	.546	1.083
South West	.206	.142	2.122	1	.145	1.229
Wales	-.113	.158	0.516	1	.473	0.893
Scotland	.196	.138	2.011	1	.156	1.217
Type of dwelling			19.458	3	.000	
Detached House	(baseline)					
Semi-detached house	-.221	.064	11.886	1	.001	.802
Terraced house (including end of terrace)	-.106	.068	2.418	1	.120	.899
Flat or maisonette and other	.077	.090	0.722	1	.396	1.080
Barriers to address						
No barriers	(baseline)					
One or more	-.448	.085	28.050	1	.000	.639
Relative condition of the local area			46.123	2	.000	
Mainly good	(baseline)					
Mainly fair	-.311	.048	41.749	1	.000	.733
Mainly bad or very bad	-.442	.111	15.849	1	.000	.642
Relative condition of the address			38.636	2	.000	
Better	(baseline)					
About the same	-.406	.081	24.929	1	.000	.666
Worse	-.693	.114	36.753	1	.000	.500

Table A.1 The final non-response model (continued)

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Odds
Percentage owner-occupied in quintiles			5.894	4	.207	
1 lowest	(constant)					
2	-.046	.074	.387	1	.534	.955
3	-.113	.078	2.104	1	.147	.893
4	.010	.082	.015	1	.901	.010
5 highest	-.119	.083	.023	1	.155	.888
Population density[1]	-.034	.021	2.520	1	.112	.967
Constant	.342	.168	4.137	1	.042	1.407

The response is 1 = individual responding to the survey, 0 = non-response

Variables that are significant at the 0.05 level are included in the model. Percentage owner-occupied (in quintiles) and population density were not significant in 2018 but were kept in the model for consistency.

The model R^2 is 0.036 (Cox and Snell)

***B** is the estimate coefficient with standard error **S.E**.*

*The Wald-test measures the impact of the categorical variable on the model with the appropriate number of degrees of freedom (**df**). If the test is significant (**sig**. < 0.05), then the categorical variable is considered to be 'significantly associated' with the response variable and therefore included in the model*

The non-response weight was calculated as the inverse of the predicted response probabilities saved from the logistic regression model. The non-response weight was then combined with the selection weights to create the final non-response weight. The top 0.5% of the weight were trimmed before the weight was scaled to the achieved sample size (resulting in the weight being standardised around an average of one).

Calibration weighting

The final stage of weighting was to adjust the final non-response weight so that the weighted sample matched the population in terms of age, sex and region.

Only adults aged 18 or over are eligible to take part in the survey, therefore the data have been weighted to the British population aged 18+ based on 2017 Mid-Year Estimates data from the Office for National Statistics/General Register Office for Scotland.

The survey data were weighted to the marginal age/sex and region distributions using calibration weighting. As a result, the weighted data should exactly match the population across these three dimensions. This is shown in Table A.2.

1 Population density refers to the number of people per unit of area. This was achieved by calculating the ratio between the number of people in private households in each PSU divided by the area of each PSU in hectares.

Table A.2 Weighted and unweighted sample distribution, by region, age and sex

	Population	Unweighted respondents	Respondent weighted by selection weight only	Respondent weighted by un-calibrated non-response weight	Respondent weighted by final weight
Region	%	%	%	%	%
North East	4.2	4.6	4.7	4.2	4.2
North West	11.3	11.4	11.0	10.8	11.3
Yorks. and Humber	8.5	10.5	10.2	8.7	8.5
East Midlands	7.5	9.3	9.2	7.7	7.5
West Midlands	9.0	7.6	7.5	8.6	9.0
East of England	9.6	10.2	10.3	9.9	9.6
London	13.5	10.0	10.9	13.3	13.5
South East	14.1	13.4	13.7	14.3	14.1
South West	8.8	9.5	9.5	9.1	8.8
Wales	4.9	4.4	4.5	5.0	4.9
Scotland	8.7	9.1	8.5	8.6	8.7
Age & sex	%	%	%	%	%
M 18–24	5.5	2.6	3.8	4.0	5.5
M 25–34	8.6	5.5	6.2	6.6	8.6
M 35–44	7.9	6.2	6.4	6.5	7.9
M 45–54	8.7	7.5	7.6	7.8	8.7
M 55–59	4.1	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.1
M 60–64	3.5	4.1	4.2	4.0	3.5
M 65+	10.8	13.5	12.8	12.2	10.8
F 18–24	5.2	3.0	4.0	4.1	5.2
F 25–34	8.5	7.7	7.6	8.1	8.5
F 35–44	8.0	10.0	10.0	10.1	8.0
F 45–54	8.9	8.8	9.8	9.6	8.9
F 55–59	4.2	4.4	4.7	4.7	4.2
F 60–64	3.6	4.4	4.1	4.0	3.6
F 65+	12.4	18.0	14.3	13.9	12.5
Base	*50,792,629*	*3,879*	*3,879*	*3,879*	*3,879*

The calibration weight (WtFactor) is the final non-response weight to be used in the analysis of CAPI (face-to-face) variables in the 2018 survey; this weight has been scaled to the responding sample size. The range of the weights is given in Table A.4.

Self-completion weighting

The BSA survey requires respondents to answer a self-completion questionnaire in addition to the face-to-face interview. The rate of self-completion response differs from survey to survey but has trended downwards in recent years. In 2018, 79% of respondents completed a valid self-completion questionnaire, compared with 82% in both 2016 and 2017.

As in previous years, we investigated differences between the profile of respondents who completed the self-completion questionnaire and those who did not. In 2018, unlike recent years, this analysis showed that there were statistically significant differences in the profile of those who completed a valid self-completion survey and those who did not. As a result, it was deemed appropriate to generate a self-completion non-response weight which takes account of some of the systemic underlying factors which may be leading to these differences. In addition to the census data and interviewer observations that were used to compute the non-response component of the main weight, other respondent characteristics were also considered for the self-completion weight. More is known about individuals who did not complete a self-completion questionnaire compared to those who did not participate in BSA at all. Hence, this can be leveraged in modelling the characteristics of those who filled in the self-completion questionnaire, compared to those who did not.

As when modelling non-response for the main survey weight, logistic regression was used (with the dependent variable indicating whether the respondent completed their self-completion questionnaire). A number of demographic characteristics, responses to politics-related questions (asked in the face-to-face interview), as well as area-level and interviewer observation variables, were used to model response. Again, not all the variables examined were retained for the final model; variables which were found to not be significantly associated with an individual's propensity to complete the self-completion supplement were excluded.

Among the key findings were that respondents from a BAME background were significantly less likely to complete the self-completion supplement. Those without any educational qualifications were also significantly less likely to make a valid return compared to those with a degree. So too, those with 'little' or 'no' interest in politics were less likely to fill in the self-completion questionnaire. The full results from the model are presented in Table A.3.

Table A.3 The final self-completion non-response model

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Odds
Respondent sex/ age			58.337	13	.000	
Male 18-24	(baseline)					
Male 25-34	-.005	.204	.001	1	.982	.995
Male 35-44	-.235	.204	1.322	1	.250	.791
Male 45-54	.399	.210	3.619	1	.057	1.490
Male 55-59	.366	.255	2.060	1	.151	1.442
Male 60-64	.275	.272	1.016	1	.314	1.316
Male 65+	.645	.216	8.945	1	.003	1.905
Female 18-24	.816	.252	10.499	1	.001	2.261
Female 25-34	.020	.204	.010	1	.921	1.020
Female 35-44	.259	.211	1.510	1	.219	1.296
Female 45-54	.619	.216	8.198	1	.004	1.857
Female 55-59	.384	.256	2.252	1	.133	1.468
Female 60-64	.801	.295	7.379	1	.007	2.227
Female 65+	.760	.212	12.890	1	.000	2.137
Region			54.292	10	.000	
North East	(baseline)					
North West	-.187	.242	.592	1	.441	.830
Yorkshire and The Humber	-.191	.251	.574	1	.449	.827
East Midlands	.404	.278	2.111	1	.146	1.497
West Midlands	-.836	.242	11.966	1	.001	.433
East of England	.027	.254	.011	1	.916	1.027
London	.113	.248	.206	1	.650	1.119
South East	-.076	.241	.098	1	.754	.927
South West	-.360	.253	2.030	1	.154	.698
Wales	-.359	.276	1.685	1	.194	.699
Scotland	-.283	.251	1.277	1	.258	.753
Ethnicity						
White	(baseline)					
BAME	-.770	.114	45.452	1	.000	.463
Highest qualification			30.452	3	.000	
Degree	(baseline)					
A-level / higher (below degree)	-.156	.122	1.643	1	.200	.856
O-level/ GCSE	-.518	.122	17.916	1	.000	.596
No qualifications / other	-.645	.138	21.883	1	.000	.524

Table A.3 The final self-completion non-response model (continued)

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Odds
Interest in politics			15.324	4	.004	
A great deal	(baseline)					
Quite a lot	.063	.149	.178	1	.673	1.065
Some	-.098	.143	.469	1	.494	.907
Not very much	-.331	.153	4.692	1	.030	.718
None at all	-.422	.175	5.840	1	.016	.656
Internet access						
Yes	(baseline)					
No	-.474	.150	9.996	1	.002	.623
Type of dwelling			13.644	3	.003	
Detached house	(baseline)					
Semi-detached house	-.049	.123	.155	1	.694	.953
Terraced house (including end of terrace)	.001	.126	.000	1	.991	.001
Flat or maisonette and other	-.410	.142	8.350	1	.004	.664
Relative condition of the address			6.186	2	.045	
Better	(baseline)					
About the same	.331	.148	5.000	1	.025	1.393
Worse	.479	.210	5.190	1	.023	1.615
Constant	2.743	.371	54.725	1	.000	15.540

The response is 1 = self-completion supplement returned (response), 0 = self-completion supplement not returned (non-response)

Variables that were significant at the 0.05 level were included in the model.

The model R^2 is 0.106 (Cox and Snell)

***B** is the estimate coefficient with standard error **S.E**.*

*The Wald-test measures the impact of the categorical variable on the model with the appropriate number of degrees of freedom (**df**). If the test is significant (**sig**. < 0.05), then the categorical variable is considered to be 'significantly associated' with the response variable and therefore included in the model*

The self-completion weight was calculated as the inverse of the predicted response probabilities saved from the logistic regression model. These were then combined with the main BSA weight to create the final self-completion weight. The top 0.5% of the weight were trimmed before the weight was scaled to the achieved sample size (resulting in the weight being standardised around an average of one).

The self-completion weight (**WtFactorSC**) is the weight to be used in the analysis of self-completion variables on the 2018 survey; this weight has been scaled to the responding self-completion sample size. The range of the weights is given in Table A.4.

Table A.4 Range of weights

	N	Minimum	Mean	Maximum
DU and person selection weight	3,879	.55	1.00	2.20
Un-calibrated non-response and selection weight	3,879	.33	1.00	3.61
Final calibrated non-response weight	3,879	.28	1.00	4.39
Self-completion non-response weight	3,065	.28	1.00	3.97

Effective sample size

The effect of the sample design on the precision of survey estimates is indicated by the effective sample size (neff). The effective sample size measures the size of an (unweighted) simple random sample that would achieve the same precision (standard error) as the design being implemented. If the effective sample size is close to the actual sample size, then we have an efficient design with a good level of precision. The lower the effective sample size is, the lower the level of precision. The efficiency of a sample is given by the ratio of the effective sample size to the actual sample size. Samples that select one person per household tend to have lower efficiency than samples that select all household members. The final calibrated non-response weights have an effective sample size (neff) of 2,936 and efficiency of 76%.

Weighted bases

All the percentages presented in this report are based on weighted data. Only unweighted bases are presented in the tables. Details of weighted bases for standard demographics are shown in Table A.5.

Table A.5 Weighted bases for standard demographics, 2018

	Weighted base	Unweighted base
Sex		
Male	*1904*	*1691*
Female	*1975*	*2188*
Age		
18-24	*417*	*218*
25-34	*664*	*512*
35-44	*622*	*629*
45-54	*682*	*631*
55-59	*320*	*335*
60-64	*274*	*330*
65+	*896*	*1217*
Ethnicity		
White	*3296*	*3433*
Black and Minority Ethnic	*571*	*432*
Class group (NSSEC)		
Managerial & professional occupations	*1544*	*1601*
Intermediate occupations	*510*	*534*
Employers in small org; own account workers	*383*	*375*
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	*292*	*280*
Semi-routine & routine occupations	*941*	*930*
Highest educational qualification		
Degree	*1061*	*1009*
Higher education below degree	*423*	*449*
A level or equivalent	*631*	*567*
O level or equivalent	*706*	*680*
CSE or equivalent	*288*	*297*
Foreign or other	*48*	*49*
No qualification	*699*	*806*
Marital status		
Married	*1989*	*1769*
Living as married	*408*	*324*
Separated or divorced after marrying	*352*	*558*
Widowed	*224*	*414*
Not married	*903*	*812*

Questionnaire versions

Each address in each sector (sampling point) was allocated to one of the portions of the sample: A, B ,C or D. As mentioned earlier, a different version of the questionnaire was used with each of the four sample portions. If one serial number was version A, the next was version B,the third version C and the fourth version D. There were 2,567 issued addresses for each of the versions of the sample.

Fieldwork

Interviewing was mainly carried out between July and October 2018, with a small number of interviews taking place in November 2018.

Fieldwork was conducted by interviewers drawn from The National Centre for Social Research's regular panel and conducted using face-to-face computer-assisted interviewing.[3] Interviewers attended a one-day briefing conference to familiarise them with the selection procedures and questionnaires, with the exception of experienced interviewers who completed a self-briefing containing updates to the questionnaire and procedures.

The mean interview length was 64 minutes for version A of the questionnaire, 55 minutes for version B, 62 minutes for version C and 63 minutes for version D.[4] Interviewers achieved an overall response rate of between 41.9% and 42.4%. Details are shown in Table A.6.

Table A.6 Response rate on British Social Attitudes, 2018

	Number	Lower limit of response (%)	Upper limit of response (%)
Addresses issued	10,270		
Out of scope	1,023	%	%
Upper limit of eligible cases	9,247	100	
Uncertain eligibility	99	1.1	
Lower limit of eligible cases	9,148		100
Interview achieved	3,879	41.9	42.4
With self-completion	3,065		
Interview not achieved	5,269	57	57.6
Refused	3,792	41	41.5
Non-contacted	892	9.6	9.8
Other non-response	585	6.3	6.4

Response is calculated as a range from a lower limit where all unknown eligibility cases (for example, address inaccessible, or unknown whether address is residential) are assumed to be eligible and therefore included in the unproductive outcomes, to an upper limit where all these cases are assumed to be ineligible and therefore excluded from the response calculation

'Refused' comprises refusals before selection of an individual at the address, refusals to the office, refusal by the selected person, 'proxy' refusals (on behalf of the selected respondent) and broken appointments after which the selected person could not be re-contacted

'Non-contacted' comprises households where no one was contacted and those where the selected person could not be contacted

As in earlier rounds of the series, the respondent was asked to fill in a self-completion questionnaire which, whenever possible, was collected by the interviewer. Otherwise, the respondent was asked to post it to NatCen Social Research.

A total of 814 respondents (21% of those interviewed) did not return their self-completion questionnaire. Version A of the self-completion questionnaire was returned by 78% of respondents to the face-to-face interview, version B of the questionnaire was returned by 80%, version C by 80% and Version D by 78%.

Advance letter

Advance letters describing the purpose of the survey and the coverage of the questionnaire, were sent to sampled addresses before the interviewer made their first call.[5]

Analysis variables

A number of standard analyses have been used in the tables that appear in this report. The analysis groups requiring further definition are set out below. For further details see Stafford and Thomson (2006). Where relevant the name given to the relevant analysis variable is shown in square brackets – for example [HHincQ].

Region

The dataset is classified by 12 regions, formerly the Government Office Regions.

Standard Occupational Classification

Respondents are classified according to their own occupation, not that of the 'head of household'. Each respondent was asked about their current or last job, so that all respondents except those who had never worked were coded. Additionally, all job details were collected for all spouses and partners in work.

Since the 2011 survey, we have coded occupation to the Standard Occupational Classification 2010 (SOC 2010) instead of the Standard Occupational Classification 2000 (SOC 2000). The main socio-economic grouping based on SOC 2010 is the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). However, to maintain time-series, some analysis has continued to use the older schemes based on SOC 90 – Registrar General's Social Class and Socio-Economic Group – though these are now derived from SOC 2000 (which is derived from SOC 2010).

National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC)

The combination of SOC 2010 and employment status for current or last job generates the following NS-SEC analytic classes:

- Employers in large organisations, higher managerial and professional
- Lower professional and managerial; higher technical and supervisory
- Intermediate occupations
- Small employers and own account workers
- Lower supervisory and technical occupations
- Semi-routine occupations
- Routine occupations

The remaining respondents are grouped as “never had a job” or “not classifiable”. For some analyses, it may be more appropriate to classify respondents according to their current socio-economic status, which takes into account only their present economic position. In this case, in addition to the seven classes listed above, the remaining respondents not currently in paid work fall into one of the following categories: “not classifiable”, “retired”, “looking after the home”, “unemployed” or “others not in paid occupations”.

Registrar General’s Social Class

As with NS-SEC, each respondent’s social class is based on his or her current or last occupation. The combination of SOC 90 with employment status for current or last job generates the following six social classes:

I		Professional etc. occupations	‘Non-manual’
II		Managerial and technical occupations	
III	(Non-manual)	Skilled occupations	
III	(Manual)	Skilled occupations	‘Manual’
IV		Partly skilled occupations	
V		Unskilled occupations	

They are usually collapsed into four groups: I & II, III Non-manual, III Manual, and IV & V.

Socio-Economic Group

As with NS-SEC, each respondent’s Socio-Economic Group (SEG) is based on his or her current or last occupation. SEG aims to bring together people with jobs of similar social and economic status, and is derived from a combination of employment status and occupation. The full SEG classification identifies 18 categories, but these are usually condensed into six groups:

- Professionals, employers and managers
- Intermediate non-manual workers
- Junior non-manual workers
- Skilled manual workers
- Semi-skilled manual workers
- Unskilled manual workers

As with NS-SEC, the remaining respondents are grouped as "never had a job" or "not classifiable".

Industry

All respondents whose occupation could be coded were allocated a Standard Industrial Classification 2007 (SIC 07). Two-digit class codes are used. As with social class, SIC may be generated on the basis of the respondent's current occupation only, or on his or her most recently classifiable occupation.

Party identification

Respondents can be classified as identifying with a particular political party on one of three counts: if they consider themselves supporters of that party; closer to it than to others; or more likely to support it in the event of a general election. The three groups are generally described respectively as 'partisans', 'sympathisers' and 'residual identifiers'. In combination, the three groups are referred to as 'identifiers'. Responses are derived from the following questions:

> ***Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party? [Yes/No]***
>
> ***[If "No"/"Don't know"]***
>
> ***Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one political party than to the others? [Yes/No]***
>
> ***[If "Yes" at either question or "No"/"Don't know" at 2nd question]***
>
> ***Which one?/If there were a general election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?***
>
> ***[Conservative; Labour; Liberal Democrat; Scottish National Party; Plaid Cymru; Green Party; UK Independence Party (UKIP)/Veritas; British National Party (BNP)/National Front; RESPECT/Scottish Socialist Party (SSP)/Socialist Party; Other party; Other answer; None; Refused to say]***

Income

Respondent's household income is classified by the standard BSA variable [HHInc]. The bandings used are designed to be representative of those that exist in Britain and are taken from the Family Resource Survey and adjusted for inflation. Two derived variables give income deciles/quartiles: [HHIncD] and [HHIncQ].

In 2018 BSA included some more detailed questions on respondent individual and household income. The dataset includes a derived variable using these data [eq_inc_quintiles] which is the net equivalised household income after housing costs in quintiles. More detailed income data can be made available to researchers on request.

Attitude scales

Since 1986, the BSA surveys have included two attitude scales which aim to measure where respondents stand on certain underlying value dimensions – left–right and libertarian–authoritarian.[6] Since 1987 (except in 1990), a similar scale on 'welfarism' has also been included. Some of the items in the welfarism scale were changed in 2000–2001. The current version of the scale is shown below.

A useful way of summarising the information from a number of questions of this sort is to construct an additive index (Spector, 1992; DeVellis, 2003). This approach rests on the assumption that there is an underlying – 'latent' – attitudinal dimension which characterises the answers to all the questions within each scale. If so, scores on the index are likely to be a more reliable indication of the underlying attitude than the answers to any one question.

Each of these scales consists of a number of statements to which the respondent is invited to "agree strongly", "agree", "neither agree nor disagree", "disagree" or "disagree strongly".

The items are:

Left–right scale

> *Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off [Redistrb]*
>
> *Big business benefits owners at the expense of workers [BigBusnN]*
>
> *Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth [Wealth]*[7]
>
> *There is one law for the rich and one for the poor [RichLaw]*
>
> *Management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance [Indust4]*

Libertarian–authoritarian scale

Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values. [TradVals]

People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences. [StifSent]

For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence. [DeathApp]

Schools should teach children to obey authority. [Obey]

The law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong. [WrongLaw]

Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards. [Censor]

Welfarism scale

The welfare state encourages people to stop helping each other. [WelfHelp]

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

Around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one. [UnempJob]

Many people who get social security don't really deserve any help. [SocHelp]

Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another. [DoleFidl]

If welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet. [WelfFeet]

Cutting welfare benefits would damage too many people's lives. [DamLives]

The creation of the welfare state is one of Britain's proudest achievements. [ProudWlf]

The indices for the three scales are formed by scoring the leftmost, most libertarian or most pro-welfare position, as 1 and the rightmost, most authoritarian or most anti-welfarist position, as 5. The "neither agree nor disagree" option is scored as 3. The scores to all the questions in each scale are added and then divided by the number of items in the scale, giving indices ranging from 1 (leftmost, most libertarian, most pro-welfare) to 5 (rightmost, most authoritarian, most anti-welfare). The scores on the three indices have been placed on the dataset.[8]

The scales have been tested for reliability (as measured by Cronbach's alpha). The Cronbach's alpha (unstandardised items) for the scales in 2018 are 0.818 for the left–right scale, 0.785 for the libertarian–authoritarian scale and 0.828 for the welfarism scale. This level of reliability can be considered 'good' for the left–right and welfarism scales and 'respectable' for the libertarian-authoritarian scale (DeVellis, 2003: 95–96).

Other analysis variables

These are taken directly from the questionnaire and to that extent are self-explanatory. The principal ones are:

- Sex
- Age
- Household income
- Economic position
- Religion
- Highest educational qualification obtained
- Marital status
- Benefits received

Sampling errors

No sample precisely reflects the characteristics of the population it represents, because of both sampling and non-sampling errors. If a sample was designed as a random sample (if every adult had an equal and independent chance of inclusion in the sample), then we could calculate the sampling error of any percentage, **p**, using the formula:

$$\text{s.e. }(p) = \sqrt{\frac{p(100 - p)}{n}}$$

where *n* is the number of respondents on which the percentage is based. Once the sampling error had been calculated, it would be a straightforward exercise to calculate a confidence interval for the true population percentage. For example, a 95% confidence interval would be given by the formula:

$$p \pm 1.96 \times \text{s.e. }(p)$$

Clearly, for a simple random sample (srs), the sampling error depends only on the values of *p* and *n*. However, simple random sampling is almost never used in practice, because of its inefficiency in terms of time and cost.

As noted above, the BSA sample, like that drawn for most large-scale surveys, was clustered according to a stratified multi-stage design into 395 postcode sectors (or combinations of sectors).

With a complex design like this, the sampling error of a percentage giving a particular response is not simply a function of the number of respondents in the sample and the size of the percentage; it also depends on how that percentage response is spread within and between sample points.

The complex design may be assessed relative to simple random sampling by calculating a range of design factors (DEFTs) associated with it, where:

$$\text{DEFT} = \sqrt{\frac{\text{Variance of estimator with complex design, sample size n}}{\text{Variance of estimator with srs design, sample size n}}}$$

and represents the multiplying factor to be applied to the simple random sampling error to produce its complex equivalent. A design factor of one means that the complex sample has achieved the same precision as a simple random sample of the same size. A design factor greater than one means the complex sample is less precise than its simple random sample equivalent. If the DEFT for a particular characteristic is known, a 95% confidence interval for a percentage may be calculated using the formula:

$$p \pm 1.96 \text{ x complex sampling error (p)}$$

$$= p \pm 1.96 \text{ x DEFT x } \sqrt{\frac{p(100 - p)}{n}}$$

Table A.7 gives examples of the confidence intervals and DEFTs calculated for a range of different questions. Most background questions were asked of the whole sample, whereas many attitudinal questions were asked only of a third or two-thirds of the sample; some were asked on the interview questionnaire and some on the self-completion supplement.

Table A.7 Complex standard errors and confidence intervals of selected variables

	% (p)	Complex standard error of p	5% confidence interval		DEFT	*Base*
			Lower	Upper		
Classification variables						
Party identification (full sample)						
Conservative	27.3%	0.9%	25.6%	29.1%	1.247	*1178*
Labour	35.8%	1.1%	33.6%	38.0%	1.454	*1329*
Liberal Democrat	5.9%	0.4%	5.1%	6.8%	1.141	*243*
Scottish National Party	3.0%	0.4%	2.3%	3.8%	1.341	*114*
Plaid Cymru	0.4%	0.1%	0.2%	0.7%	1.075	*11*
UK Independence Party (UKIP)	1.4%	0.2%	1.1%	1.9%	1.106	*64*
Green Party	2.4%	0.3%	1.8%	3.1%	1.339	*90*
None	16.4%	0.9%	14.8%	18.2%	1.465	*568*
Housing tenure (full sample)						
Owns	63.4%	1.1%	61.2%	65.5%	1.419	*2528*
Rents from local authority	9.1%	0.7%	7.9%	10.5%	1.425	*378*
Rents privately/HA	25.8%	1.0%	23.8%	27.9%	1.479	*912*
Age of completing continuous full-time education (full sample)						
16 or under	40.3%	1.0%	38.4%	42.2%	1.228	*1760*
17 or 18	23.1%	0.8%	21.5%	24.8%	1.228	*857*
19 or over	31.7%	0.9%	29.9%	33.5%	1.242	*1157*
Does anyone have access to the internet from this address? (full sample)						
Yes	92.5%	0.4%	91.7%	93.2%	0.911	*3441*
No	7.5%	0.4%	6.8%	8.3%	0.912	*437*
Can I just check, would you describe the place where you live as... (full sample)						
...a big city	17.1%	1.4%	14.4%	20.1%	2.382	*543*
the suburbs or outskirts of a big city	22.2%	1.6%	19.1%	25.5%	2.440	*842*
a small city or town,	41.9%	1.8%	38.4%	45.4%	2.252	*1684*
a country village	15.7%	1.0%	13.8%	17.9%	1.773	*676*
or, a farm or home in the country?	2.5%	0.4%	1.8%	3.4%	1.576	102

Table A.7 Complex standard errors and confidence intervals of selected variables (continued)

	% (p)	Complex standard error of p	5% confidence interval		DEFT	*Base*
			Lower	Upper		
Attitudinal variables (face-to-face interview)						
Some people say there is very little real poverty in Britain today. Others say there is quite a lot. Which comes closest to your view? (three quarters of sample)						
... that there is very little real poverty in Britain,	31.1%	1.1%	28.9%	33.3%	1.285	*896*
or, that there is quite a lot?	64.6%	1.1%	62.4%	66.8%	1.256	*1,865*
How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics… (full sample)						
... a great deal	14.1%	0.7%	12.8%	15.6%	1.259	*562*
quite a lot	24.0%	0.8%	22.4%	25.6%	1.206	*951*
Some	31.0%	0.9%	29.1%	32.9%	1.279	*1,216*
not very much	20.1%	0.8%	18.6%	21.7%	1.250	*743*
or, none at all?	10.8%	0.7%	9.6%	12.2%	1.327	*407*
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with local doctors or GPs ... (one quarter of sample)						
... Satisfied,	63.0%	1.9%	59.1%	66.7%	1.246	*617*
… neither,	12.6%	1.3%	10.2%	15.3%	1.211	*115*
… dissatisfied?	24.1%	1.6%	21.0%	27.4%	1.186	*238*
Attitudinal variables (self-completion)						
Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards (full sample)						
Agree	51.6%	1.2%	49.2%	54.0%	1.349	*1660*
Neither agree nor disagree	24.1%	0.9%	22.2%	26.0%	1.225	*698*
Disagree	22.6%	1.0%	20.6%	24.7%	1.364	*660*
Do unmarried couples who live together have the same legal rights as married couples? (three quarters of sample)						
Definitely do	14.2%	0.9%	12.6%	16.0%	1.211	*330*
Probably do	33.1%	1.2%	30.8%	35.5%	1.216	*745*
Probably do not	22.7%	1.0%	20.8%	24.8%	1.186	*526*
Definitely do not	16.8%	0.9%	15.1%	18.6%	1.142	*444*
If you were to consider your life in general how happy or unhappy would you say you are? (half sample)						
Happy	88.9%	1.0%	86.8%	90.7%	1.235	*1380*
Not happy	9.2%	0.9%	7.5%	11.2%	1.263	*142*

The table shows that most of the questions asked of all sample members have a confidence interval of around plus or minus two to three of the survey percentage. This means that we can be 95% certain that the true population percentage is within two to three percentage points (in either direction) of the percentage we report.

Variables closely related to the geographic location of the respondent (for example, whether they live in a big city, a small town or a village) typically have larger variation. Consequently, the design effects calculated for these variables in a clustered sample will be greater than the design effects calculated for variables less strongly associated with area. Also, sampling errors for percentages based only on respondents to just one of the versions of the questionnaire, or on subgroups within the sample, are larger than they would have been had the questions been asked of everyone.

Analysis techniques

Regression

Regression analysis aims to summarise the relationship between a 'dependent' variable and one or more 'independent' variables. It shows how well we can estimate a respondent's score on the dependent variable from knowledge of their scores on the independent variables. It is often undertaken to support a claim that the phenomena measured by the independent variables *cause* the phenomenon measured by the dependent variable. However, the causal ordering, if any, between the variables cannot be verified or falsified by the technique. Causality can only be inferred through special experimental designs or through assumptions made by the analyst.

All regression analysis assumes that the relationship between the dependent and each of the independent variables takes a particular form. In *linear regression*, it is assumed that the relationship can be adequately summarised by a straight line. This means that a 1 percentage point increase in the value of an independent variable is assumed to have the same impact on the value of the dependent variable on average, irrespective of the previous values of those variables.

Strictly speaking the technique assumes that both the dependent and the independent variables are measured on an interval-level scale, although it may sometimes still be applied even where this is not the case. For example, one can use an ordinal variable (e.g. a Likert scale) as a *dependent* variable if one is willing to assume that there is an underlying interval-level scale and the difference between the observed ordinal scale and the underlying interval scale is due to random measurement error. Often the answers to a number of Likert-type questions are averaged to give a dependent variable that is more like a continuous variable. Categorical or nominal data can be used as *independent* variables by converting them into dummy or binary variables; these are variables where the only valid scores are 0 and 1, with 1 signifying membership of a particular category and 0 otherwise.

The assumptions of linear regression cause particular difficulties where the *dependent* variable is binary. The assumption that the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables is a straight line means that it can produce estimated values for the dependent variable of less than 0 or greater than 1. In this case it may be more appropriate to assume that the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables takes the form of an S-curve, where the impact on the dependent variable of a one-point increase in an independent variable becomes progressively less the closer the value of the dependent variable approaches 0 or 1. *Logistic regression* is an alternative form of regression which fits such an S-curve rather than a straight line. The technique can also be adapted to analyse multinomial non-interval-level dependent variables, that is, variables which classify respondents into more than two categories.

The two statistical scores most commonly reported from the results of regression analyses are:

A measure of variance explained: This summarises how well all the independent variables combined can account for the variation in respondents' scores in the dependent variable. The higher the measure, the more accurately we are able in general to estimate the correct value of each respondent's score on the dependent variable from knowledge of their scores on the independent variables.

A parameter estimate: This shows how much the dependent variable will change on average, given a one-unit change in the independent variable (while holding all other independent variables in the model constant). The parameter estimate has a positive sign if an increase in the value of the independent variable results in an increase in the value of the dependent variable. It has a negative sign if an increase in the value of the independent variable results in a decrease in the value of the dependent variable. If the parameter estimates are standardised, it is possible to compare the relative impact of different independent variables; those variables with the largest standardised estimates can be said to have the biggest impact on the value of the dependent variable.

Regression also tests for the statistical significance of parameter estimates. A parameter estimate is said to be significant at the 5% level if the range of the values encompassed by its 95% confidence interval (see also section on sampling errors) are either all positive or all negative. This means that there is less than a 5% chance that the association we have found between the dependent variable and the independent variable is simply the result of sampling error and does not reflect a relationship that actually exists in the general population.

Factor analysis

Factor analysis is a statistical technique which aims to identify whether there are one or more apparent sources of commonality to the answers given by respondents to a set of questions. It ascertains the smallest number of *factors* (or dimensions) which can most economically summarise all of the variation found in the set of questions being analysed. Factors are established where respondents who gave a particular answer to one question in the set tended to give the same answer as each other to one or more of the other questions in the set. The technique is most useful when a relatively small number of factors are able to account for a relatively large proportion of the variance in all of the questions in the set.

The technique produces a *factor loading* for each question (or variable) on each factor. Where questions have a high loading on the same factor, then it will be the case that respondents who gave a particular answer to one of these questions tended to give a similar answer to each other at the other questions. The technique is most commonly used in attitudinal research to try to identify the underlying ideological dimensions which apparently structure attitudes towards the subject in question.

Table and figure conventions

The following conventions are used for tables and figures throughout the report.

1. Data in the tables are from the 2018 British Social Attitudes survey unless otherwise indicated.
2. Tables are percentaged as indicated by the percentage signs.
3. In tables, '*' indicates less than 0.5 % but greater than zero, and '–' indicates zero.
4. When findings based on the responses of fewer than 100 respondents are reported in the text, reference is made to the small base size. These findings are excluded from line charts, but included in tables.
5. Percentages equal to or greater than 0.5 have been rounded up (e.g. 0.5 % = 1 %; 36.5 % = 37 %).
6. In many tables the proportions of respondents answering "Don't know" or not giving an answer are not shown. This, together with the effects of rounding and weighting, means that percentages will not always add up to 100 %.
7. The self-completion questionnaire was not completed by all respondents to the main questionnaire (see Technical details). Percentage responses to the self-completion questionnaire are based on all those who completed it.
8. The unweighted bases shown in the tables (the number of

respondents who answered the question) are printed in small italics.

9. In time series line charts, survey readings are indicated by data markers. While the line between data markers indicates an overall pattern, where there is no data marker the position of the line cannot be taken as an accurate reading for that year.

International Social Survey Programme

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) is run by a group of research organisations in different countries, each of which undertakes to field annually an agreed module of questions on a chosen topic area. Since 1985, an International Social Survey Programme module has been included in one of the BSA self-completion questionnaires. Each module is chosen for repetition at intervals to allow comparisons both between countries (membership is currently standing at 42) and over time. In 2018, the chosen subject was Religion, and the module was carried on the A and B versions of the self-completion questionnaire (variables ruhappy – attathst). Further information on ISSP is available on their website: www.issp.org.

Notes

1. Until 1991 all British Social Attitudes samples were drawn from the Electoral Register (ER). However, following concern that this sampling frame might be deficient in its coverage of certain population subgroups, a 'splicing' experiment was conducted in 1991. We are grateful to the Market Research Development Fund for contributing towards the costs of this experiment. Its purpose was to investigate whether a switch to PAF would disrupt the time-series – for instance, by lowering response rates or affecting the distribution of responses to particular questions. In the event, it was concluded that the change from ER to PAF was unlikely to affect time trends in any noticeable ways, and that no adjustment factors were necessary. Since significant differences in efficiency exist between PAF and ER, and because we considered it untenable to continue to use a frame that is known to be biased, we decided to adopt PAF as the sampling frame for future British Social Attitudes surveys. For details of the PAF/ER 'splicing' experiment, see Lynn and Taylor (1995).
2. This includes households not containing any adults aged 18 or over, vacant dwelling units, derelict dwelling units, non-resident addresses and other deadwood.
3. In 1993 it was decided to mount a split-sample experiment designed to test the applicability of Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) to the British Social Attitudes survey series. CAPI has been used increasingly over the past decade as an alternative to traditional interviewing techniques. As the name implies, CAPI involves the use of a laptop computer during the interview, with the interviewer entering responses directly into the computer. One of the advantages of CAPI is that it significantly reduces both the amount of time spent on data processing and the number of coding and editing errors. There was, however, concern that a different interviewing technique might alter the distribution of responses and so affect the year-on-year consistency of British Social Attitudes data.

   Following the experiment, it was decided to change over to CAPI completely in 1994 (the self-completion questionnaire still being administered in the conventional way). The results of the experiment are discussed in the British Social Attitudes 11th Report (Lynn and Purdon, 1994).
4. Interview times recorded as less than 20 minutes were excluded, as these timings were likely to be errors.
5. An experiment was conducted on the 1991 British Social Attitudes survey (Jowell et al., 1992) which showed that sending advance letters to sampled addresses before fieldwork begins has very little impact on response rates. However, interviewers do find that an advance letter helps them to introduce the survey on the doorstep, and a majority of respondents have said that

they preferred some advance notice. For these reasons, advance letters have been used on the British Social Attitudes surveys since 1991.

6. Because of methodological experiments on scale development, the exact items detailed in this section have not been asked on all versions of the questionnaire each year.
7. In 1994 only, this item was replaced by: Ordinary people get their fair share of the nation's wealth *[Wealth1]*.
8. In constructing the scale, a decision had to be taken on how to treat missing values ("Don't know" and "Not answered"). Respondents who had more than two missing values on the left–right scale and more than three missing values on the libertarian–authoritarian and welfarism scales were excluded from that scale. For respondents with fewer missing values, "Don't know" was recoded to the midpoint of the scale and "Not answered" was recoded to the scale mean for that respondent on their valid items.

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