

NatCen

Social Research that works for society

Introduction to the British Social Attitudes survey

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September 2016 UKDS Workshop

What we'll cover

- NatCen – who we are
- Why measure attitudes?
- The British Social Attitudes survey series
- Methodology
 - The survey process
 - Sampling and weighting
 - Data collection
 - Question design
- Dissemination and accessing data
 - Things to consider for BSA analysis



Who are NatCen?

- Founded in 1969, Britain's largest independent social research agency
- Not-for-profit
- Variety of clients and funders
- Range of types of research



What we do

For the last 40 years we've worked on behalf of government and charities to find out what people really think about important social issues and how Britain is run.

By really understanding the complexity of people's lives and attitudes, we give the public a powerful role in shaping decisions and services that make a difference to everyone.

NatCen

Social Research that works for society

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Why we're here

We're Britain's largest independent social research agency. By really understanding the complexity of people's lives and attitudes, we give the public a powerful role in shaping decisions and services that make a difference to everyone.

[Read more about us](#)



National Travel Survey publishes latest report

[Read more](#)



Only 8% of teenagers eat their 5-a-day

[National Diet & Nutrition Survey report](#)

Sign up for our newsletter



Our research: All our reports are free to download



Britain's first online probability-based panel

[Read more](#)

Attitudinal research



Many people who seem to have unquestioning faith in behavioural data retreat into agnosticism when faced with attitudinal data from similar samples

Roger Jowell, 1st BSA report

Legitimate concerns?

“Attitudes don’t matter”

- Behaviour and experience is more important
- Attitudes and behaviour aren’t always consistent
- Don’t want government by opinion poll

“You can’t measure attitudes”

- Easier to measure objective ‘facts’?
- Answers affected by question wording, context

Attitudes do matter

Attitudes and values are an important part of our social world

- Helps our understanding of society, how it works and how it is changing
- Importance to policy makers

If we don't try and measure them, people will guess

- Competing claims about “what the public think”
- Dominant voices get heard

The British Social Attitudes survey series



2.

Overview of BSA

- Initiated by NatCen in 1983, fielded annually
- Measures social and political attitudes and moral values
- Main focus is on time series
- Annual cross-sectional survey (not panel)
- Random probability sample
- 3000+ respondents across Britain
- CAPI interview and self-completion
- Range of funding sources: government depts, charities, grants from ESRC and other bodies
- Data and findings widely used



“Over 30 years, the annual British Social Attitudes survey has illuminated the evolving mood of the nation”

Financial Times, September 2012



Example topic areas

Health

Transport

Education

Social security and welfare

Pensions

Work-life balance

Housing

Immigration

Euthanasia

Genomic science

Redistribution of income

National identity

Disability

Political attitudes and
voting behaviour

Attitudes to Armed
Forces

International comparisons

International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)

GB module fielded on BSA and funded by ESRC

Rotating topics asked in c.50 countries worldwide

International Social Survey Programme 2015

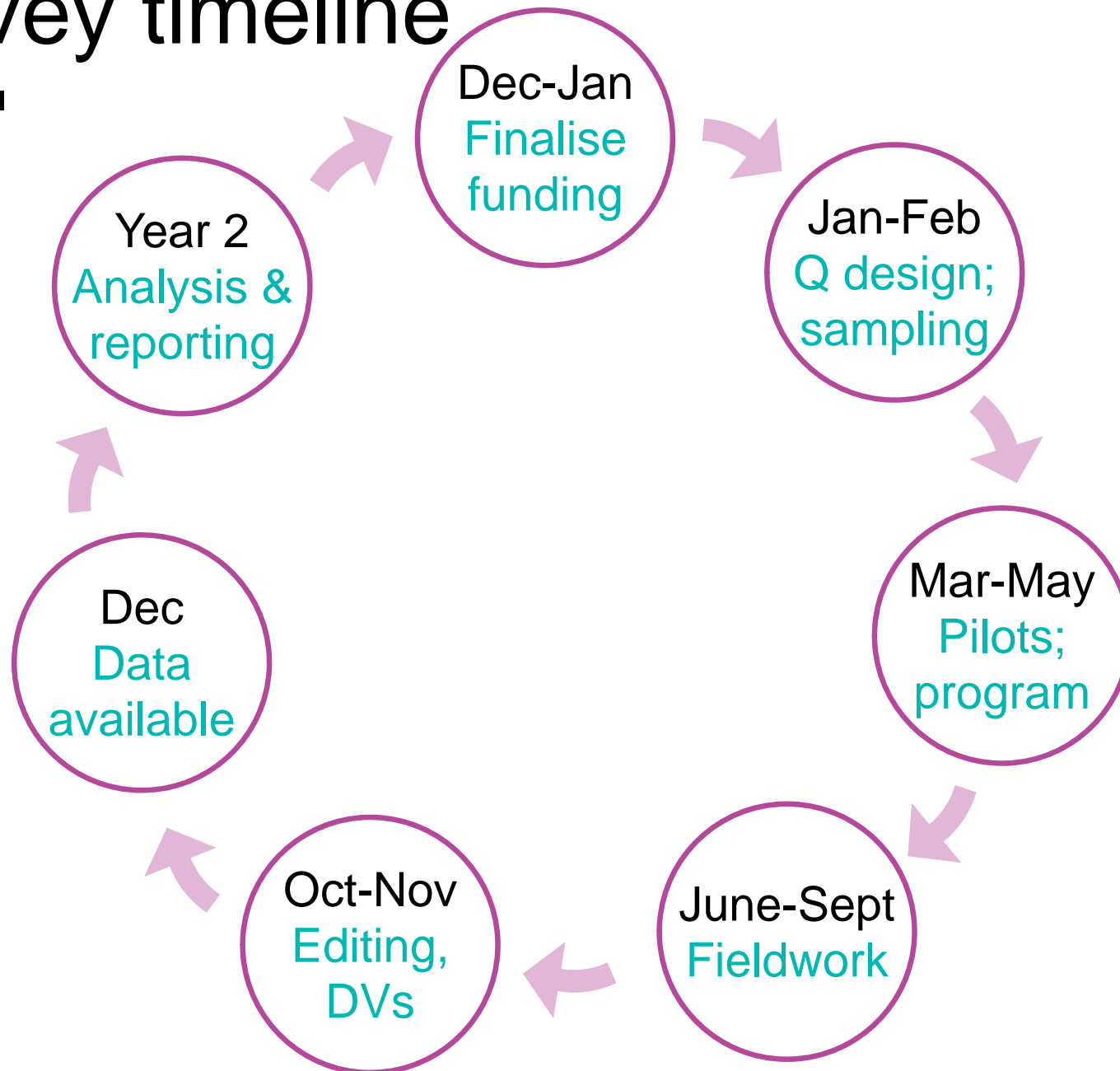


Methodology & survey processes



3.

BSA survey timeline



Sampling

Achieved sample needs to be:

- representative of target population
- large enough to obtain robust estimates

Random probability sampling

Sample frame - Postcode Address File (PAF)



Selecting addresses then people

PERSON/DU:	2	3	4	5	6	
SELECT:	1	3	2	3	4	
PERSON/DU:	7	8	9	10	11	12
SELECT:	6	8	7	5	3	10

Multi-stage sampling

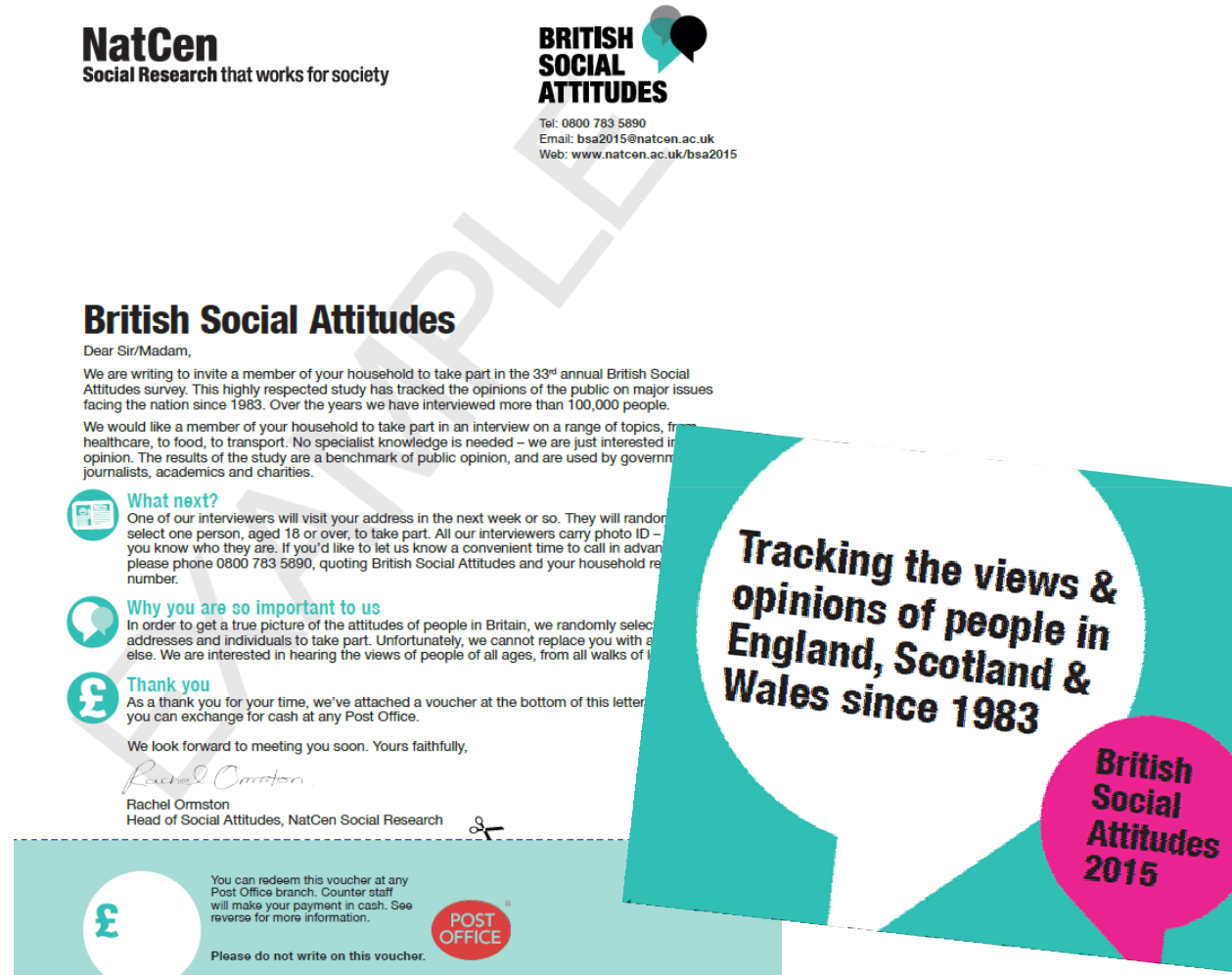
- Select postcode sectors
- Select addresses within those sectors

Interviewer selection

- Select flat within building (if necessary)
- Select person using random selection grid

Fieldwork

1. Advance letter / postcard sent to respondents
2. Interviewer approaches address and makes appointment
3. Interview conducted and data transmitted



The interview

1. Face-to-face

- Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) in the home
- Use of showcards for most questions

2. Self-completion

- Booklet left with respondent
- Sensitive questions, questions asked in a battery, questions that may elicit 'socially-desirable' responses

Weighting

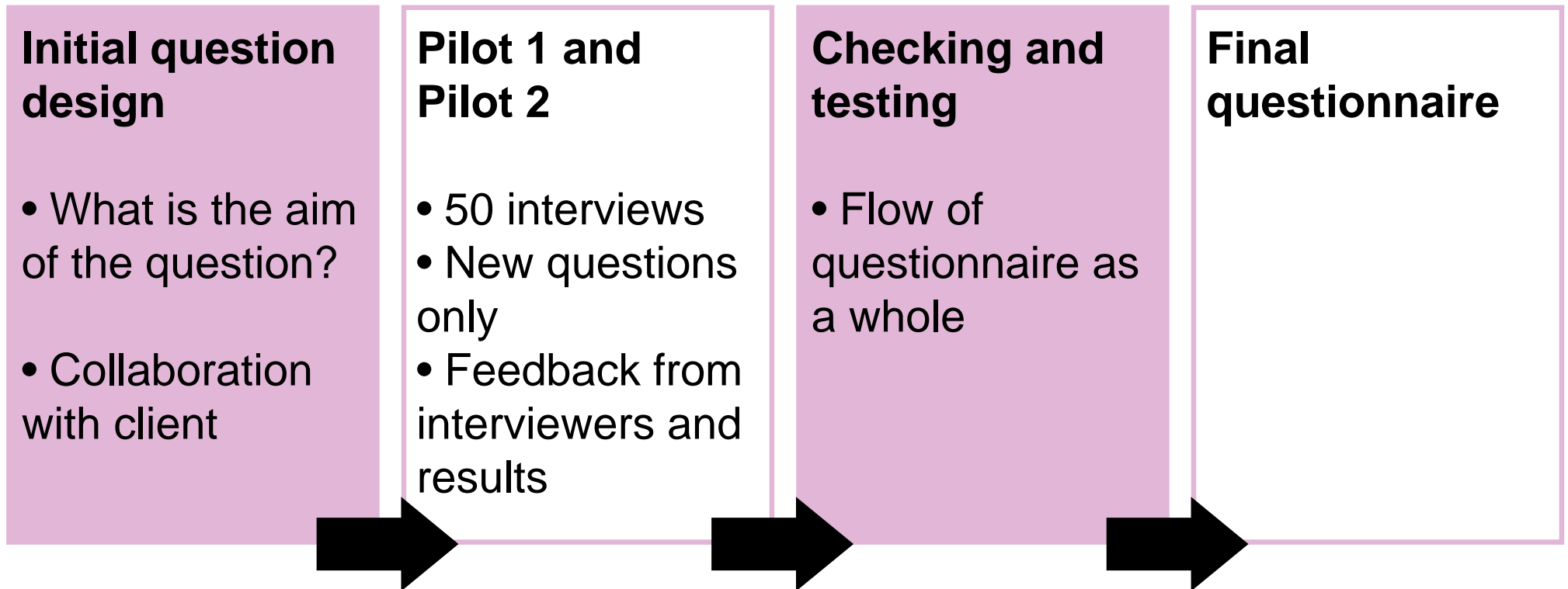
- Three stages of weighting
 - selection weights
 - non-response weights
 - calibration weights
- Single weight variable = “wtfactor”
- Same in all years
- Weights must be applied for all analysis (the datasets are not pre-weighted)

Attitudinal question design



4.

Questionnaire design process



Attitude question design

- Different design process?
- New questions
 - Testing and pre-testing new questions
- Repeat questions
 - Repeating a older time series measure
 - Designing a new (i.e. future time series) question
- Other considerations
 - CAPI or self-completion
 - Order effects
 - A complex issue can't be covered by just one or two questions

Common question formats

- agree/disagree (likert scale) batteries
- either/or statements (forced choice)
- priority ranking
- Scenarios
- Other types of answer options:
 - true / false
 - in favour / against
 - wrong / right
 - numeric scale between two opposite positions
 - what *should* happen & what *actually* happens

Dissemination and accessing BSA data



5.

Latest report: Britain divided? Public attitudes after seven years of austerity

Editors: John Curtice, Miranda Phillips and Elizabeth Clery

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Social class
- ▶ Welfare
- ▶ Work
- ▶ NHS
- ▶ Mental health
- ▶ Politics
- ▶ Euroscepticism
- ▶ Explore the data



Introduction



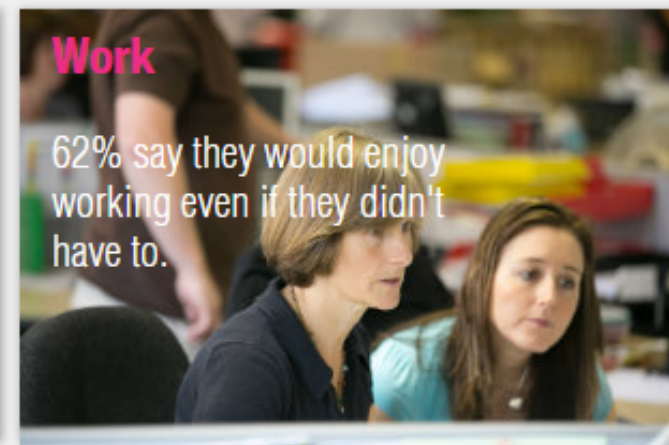
Social Class



60%
say they are
working class,
the same as in 1983

Work

62% say they would enjoy working even if they didn't have to.



Welfare

NHS

Politics



You are here: [British Social Attitudes](#) > [Latest report](#) > [British Social Attitudes 33](#) > [Interactive: What will Brexit mean for Britain?](#)

- Work
- NHS
- Food
- Alcohol
- Mental health
- Politics
- Euroscepticism
- Random sampling
- Brexit: What will it mean for Britain?
- [Interactive: What will Brexit mean for Britain?](#)
- Technical details
- British Social Attitudes 32
- British Social Attitudes 31
- British Social Attitudes 30
- British Social Attitudes 29
- British Social Attitudes 28
- Scottish Social Attitudes

What does the public think will happen if the UK leaves the EU?



[Click here to explore!](#)

69%^{??}

unsure about the impact of Brexit.



57%

think immigration would be lower if Britain left the EU.

40%

think the economy will be worse off if we



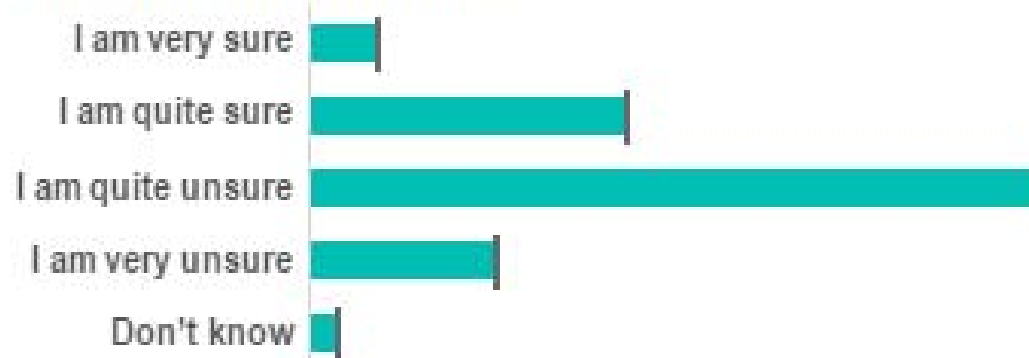
44%

believe Brexit would make little difference to GB's influence in

Click the buttons above to see what different groups of people think about the EU and how this compares to the national response, indicated by the reference lines (|).
Click on the arrows to find out more about the key issues.

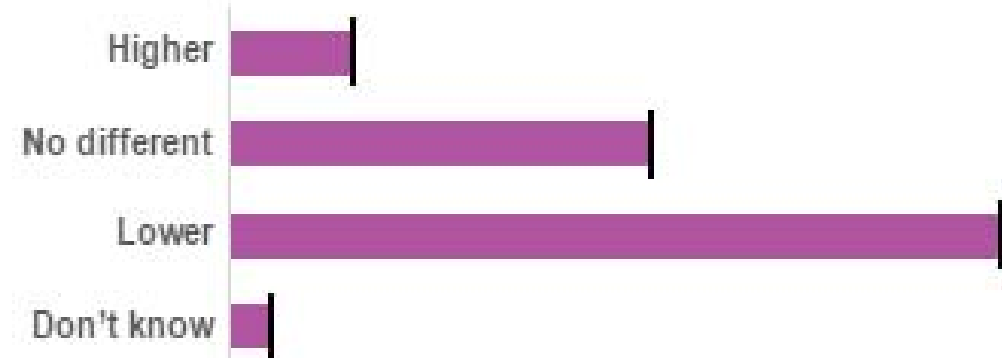
Certainty

How sure are you about what would happen if GB were to leave the EU – whether good or bad?



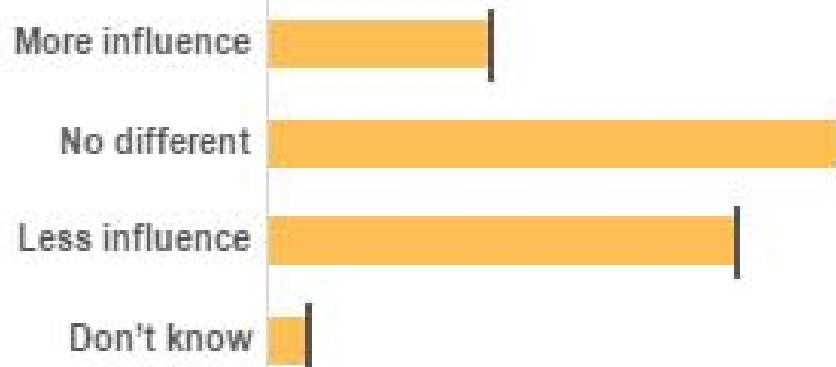
Immigration

If GB left the EU immigration would be...



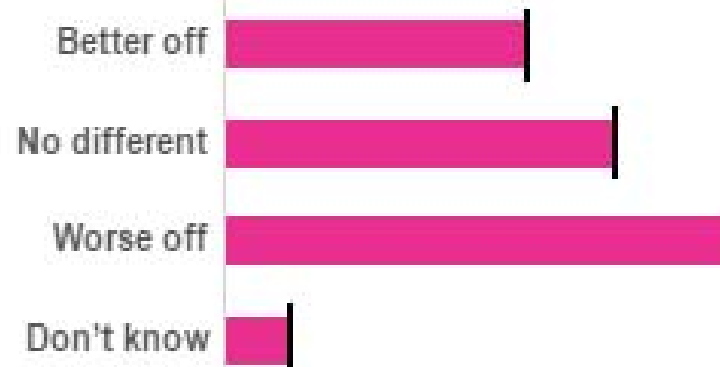
Influence

If GB left the EU we would have...



Economy

If GB left the EU the economy would be...



Degree

Higher educ below
degree/A level

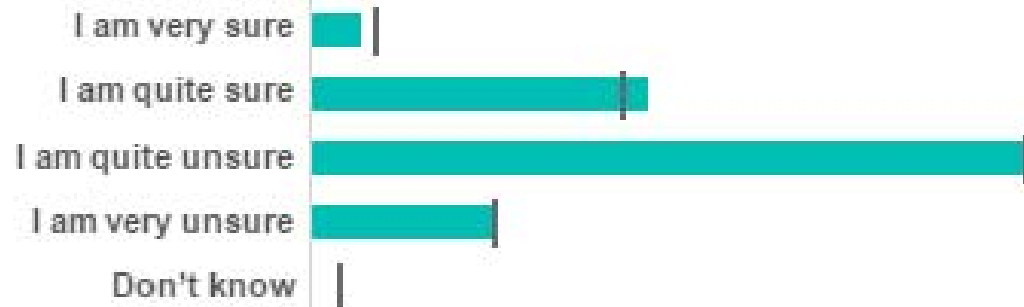
O level or equiv/CSE

No qualification

Click the buttons above to see what different groups of people think about the EU and how this compares to the national response, indicated by the reference lines (|).
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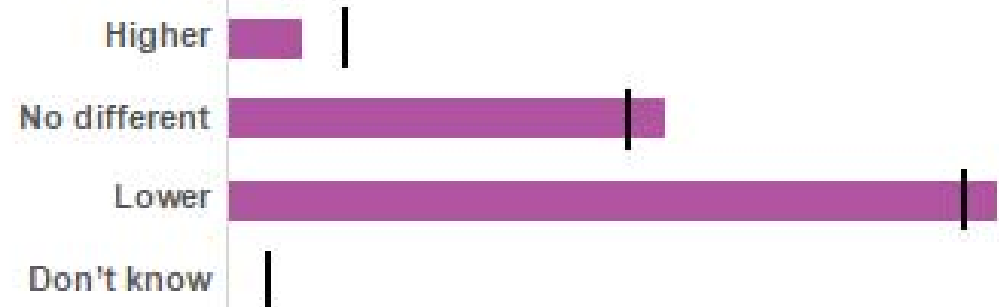
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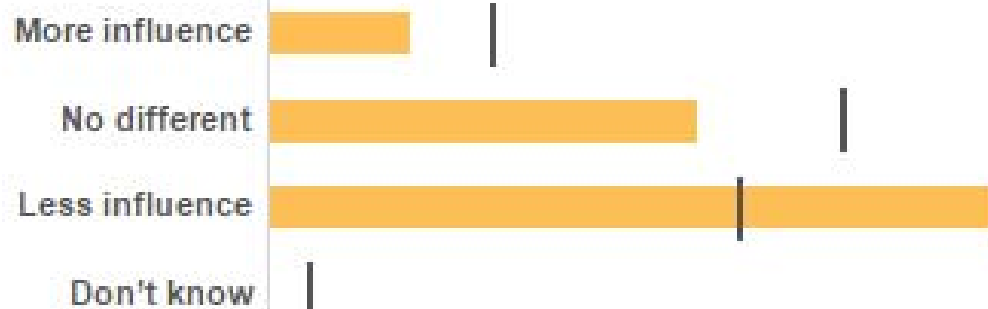
Immigration

If GB left the EU immigration would be...



Influence

If GB left the EU we would have...



Economy

If GB left the EU the economy would be...



When to use BSA

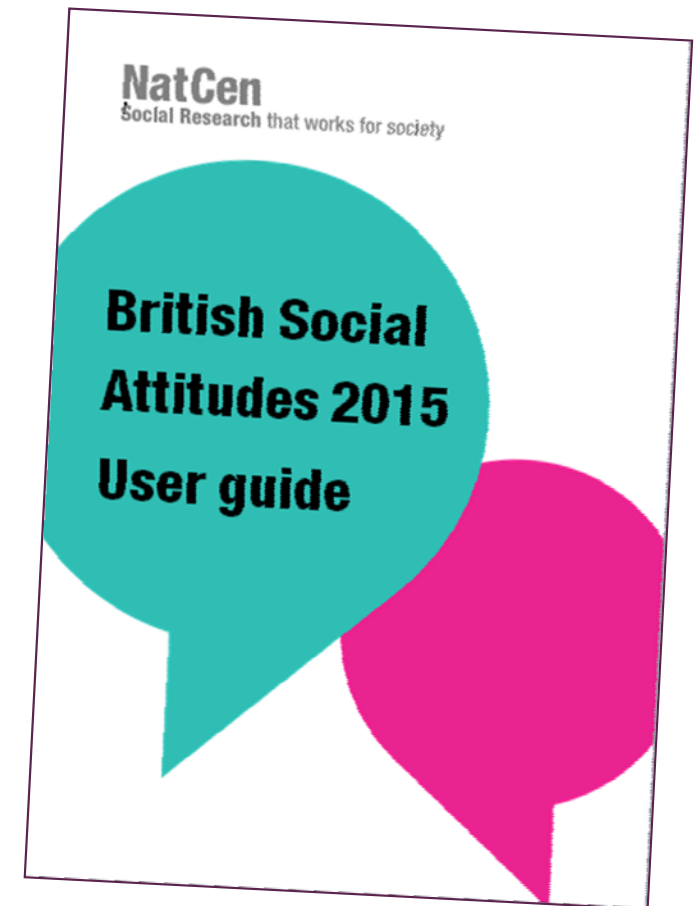
- To understand in detail what the public thinks about particular issues
- To explore differences between groups – analysis by key demographics
- To examine trends in attitudes over time for the public and different groups – time series analysis

When not to use BSA

- Detailed geographic analysis
- When interested in understanding how individuals' views change over time (longitudinal analysis)

Data tools and resources

- Nesstar - UK Data Service
- UK Data Archive
 - Online search tool for variables
discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/variables
 - Online analysis
 - BSA user guide, survey documentation
- Britsocat.com



British Social Attitudes Information System

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[previous screen](#)

[survey years](#) | [contents list](#) | [search questions](#) | [survey/series details](#)

Working List

British Social Attitudes Contents List

Working List Menu

Year Selection

- Questions in *any* year
- Questions in *every* year

Years chosen

- 2014
- 2013
- 2012
- 2011
- 2010
- 2009
- 2008
- 2007
- 2006
- 2005
- 2004

- [Add years](#)
- [Choose all years](#)
- [Remove selected years](#)
- [Clear list](#)

Welcome to the British Social Attitudes Contents List. For details and instructions, please click [here](#).

Please navigate through the tree to locate areas of interest. Alternatively, use the drop-down box below to select the relevant category and then press the Select button. (You can hasten the process by clicking on the drop-down box and then typing in the first few letters of the category you are looking for.) To clear your previous selections, press the Refresh button.

ABILITY TO HELP OTHERS

Select Refresh

- + ECONOMICS, TRADE, INDUSTRY AND MARKETS
- + EDUCATION
- + HEALTH
- + HOMES, NEIGHBOURHOODS, HOUSING, LAND USE
- + INEQUALITY, INCOME REDISTRIBUTION, SOCIAL WELFARE
- + INTERNET, MEDIA, COMMUNICATIONS
- + LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT
- + LAW, CRIME, LEGAL SYSTEMS
- + POLITICS, GOVERNMENT, EU
- + SCIENCE, NATURE, THE ENVIRONMENT
- + SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND DEMOGRAPHY
- + SOCIETY, CULTURE
- + TRANSPORT, TRAVEL, MOBILITY

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ABILITY TO HELP OTHERS ▼

Select

Refresh

+ ECONOMICS, TRADE, INDUSTRY AND MARKETS

+ EDUCATION

- HEALTH

+ FITNESS, DIET AND LIFESTYLE

- HEALTH SERVICES

+ CHILDBEARING, FAMILY PLANNING AND ABORTION

- FUNDING OF HEALTH SERVICES

- GOVERNMENT SPENDING

[About areas of government spending. Would you like to see more or less government spending on ... Health \(2006, 1996, 1994, 1993, 1991, 1990, 1985\)](#)

[About someone on a low income, who needed hospital treatment, deciding they wanted to go to a hospital more than 100 miles from their home, because they thought they would get better treatment there. But they cannot afford the train or bus fare to get there. What do you think should happen? \(2007\)](#)

[About the National Health Service. Which of these three types of family would you say gets best value from their taxes out of the National Health Service ... those with high, middle or low incomes? \(1984, 1983\)](#)

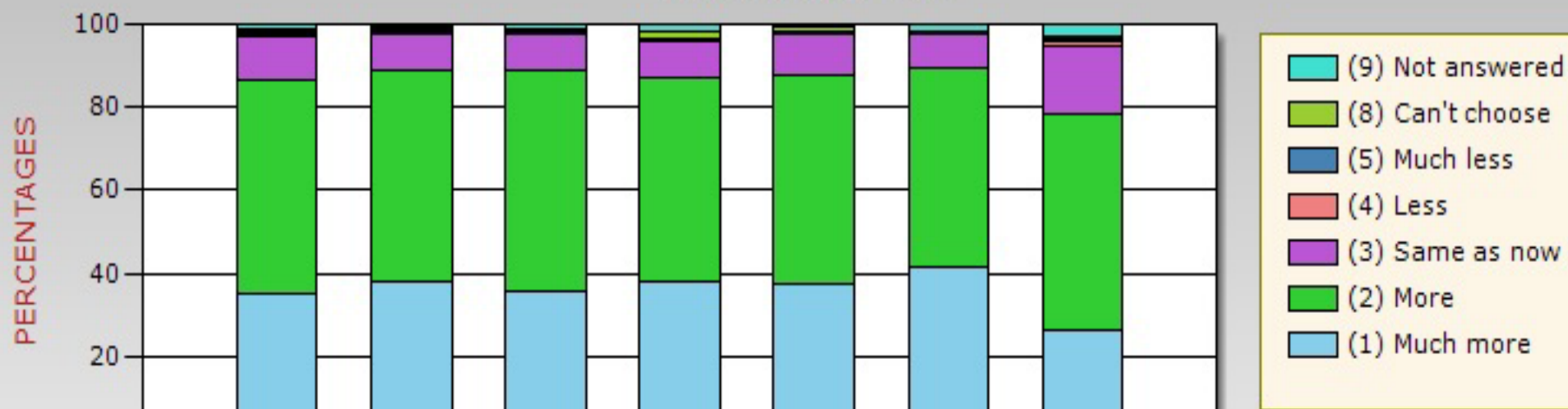
[Are you in favour of or against public funding of organ transplants? \(2011\)](#)

Government spending: Health

Survey year

	1985	1990	1991	1993	1994	1996	2006
<input type="checkbox"/> (1) Much more	35.1% 527	38.4% 902	35.7% 430	37.9% 481	37.8% 367	41.9% 416	26.3% 245
<input type="checkbox"/> (2) More	51.5% 773	50.5% 1,185	53.0% 639	49.1% 622	49.6% 482	47.6% 473	52.1% 485
<input type="checkbox"/> (3) Same as now	10.6% 160	9.2% 215	9.0% 108	8.8% 111	9.9% 97	8.1% 80	16.6% 154
<input type="checkbox"/> (4) Less	0.5% 7	0.3% 8	0.7% 9	0.5% 6	0.7% 6	0.3% 3	1.3% 12
<input type="checkbox"/> (5) Much less	0.3% 4	0.1% 2	0.1% 1	0.4% 5	0.3% 3	0.1% 1	0.2% 2
<input type="checkbox"/> (8) Can't choose	0.7% 10	0.6% 14	0.5% 6	1.5% 19	0.8% 7	0.2% 2	0.8% 7
<input type="checkbox"/> (9) Not answered	1.4% 21	0.9% 22	1.1% 13	1.9% 24	0.9% 9	1.8% 17	2.8% 26
	1,502	2,349	1,207	1,268	971	993	932

GVSPEND2 BY TIME



'Missing' responses

“Don't know”

“Can't choose”

“Refusal”

“Not answered”

Dealing with 'missing' values

- On BSA they are **not** considered 'missing'
- Included in the analysis because they represent a valid attitudinal response
- Don't know/can't choose = code 8/88/888
- Refusal/not answered = code 9/99/999
- Different to most other surveys (where they will be set to missing -8 / -9)
- Background variables with missing data may need different approach

Time-series analysis: practical issues

- Separate datasets
- Naming conventions – all variables will have the same name if the question wording is not altered
- Frequency of repeat questions may be sporadic
- Focus on the overall trend – changes from year-to-year seen in that context

Key points

- Attitudes do matter, and you can measure them
- Importance of question wording and testing
- BSA is a rich data resource for the British social science community, dating back over 30 years, and accessible to all social researchers
- Cross-sectional design (not longitudinal)
- Time series analysis
- Weight the data (wtfactor)
- Include “Don’t know” and “Refuse” in your analysis

Expectations are important

- Respondents are complex human beings – with conflicting patterns of belief
- Survey questions can't do the job of a qualitative study...
- ... nor the analysis
- Can't expect respondents to perform unreasonable tasks
- Don't over-estimate people's knowledge of or interest in a topic
- A complex issue can't be covered by just one or two questions