

## **Department of Politics**

### **DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FORM**

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**Name:**

**E-mail address:**

**MSc or MRes programme:**

MSc Social Research

**Full-time or part-time?**

Part-time

**Title of proposed dissertation:**

Perception of social conflict as a determinant of opinion on the welfare state in Great Britain

**Description of subject area**

This dissertation sets out to investigate the extent to which the perception of social cleavages between rich and poor, and between the middle class and working class, could affect public attitudes towards the expansion or reduction of the welfare state in Great Britain. The literature on the topic of opinion in favour or against redistribution policies has extensively investigated the extent to which different income levels and belonging to a certain social class have an impact on citizens' preferences for income redistribution (Blekesaune, 2007). However, to date, little light has been shed on how the image of society, in the guise of perceived social cleavages between rich and poor and individuals belonging to different social classes, could influence perceptions surrounding government intervention to support poverty. Exploring perceptions of social conflict provides the opportunity to investigate a multifaceted variable, which is underpinned by several factors, including socio-demographic characteristics, self-interest, ideology, political and religious affiliation (Halman & Oorschot, 2000) as well as how society is portrayed in the media and the political debate (Spruyt, et al., 2018).

The study contributes to a better understanding of social division in Great Britain by means of an in-depth examination of what determines the perception of social conflict and how this affects welfare state preferences. This research aims to explore the following provisional research questions:

- 1) To what extent do socio-demographic characteristics<sup>1</sup>, political affiliation, and opinion on migration shape perception of social conflict?
- 2) To what extent does the perception of social conflict influence opinions about the need to expand or shrink government investment in welfare benefits for the poor?

**What scholarly literature will you be examining?**

I will start by defining the notion of the welfare state, with a specific focus on welfare policies in Britain. I will then examine the body of literature that investigates individual characteristics that play a role in influencing public opinion on the welfare state (Blekesaune, 2007). These include self-interests, i.e. individuals that are more likely to need benefits in the future, or are already claiming welfare state benefits, are more prone to value the welfare state and the positive impact it generates on society (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989); socio-demographic characteristics such as age, income level, religion, social class, ethnicity, gender and level of education; political stances and ideology (Lewin-Epstein, et al., 2003). I will subsequently review the specific literature that explores the extent to which the image of a society, in terms of social conflict, affects attitudes towards welfare (Yamamura, 2016). In this context, I will also attempt to define the phenomenon of social conflict, exploring the body of research on conflict theory, starting from Marx and Weber (George & Wilding, 2013).

**What primary research material might you use?**

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<sup>1</sup> Including age, income level, religion, social class, ethnicity, gender and level of education

This dissertation is quantitative in nature. In this context, the primary research material that I intend to use is the British Social Attitude 37, which was undertaken in 2019. The dataset includes a set of pertinent variables including perceptions around the need to expand or shrink the welfare state in Great Britain, which constitutes the main dependent variable that my hypothesis will attempt to test. The survey also offers a wealth of independent variables to be included in the empirical models including perceptions of conflict between rich and poor and middle class and working class; opinion on migration, as well as a plethora of demographic variables that could be incorporated into the model as control.

**Have you identified or spoken with a potential supervisor? If so, who?**

I have not identified a potential supervisor yet but I would benefit from one that has in-depth knowledge of quantitative methods.

## Bibliography

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