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**Social Research** that works for society



# **British Social Attitudes 2020 User guide**

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# 1 British Social Attitudes

The British Social Attitudes survey has been running since 1983. During that time, we have surveyed almost 120,000 members of the public, each year asking up to 4,000 people up to 300 questions about their attitudes on a variety of topics ranging from welfare to genomic science. (The survey was not run in 1988 and 1992 when we ran the British Election Study series, which included relevant attitudinal questions.)

The British Social Attitudes surveys inform the development of public policy and are an important barometer of public attitudes used by opinion leaders and social commentators. The topics we cover in each survey are determined by the interests of our funders, some questions have been asked every year, others every couple of years, and others less frequently. Repeating some questions over time means that we are able to provide a unique insight into how social attitudes have changed during the last three decades.

Each year we publish a report, freely available online, using the data we have collected to present a compelling picture of Britain's social, moral and political attitudes. Our latest report based on data collected in 2019 is our 37<sup>th</sup> Report:

[www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk).

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## 2 Accessing the data

Users from non-commercial organisations can download the data directly from the UK Data Service. Access to the data requires Athens registration. You can download the data as SPSS or STATA files, or as a TAB file. Data is archived around a year after the completion of fieldwork (giving time for analysis and reporting).

Commercial organisations must notify the National Centre for Social Research by email ([BSA@natcen.ac.uk](mailto:BSA@natcen.ac.uk)) stating their intended use and seeking permission for download. Permission to download may incur a charge. UKDS will be monitoring usage and providing NatCen with usage reports.

### 3 What topics do the datasets cover?

Historically, the questionnaire consisted of two parts – the face-to-face interview and the self-completion. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the British Social Attitudes has run for the first time with a mixed-mode design of web and CATI. Questions included from previous rounds, as well as new modules have been adapted for web self-completion and telephone interviewing.

In 2020 the survey covered the following:

Topic	Funder
Employment	NatCen Social Research
Politics	NatCen Social Research
Welfare	NatCen Social Research
Benefits and income	NatCen Social Research
National identity and ethnicity	NatCen Social Research
Religion	NatCen Social Research
Disability	NatCen Social Research
Education	NatCen Social Research
EU referendum and the general election	NatCen Social Research
Political Trust	British Academy
Work and Health	Department for Work and Pensions
Child maintenance	Department for Work and Pensions
Digital	Department for Work and Pensions
Workplace and COVID-19	Department for Work and Pensions
Pensions and retirement	Department for Work and Pensions

A wide range of background and classificatory questions are also always included.

A number of the same questions are asked most years, enabling us to track change over time.

To see which questions have been asked in which years, check BritSocAt ([www.britsocat.com](http://www.britsocat.com)) where you will find a searchable database of questions asked over the survey's history, or contact a member of the British Social Attitudes team at [BSA@natcen.ac.uk](mailto:BSA@natcen.ac.uk).

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## 4 The sample

In 2020 the sample for the British Social Attitudes survey was split into six versions. Most questions were asked on all questionnaire versions and were thus asked of the full sample (3964 respondents). The module on political trust was asked on versions 5 and 6, which cover approximately a third of the sample (1332 respondents).

The British Social Attitudes 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. 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 are not on the PAF.

A sample file of non-clustered addresses was produced from the PAF. Addresses located North of the Caledonian Canal and on the Isles of Scilly were excluded for consistency with previous years of BSA. The sample file was then split into a main sample and two reserve samples. The main sample and first reserve sample were issued.

### Selection of individuals

Up to two individuals aged 18 or over living at the selected addresses were eligible to take part. The invitation and reminder letters contained two unique access codes allowing any two adults aged 18+ living within the household to log in and complete the questionnaire.

## 5 Fieldwork

Fieldwork was carried out between the end of October and early December 2020.

Fieldwork used a mixed-mode design, offering the choice of both web and telephone survey completion. The fieldwork period was the same for both modes. The invitation and first reminder letters sent to respondents mainly directed them to taking part online, presenting the telephone interview as an option in the frequently asked questions. The second reminder letter made the telephone interview more explicit as an option.

Telephone fieldwork was conducted by interviewers drawn from NatCen Social Research's regular panel. Before fieldwork began, interviewers attended a briefing conference to familiarise themselves with the questionnaire.

The mean interview length for each version of the questionnaire was:

Version 1: 32 minutes

Version 2: 31 minutes

Version 3: 34 minutes

Version 4: 33 minutes

Version 5: 37 minutes

Version 6: 36 minutes

Overall, we achieved a response rate of between 13.1% and 14.4%. Details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: BSA 2020 response rate	
Issued sample	22,140
Estimate number of deadwood/ineligible <sup>1</sup>	9%
Eligible addresses	20,147
Number of fully productive cases	3,964
Number of addresses with at least one complete	2,898
Number of completes per address	1.37
Unadjusted response rate	13.1%
Adjusted response rate	14.4%

### Advance mailings

Sampled addresses were sent an advance letter inviting adults aged 18 or over and resident at the household to take part in the survey. Up to two adults could take part in each household. Participants had the option to complete the survey via web or by telephone. Non-responsive households were sent two reminder letters, which included the access codes for the web survey and the BSA contact number. A £10 voucher was issued upon completion and sent out to the respondents via email or post.

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<sup>1</sup> Estimate based on BSA 2019 % of ineligible/deadwood addresses.



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## Weighting the data

As with previous waves of the BSA, weights have been constructed to adjust for differential non-response. The change in methodology from “face-to-face” to “push-to-web” meant that non-response could occur within households as well as at the level of the address. This contrasts with previous years where one adult was selected at random at each address, and selection weights were used to account for differential selection probabilities.

As described in section xx, addresses were selected with equal probability, and up to two people in one household at each address were invited to take part. Weighting was therefore required to adjust for non-response *within* households in addition to accounting for non-response amongst households at selected addresses. Separate non-response models were constructed to deal with each of these elements of non-response. Finally, calibration weighting was used to adjust the profile of the responding sample to match the population in terms of age, sex, education, tenure, ethnicity and region.

To minimise non-response bias, data should be weighted in all univariate analyses. Weighting is also recommended for multivariate analysis. The file is not pre-weighted: before running any analysis, please “switch on” the NatCen computed weight (**BSA20\_wt\_new**).

Only one weight is available this year. Due to the change in method, there is no selection weight (see above) and no separate self-completion weight (as the majority of responses were entirely from self-completion on the web).

## Non-response models

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 responding sample, which can lead to bias in the survey estimates. Given that up to two people per household could respond this year, non-response can occur at the household level, where no one from the selected address responds, or within households, where only one person responds in households with two or more adults. Where information is available about non-responding addresses, propensity for households (at selected addresses) to respond can be modelled, and the results used to generate a non-response weight. Similarly, where information is available about responding households, the expected number of responses within these households can also be modelled. Hence, this year there are two non-response weights for households – one for between household non-response and one for within household non-response. These are intended to reduce bias in the responding sample resulting from differential response to the survey.

Between household response was modelled using logistic regression, with the dependent variable indicating whether or not someone at each selected address responded to the survey. A number of area-level variables, including aggregated census data and deprivation indices were considered for modeling response. From this model, the between household non-response weight was calculated as the inverse of the predicted response probability for each responding household.

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Within household response was also modelled using logistic regression, with the dependent variable indicating whether each responding address had one or two responses to the survey. Single-adult<sup>2</sup> addresses and non-responding addresses were not included in this stage of non-response modelling. As well as the area-level information used before, additional household-level variables such as household size, tenure, whether anyone in the household has a degree and income were also considered. The predicted probability from the model was used to estimate the expected number of completed surveys in responding households. This was calculated as  $1 \times (1-p) + 2 \times p = 1+p$ , where  $p$  is the probability of two responses. The within household non-response weight was calculated as the ratio of the number of adults in the household (capped at 4) divided by the expected number of responses for each responding household, i.e.  $\text{numad} / (1+p)$ , where  $\text{numad}$  is the number of adults in the household (capped at 4).

The composite (pre-calibration) weight was calculated as the product of the two non-response weights above.

## Calibration weighting

In the final stage of weighting, calibration was used to adjust the composite non-response weight (from the previous stages) so that the weighted sample was in line with the best available population estimates of GB adults for: sex by age, region, education by age, ethnicity and housing tenure.

Population estimates were obtained from the 2019 mid-year population estimates published by the Office for National Statistics/General Register Office for Scotland (for age, sex and region) and the latest Labour Force Survey (for education, ethnicity and housing tenure).

The final calibrated weight (**BSA20\_wt\_new**) has been scaled to the responding sample size. It should be used for all analyses of BSA 2020.

## 7 Analysing the data

British Social Attitudes provides a compelling account of the public's economic, political, moral and social attitudes over a 38-year period. It can be used to provide an annual snapshot of the public's attitudes through an analysis of a single dataset or to create a narrative of the public's attitudes over a period of time by analysing several datasets.

A number of questions have been repeated over the years. Unless the question wording has been changed, the original variable name has been retained. This year, most questions have been optimised for web and telephone modes. Caution is needed when presenting findings from BSA 2020 alongside previous survey years, as differences between years may be due to the change in survey mode.

Please note that the data must be weighted in all analysis. The file is not pre-weighted. Before running any analysis, please weight the data using the NatCen computed weight (BSA20\_wt).

(As long as the weight is included when specifying the sample design, the complex sample procedures will ensure that the data is weighted; other procedures may not weight the data automatically, however.)

Unlike some other surveys, on British Social Attitudes responses of 'Don't know' or 'Prefer not to answer' are considered to be valid responses and should be included in the base for analysis.

There are a number of identification variables that users may find useful in analyses. These are listed below. In addition, there are a number of potentially useful derived variables that are outlined in the following section.

Table 6 Demographic variables	
RespSx	Respondent's sex
RAgeCat	Respondent's age group
RaceOri4	Respondent's ethnicity
ReligSum20	Respondent's religion
REarn	Total gross individual income
HEdQual2	Respondent's highest educational qualification
MarStat6	Respondent's marital status

## Derived variables

The following derived variables are included in the datasets as standard.

### Age

RAgeCat (dv) splits respondent's age into seven age categories, pulling information from RespAge (asked from all respondents) and Ragebnd (which collects banded age from respondents who refused to give an answer at RespAge).

### Region

The dataset includes a region variable ([GOR\_ID]), which categorises cases into 11 regions, formerly the Government Office Regions. [GOR\_ID] combines Inner London and Outer London into one region. Earlier datasets between 2003–2016 use GOR2 (although GOR\_ID is also available); from 2000–2002 the equivalent variable was [GOR]. Before 2000, (1983–1999) [StRegion] was the variable denoting region. It should be noted that the coding of these variables are not the same, and that [GOR2] splits London into 'outer' and 'inner'. Users should be aware of potentially small sample sizes for regional subgroups, and the implications that has for analysis.

Table 7 Coding of region					
Code	StRegion (1983–1999)	GOR (2000–2002)	GOR2 (2003–2016)	GOR_ID (2017–2019)	
1	Scotland	North East	North East	North East	
2	North of England	North West	North West	North West	
3	North West	Merseyside	Yorkshire and the Humber	Yorkshire and the Humber	
4	Yorks and Humberside	Yorkshire & Humber	East Midlands	East Midlands	
5	West Midlands	East Midlands	West Midlands	West Midlands	
6	East Midlands	West Midlands	East of England	East of England	
7	East Anglia	South West	Inner London	London	
8	South West	East of England	Outer London	South East	
9	South East (excl. Greater London)	South East	South East	South West	
10	Greater London	London	South West	Wales	
11	Wales	Wales	Wales	Scotland	
12		Scotland	Scotland		
13					
14					

## Standard Occupational Classification and National Statistics Socio-Economic 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. For the 2020 survey, respondents were asked to self-code their current or last job into an 8 category variable (EmpOCC). An employment status variable that captures information on employment status and size of organisation was also derived (EmplStatDV) based on questions collect information on whether an individual is:

- an employer, self-employed or an employee (EMPSTAT);
- size of organisation (employ); and
- supervisory status (Superv).

The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) was derived from a combination of information on occupation and employment status. In the dataset this variable is called 'RClassGP'. It is important to note this difference how the NS-SEC variable was derived this year, and to take this into account when comparing findings from previous survey years.

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. Respondents can be allocated to one of the following categories: "in full time education/training", "in work, waiting to take up work", "in paid work but furloughed", "on maternity or paternity leave", "unemployed", "retired" or "other" using the data recorded at REconsum20.

### Note on analysing changing attitudes by social class over time

When analysing how the attitudes of different social classes have changed over time, you need to use a variable that gives a comparable measure of social class across the lifetime of the survey (during which class has been measured using a range of different variables). There is no perfect solution, but our strong preference is to use Goldthorpe-Heath (5 category version) class – RGHClass – before the 2000 SOC became a standard feature of the survey in 2000, and NS-SEC analytic class – RNSEG – thereafter. At the 5-class level these two schemes are conceptually based on more or less the same principles. (You can only do this going back to 1987.) For **BSA 2016 and later years** a variable RNSEGD has been included in the data set which bands RNSEG into 5 categories. Before 2016, a 5-category variable can be derived using RNSEG and the following syntax.

**For BSA 2001 up until BSA 2015 use: RNSEGD (derived as below)**

RECODE RNSEG (1 , 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 = 1) (9 = 2) (3, 15, 16, 17 = 3) (11, 12 = 4) (10, 13, 14, 18 = 5) (else = sysmis) into RNSEGD.

Execute.

Variable labels RNSEGD "RNSEG compressed".

Value labels RNSEGD

1 "Salaried (Higher & Lower)"

2 "Clerical (Junior non-manual)"

3 "Petty Bourgeois"

4 "Foremen/Technicians"

5 "Working class"

99 "Don't know".

**For BSA 2000 and earlier years use: RGHClass (1983 Heath Goldthorpe scale)**

RECODE RGHClass (1 thru 2 = 1) (3 thru 4 = 2) (5 thru 7 = 3) (8 = 4) (9 thru 11 = 5) (else = sysmis) into RGHClassD.

Execute.

Variable labels RGHClassD "RGHClass compressed".

Value labels RGHClassD

1 "Professional / managerial"

2 "Routine"

3 "Small petty bourgeoisie / farmers"

4 "Manual"

5 "Other manual"

99 "Don't know".

## 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:

[SupParty]

*Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party? [Yes/No]*

[If "No"/"Don't know"]

[ClosePty]

*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]

[PartyFW]<sup>3</sup>

*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); Brexit Party; Other; None; Refused to say]

Note: 2019 Brexit Party was added as an additional code to PartyId3.

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Note: 2014 PartyId3 was added with additional code for UKIP.

Note: 1983–1987 the Green Party did not have its own code.

Note: 1983–1987 Liberal Party, Social Democratic Party, and Liberal Alliance are separate codes and often combined for analysis purposes.

## Income

The BSA dataset includes a standard measure of household income [HHIncome]. This year, respondents were asked to place themselves into banded income quartiles. The bandings used are designed to be representative of those that exist in Britain and are taken from the Family Resources Survey (see <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/frs>). REarn asked respondents currently in work to place themselves within estimated earnings quartiles.

## Attitude scales

Since 1986, the British Social Attitudes surveys have included two attitude scales which aim to measure where respondents stand on certain underlying value dimensions: left–right and libertarian–authoritarian. 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]

*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]

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*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.

The scales were tested for reliability (as measured by Cronbach's alpha) using the BSA 2020 data. The Cronbach's alpha (unstandardised items) for the scales in 2020 were 0.84 for the left-right scale, 0.90 for the welfarism scale and 0.81 for the libertarian authoritarian scale. This level of reliability can generally be considered 'good' for the left-right, welfare scales and the libertarian authoritarian scale. (DeVellis, 2003: 95–96)

Please be aware the three scale variables use code 9 to record whether a respondent has answered 'don't know' or 'refused' at enough of the attitude statements to prevent



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us from deriving their score. If a user wishes to look at average scores they will need to declare these values as 'missing'.

## Multi-code variables

Where a respondent was given the opportunity to give more than one response at a question, we have created binary variables for each response option available. These binary variables record the number of respondents who chose that response option. If a respondent answered "don't know" or refused to answer a multi-code question, the "don't know" or "prefer not to answer" response has been included at each of the binary variables.

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## Further information

For further information on anything contained in this booklet please contact:

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