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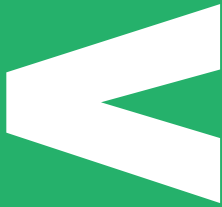
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Inequality

The IFS Deaton Review

Attitudes to inequalities

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An IFS initiative funded by the Nuffield Foundation

Attitudes to inequalities

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Executive summary

Attitudes to inequalities have important real-world implications

Perceptions of the extent and causes of inequalities are vitally important to the functioning of societies, economies and politics. If the public thinks that inequalities are large – and, crucially, that they are *unfair* – this can undermine faith in political and economic systems as a whole.

Public perceptions of and attitudes towards these inequalities have important real-world implications. There is plenty of evidence that people's concerns about inequalities in society can spill over into the political sphere – movements such as *Occupy*, the *gilets jaunes* in France and *Black Lives Matter* have all given voice to the concerns of those who feel disadvantaged or marginalised in society. The election of populist leaders in many advanced economies may also in part reflect frustrations about inequalities.

People are generally uncomfortable about inequalities but are split on what action should be taken to address them

While inequality is only infrequently flagged as an issue of public concern in unprompted questions, when people are asked explicitly how they feel about specific types of inequality, they typically express concern and discomfort with them, and wish for them to be reduced. Despite this apparent disapproval of inequalities (or the scale of them), people seem to be more reticent to support action by government to address them. In particular, there appears to be hostility towards more interventionist remedies, such as the redistribution of income or affirmative action, though lighter-touch measures or those with widely shared benefits garner more support.

Whether people think inequalities are fair is partly a result of how they are thought to arise

In general, inequalities that arise through merit or effort are more acceptable than those that arise through luck. Data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) indicate that a majority of people believe they live in societies where hard work is the most important determinant of getting ahead, a trend observed across countries and increasing since the 1980s. Conversely, people are less accepting of income inequality when it is seen to be undeserved. They are more concerned when they perceive income inequality to be driven by structural barriers (such as family background) than by effort.

The Individualists versus the Structuralists

Two competing explanations for the existence of inequalities dominate: that systematic features of social arrangements create and perpetuate inequalities (the structuralist view) on one hand and that outcomes are determined entirely by individual efforts (the individualist view) on the other.

We divided the sample into groups, based on responses to questions about structural and individual causes of inequalities, fairness, and perceptions of inequalities in the UK: what it takes to get ahead, the reasons for economic differences between black and white people, the equality

of UK society prior to the coronavirus pandemic, and equality of opportunity in education, health and the application of law (full details of the model used are provided in the appendix).

Three distinct groups within the population emerged from this analysis:

- *'The Structuralists', 32% of the sample.* When it comes to what it takes to get ahead, this group recognises characteristics outside the individual's control, such as coming from a wealthy family, more than do other groups. Strong majorities in this group attribute economic differences between black and white people to discrimination and a lack of educational opportunities. This group is most likely to recognise inequalities and to describe UK society as unequal before the COVID-19 pandemic. Large majorities, around 75%, strongly agree that there is a different law for the rich and the poor and believe people with money are a lot better able to live healthy lives. This group also rates the fairness of educational opportunities in the UK lower than the rest of the sample.
- *'In the Middle', 39% of the sample.* This group tends not to use the extreme options when responding to our questions: almost nothing is 'essential' or 'not at all' important for getting ahead; almost no one in this group described society as 'very' equal or 'very' unequal. This group seems to recognise inequalities and a range of external and individualistic causes. From these data, it is not possible to tell whether this group is genuinely some intermediate mixture of the other two groups on questions of inequalities, or whether these people are relatively disengaged from these issues and therefore less inclined to express any view.
- *'The Individualists', 29% of the sample.* This group is eager to see the world as fair. It strongly rejects roles for coming from a wealthy family, race and religion in getting ahead, and generally does not consider factors beyond the individual's control to be important. Views are spread on whether there is a different law for rich and poor, whether money facilitates a healthier lifestyle, and whether society was equal before COVID-19 – in all these domains, there is a slight tendency to recognise the inequality, but there is also quite a lot of endorsement for responses that deny these inequalities.

These attitudinal segments capture something distinct from political identities: while, for example, just over half of the Structuralist group are Labour supporters, a large proportion support other parties. There are significant proportions of both Leave and Remain supporters in each group. They are also not that different from each other in age, social grade, geography and gender. The segmentation therefore seems to be capturing additional aspects of perceptions of inequalities, beyond these characteristics. However, there are some notable differences in education, with more highly educated people tending to be Structuralists.

Key findings

- **Both Structuralists and Individualists prioritise inequalities in income and between places, but Individualists are generally less concerned about most types of inequality.** Among Individualists, 55% identified area-based inequality as one of the most serious – more than any other type of inequality for this group – but this was still less than the 68% of Structuralists who responded similarly.
- **Structuralists are most likely to believe the pandemic will deepen inequalities in Britain, and are most likely to consider this a problem.** More than 60% of Structuralists expect the pandemic to increase inequalities in the UK, compared with 39% of people In the Middle and 31% of Individualists. Structuralists were more likely to say increasing inequalities in incomes

or life expectancies between various groups would be a problem than were the group In the Middle or Individualists.

- **Structuralists are more likely to think benefits for unemployed people are too low.** In contrast, more Individualists believe they are too high (38%) than too low (28%).
- **Structuralists are more positive about the furlough scheme than other groups.** People In the Middle and Individualists are more likely to agree that the furlough scheme causes reliance on the state and/or discourages jobseeking than Structuralists.

Conclusions

- **There is no one national set of attitudes towards inequalities. Instead, a few distinct world views are discernible.** These cut across traditional political party affiliations, indicating that we cannot rely on voting patterns as a perfect proxy for attitudes to inequalities. It also suggests that action to address inequalities can garner cross-party support, if framed and targeted correctly.
- **Some types of inequality worry us more than others.** Area-based inequality (between more and less deprived areas) tops the list of the most serious inequalities among our respondents. Crucially, this concern is seen pretty equally across our three groups of Structuralists, Individualists and those In the Middle, and supporters of different political parties. These findings provide a strong endorsement for 'levelling up', and for this to be a central component of the coronavirus recovery strategy.
- **Our views of fair inequalities are nuanced – merit matters, but so does need.** While all groups (Individualists, Structuralists and those In the Middle) emphasise the importance of a fair society rewarding hard work, there is also a shared belief that those who are in need should be taken care of, irrespective of their reciprocal contribution to society.
- **Though there is some wariness of the term 'redistribution', there is clearer support for government action to address inequalities.** Framing is therefore an important aspect of winning over sceptical groups. Notably, Conservative support is markedly higher when intervention is framed as 'taking measures' to address inequalities, rather than redistribution specifically. Understanding what these 'measures' are should be a key area for further testing.
- **Our attitudes are not necessarily fixed, and the coronavirus crisis may provide an opening for a more interventionist approach to tackling inequalities.** Time-series data show oscillations in support for redistribution, and quite a pronounced softening in attitudes towards the generosity of benefit support, for example. Moreover, there are indications that the pandemic has in some ways provided a window for change: more than a third of each group believe the COVID-19 crisis increases the need for government to redistribute income from rich to poor, and almost half of us believe the experience of the pandemic has strengthened the case for a more active role for government in the future.

1. Introduction

Why are attitudes to inequalities important?

Perceptions of the extent and causes of inequalities are vitally important to the functioning of societies, economies and politics. If the public thinks that inequalities are large – and, crucially, that they are *unfair* – this can undermine faith in political and economic systems as a whole (Deaton, 2013).

This applies not only to economic forms of inequality (such as the unequal distribution of income and wealth), but across a wide range of domains, including unequal outcomes in health and education, and across characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, geography and age. As the launch report of the IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities points out, 'Inequality cannot be reduced to any one dimension: it is the culmination of myriad forms of privilege and disadvantage' (Joyce and Xu, 2019).

Public perceptions of and attitudes towards these inequalities have important real-world implications. There is plenty of evidence that people's concerns about inequalities in society can spill over into the political sphere – movements such as *Occupy*, the *gilets jaunes* in France (Guilluy, 2018) and *Black Lives Matter* have all given voice to the concerns of those who feel disadvantaged or marginalised in society. The election of populist leaders in many advanced economies may also in part reflect frustrations about inequalities (Pastor and Veronesi, 2019).

Empirical research into the political and social implications of inequalities perceptions and attitudes is limited (and largely focuses on the implications of perceived economic inequality), but does provide indications that these beliefs matter. Looking at South Korea, Jo (2016) finds the belief that income differences are too high and a perception that education inequality exists are positively correlated with taking part in political protest. In Chile, Castillo et al. (2015) find that those who believe economic inequality to be unjust and who prefer redistributive policies are more likely to participate politically, including in protests. Similarly, in China, Lei (2020) finds that concern about income inequality can impact trust in the political system. In the same study, those who believed income differences to be too large were more likely to distrust county and provincial governments, though this did not apply to trust in the central government. Those who believed that the prevailing level of income inequality violated socialist principles were more likely to distrust all levels of government.

However, such findings are not always replicated across different national contexts. In a multi-country study using data from the World Values Survey, Jo and Choi (2019) find the relationship to be less straightforward. While they do not observe a link between perceptions of economic inequality and involvement in protests at the whole-sample level, the relationship does appear stronger in OECD countries. Further, the relationship between seeing society as unequal and protest participation is stronger for those with higher levels of education or who are members of a union.

Studies also look at the impact of economic inequality perceptions on other indicators of satisfaction with prevailing social, political and economic systems. In a cross-country study, Kuhn (2019) finds that when levels of perceived wage inequality are higher, belief in the role of meritocratic processes in shaping outcomes tends to be weaker. For Kuhn, this implies that the perception of living in an unequal society can erode trust in the market economic system. In a separate multi-country study, Gimpelson and Treisman (2018) find that perceived income

inequality may matter for social cohesion, identifying a positive association between inequality perceptions and reported conflict between rich and poor.

Judgements about the extent of economic inequality also relate to what is demanded from government in response. Gimpelson and Treisman (2018) find that it is perceived, rather than actual, levels of income inequality that are correlated with public preferences for redistribution. This may be related to the degree of concern about inequalities. Niehues (2014) finds that while actual income inequality has little bearing on whether people believe income gaps to be too high, a positive relationship does exist when looking at data on perceptions of inequalities.

Alesina, Stantcheva and Teso (2018) look not at perceived economic inequality per se, but perceptions of intergenerational mobility in a set of five countries (including the US and the UK). They find that individuals who are more pessimistic about opportunities for progression tend to support more intervention and redistribution by government, particularly in the form of spending on public services such as education and health. The relationship is weaker for 'equality of outcome' policies such as progressive taxation or social safety nets, and also differs according to the political views of the respondent. Right-wing respondents who hold more pessimistic views of mobility do not tend to support the government intervening to address inequalities.

These findings point towards the importance of public attitudes to and perceptions of inequalities in shaping political and policy agendas; however, the relative shortage of research in this area has been noted (see, for example, Jo and Choi (2019)). Janmaat (2013) points to a gap in empirical work looking at the links between attitudes towards economic inequality and social outcomes, in contrast with the large body of research looking at these relationships for objective levels of inequalities. Where research has been carried out, there is a further challenge in disentangling causality. Even if attitudes to inequalities correlate with other attitudes, such as political trust or attitudes towards redistribution, it is impossible to say which attitude causes the other, or whether both are part of a wider set of beliefs or values (Janmaat, 2013).

Our study

In this chapter, we look not just at economic inequality, but at attitudes towards other types of inequalities that also have an important bearing on people's lives, including in health and education, and inequalities between genders, ethnic or racial groups, generations and people living in different areas. This list is clearly far from exhaustive. Important inequalities exist across many other aspects of society – for example, on the basis of religion, immigration or disability status, and in political power, among others – but given space constraints and available data, we have focused on these seven inequality types as they have been the most extensively studied in the existing literature. Though attitudes to these types of inequality are the most studied, there is still considerably less work exploring attitudes to these types of inequality than to economic inequality.

We believe this look across inequality types to be valuable given the lack of research into how we think and feel about non-economic types of inequality. Views on different types of inequality have tended to be studied in isolation, with few attempts to compare attitudes across inequality types, partly due to the difficulties inherent with such an exercise. Relatively few studies also look at how attitudes to and perceptions of inequalities differ across the population, focusing instead on the public overall. But how different groups think about inequalities, including their causes and appropriate responses, is likely to have significant implications for policymaking.

We look to address these research gaps and provide new insight into attitudes towards inequalities in this chapter, using a range of approaches and data sources. These include a review of the existing literature and public opinion data, as well as new data collected through a dedicated survey. To shed light on how attitudes might differ across the population, we also conducted a latent class analysis using these new data, which points to three groups with distinct sets of attitudes – the Structuralists, the Individualists and those ‘In the Middle’.

- *‘The Structuralists’, 32% of the sample.* When it comes to what it takes to get ahead in life, this group recognises characteristics outside people’s control, such as coming from a wealthy family, more than do other groups.
- *‘The Individualists’, 29% of the sample.* This group is eager to see the world as fair. It strongly rejects the influence of coming from a wealthy family, race and religion in getting ahead, and generally does not consider factors beyond the individual’s control to be important.
- *‘In the Middle’, 39% of the sample.* This group tends not to select the more extreme options in response to questions about inequalities. It is difficult to tell whether this group is an intermediate mixture of the other two groups in terms of its views, or whether it is just less inclined to describe anything in the extreme.

We are conscious too of the unique context engendered by the COVID-19 crisis. The experience of the pandemic has brought a range of inequalities into sharper relief, and highlighted the relationships between them. Large-scale government intervention through the furlough scheme and other forms of support may also have implications for the public’s views on the role of the state. This only adds to the need to understand attitudes across inequality types, and the sorts of responses that people would like to see. We therefore explore both the direct impact of COVID-19 on perceptions of inequalities and early indications of whether the crisis has affected perspectives on government intervention to address them.

More specifically, we look to address the following research questions in this chapter:

- What inequalities do people perceive in society, and how important are these inequalities considered to be? Are some seen as more important than others?
- How do beliefs in the role of individual effort or merit interact with attitudes towards different types of inequality, and the extent to which each inequality type is seen to be fair?
- What are people’s attitudes towards policy measures to address inequalities? Does how these measures are framed affect support for them?
- How do different groups in society think about inequalities and responses to them? In particular, is there a difference between those who believe in ‘structural’ causes of inequalities and those who believe personal effort and merit are more important?
- What are people’s perceptions of and attitudes towards inequalities in the context of COVID-19? Are there indications that the experience of the pandemic may be shifting attitudes to both inequalities and government intervention?

We turn first to the existing data and research, summarising key findings on why attitudes to inequalities matter, and what is known about perceptions of and attitudes towards different types

of inequality. We then explore the literature on what might shape these attitudes, drawing on theories of fairness and meritocracy. We next introduce our own analysis of new survey data on attitudes towards inequalities, focusing in particular on the results of our segmentation analysis and on the differing attitudes of the Structuralists, Individualists and those In the Middle. We conclude with reflections on what these findings might mean for policymakers.

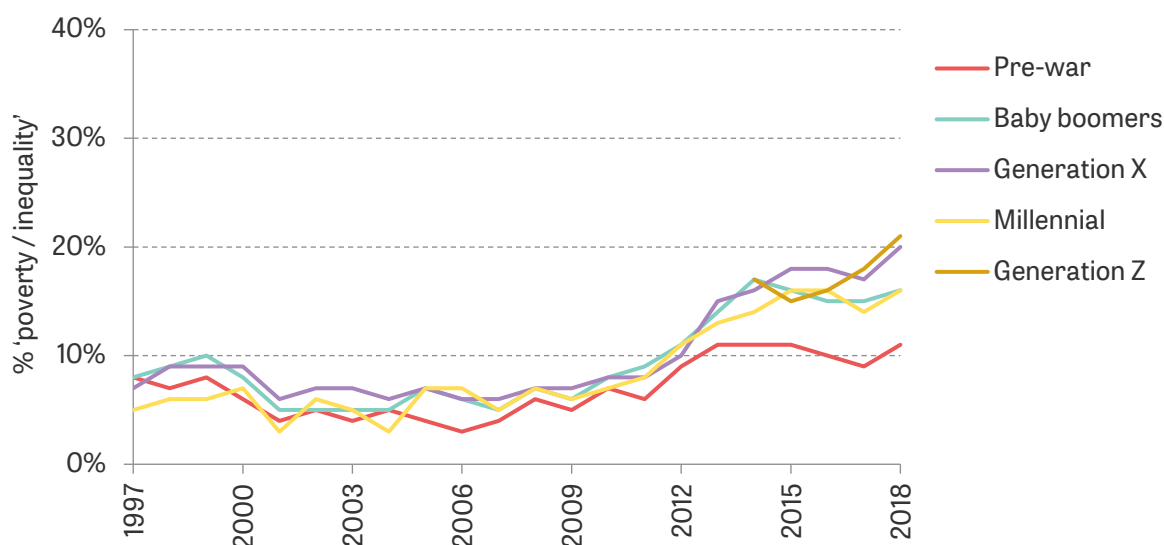
2. What does the research reveal about attitudes to inequalities?

We provide here a short survey of the existing literature and data on perceptions of and attitudes towards inequalities, focusing as far as possible on the UK evidence. Given the breadth of this issue, this is not intended as an exhaustive review, but as an overview of key themes and trends.

When considered against other public policy issues, inequality in material circumstances does not come out explicitly as an important public concern, though its salience has increased in recent years

The Ipsos MORI Issues Index asks Britons what they consider to be the most important issues facing the country today, and tracks their responses over time. Figure 1 shows the long-term trend for the share of respondents identifying 'poverty/inequality' as one of the most important issues facing the country, with an uptick visible in recent years. While there is no clear pattern of differences in concern between generations, it is the oldest age groups who tend to be least likely to view poverty and/or inequality as nationally important issues.

Figure 1. Main issues facing Britain today



Note: Question wording: 'What would you say is the most important issue facing Britain today?'. Categories: pre-war probably born before 1945; baby boomers probably born 1945–65; Generation X probably born 1966–79; millennial probably born 1980–95; Generation Z probably born 1996 onwards.

Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index.

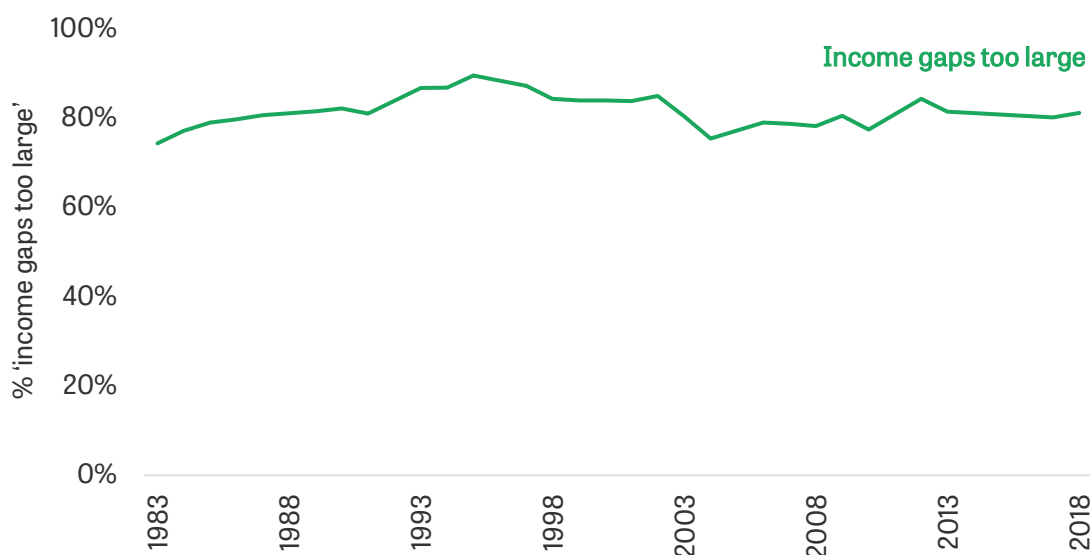
In spite of this recent increase in recognition, poverty and/or inequality remain minority concerns, with issues such as the economy, health services, crime, immigration and, currently, the coronavirus crisis all much more likely to be chosen as the most important issues facing the country. It is possible, though, that some concern about inequality could be being expressed

indirectly via these issues. The economy, unemployment, the state of public services and many other public policy issues that are highly salient can have an important bearing on inequalities, though it obviously is not possible to know whether this is what respondents have in mind when choosing their response. As outlined in the introduction, it is important to think of inequality as multifaceted, and we should not take its apparent low salience among the public as indicating a lack of concern.

When asked explicitly about specific inequalities, people consistently express concern and disapproval, and support greater equality

Across many different contexts, it is clear that people consider current income gaps to be too high, and would prefer lower levels of income inequality (Clark and D'Ambrosio, 2015; Heuer, Mau and Zimmerman, 2018). And the same is true for the UK. Since the early 1980s, the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) has consistently found that around four in five people say that income differences are too high (see Figure 2), a remarkably large and relatively stable level of agreement.

Figure 2. Belief that income gap is too large



Note: 'About 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?'. % too large.

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey (National Centre for Social Research, 2020).

While we do not have the same time-series data for other types of inequality, one-off polling suggests that large segments of the British public are generally uncomfortable with them. For example, a 2017 poll found a majority (55%) believed racial inequalities to be a very or fairly serious problem, a view that was relatively consistent across age groups and social grades (YouGov, 2017). Looking at health inequalities, polling in Scotland found almost half of people (48%) both recognised the existence of health inequalities between deprived and affluent areas and considered them to be a big problem (Bardsley et al., 2016).

Studies also show Britain to be relatively exercised by gender inequality. A 2019 cross-national survey asked respondents whether they agreed that achieving equality between men and women was important for them personally (GIWL and Ipsos MORI, 2019). In the UK, 62% of respondents

agreed, similar to the rates seen in other high-income countries such as the US, Germany and Australia. In a separate multi-country survey, British respondents were among the *least* likely to agree with the statement 'When it comes to giving women equal rights with men, things have gone far enough in my country', with 31% in agreement (GIWL and Ipsos MORI, 2020).

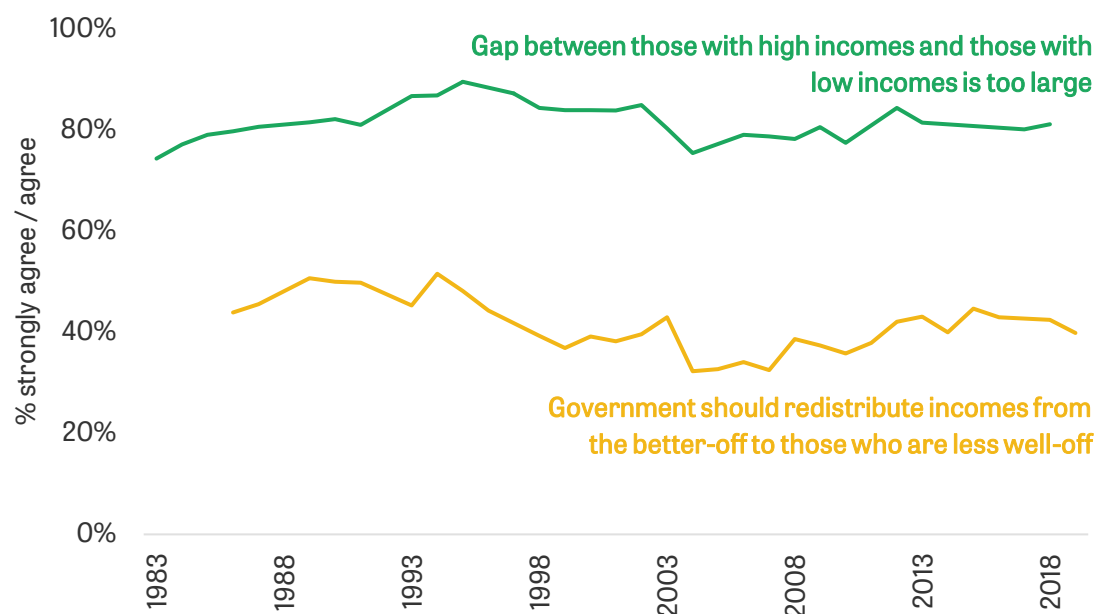
Despite these expressions of concern about inequalities, people are more hesitant to support action to address them

Government action to address income inequalities

In theory, greater income inequality is expected to result in more redistribution via its impact on the preferences of voters (Meltzer and Richard, 1981; Pontusson et al., 2020). This relationship does not appear to hold up well in reality (Niehues, 2014; Trump, 2018), including in the UK (Georgiadis and Manning, 2012). As discussed in the introduction, however, *perceptions* of income inequality do seem to be better predictors of public support for redistribution, though it may be more accurate to speak of our *misperceptions*. Many studies have shown that our estimates of economic inequalities often diverge markedly from reality (see, for example, Niehues (2014), Hauser and Norton (2017), Gimpelson and Treisman (2018) and Kuhn (2019)), with the underestimation of inequality tending to be more common, particularly in the US and the UK (Hauser and Norton, 2017).

We also see a disconnect between *concern* about income inequality and support for action to address it. In Britain, data from BSA show the belief that income differences are too high has consistently and significantly outstripped public support for redistribution (see Figure 3). Similarly, views on inheritance tax, which seeks to reduce the consolidation of wealth inequalities between generations, are relatively negative. YouGov polling since 2019 finds a consistent 50% of the public see inheritance tax as 'unfair' or 'very unfair', compared with about 20% who see it as 'fair' or 'very fair' (YouGov, 2021a).

Figure 3. Acceptability of income gaps versus support for redistribution



Note: Top line, '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?'. Bottom line, 'How much do you agree or disagree that ... government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off?'

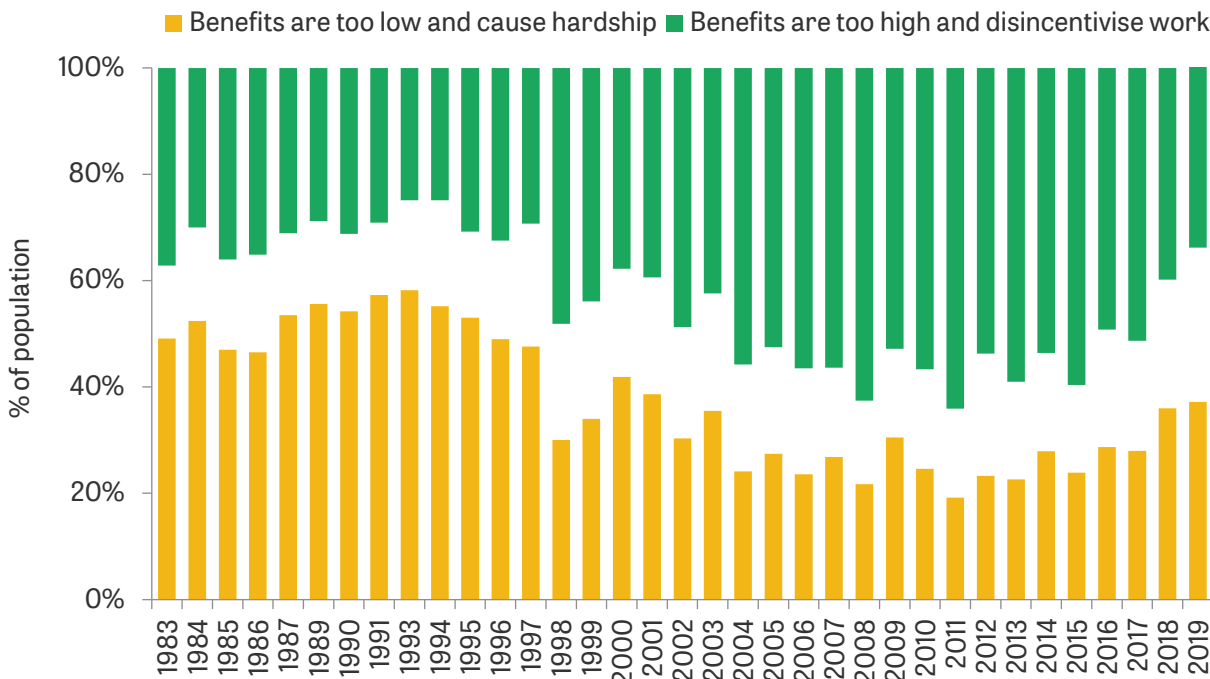
Source: British Social Attitudes Survey (National Centre for Social Research, 2020).

The available evidence suggests a range of factors that appear to affect support for redistribution. Self-interest is one such factor – individuals with the highest incomes tend to be least likely to support redistribution (Dallinger, 2010; Clark and D'Ambrosio, 2015; Pontusson et al., 2020). Political ideology may also have an effect (Bobzien, 2020), while those with strong beliefs in meritocracy also appear to be less likely to back redistribution (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007). Looking at country-level characteristics, Dallinger (2010) finds a lack of support for the hypothesis that demands for redistribution vary systematically between different types of national welfare regime.

Experimental evidence from the US suggests that it may be possible to influence preferences for redistribution. Condon and Wichowsky (2020) find that encouraging people to compare themselves with those in higher socio-economic positions leads them to perceive more distance between themselves and the wealthy, and consequently to be more supportive of redistribution. On the other hand, Kuziemko et al. (2015) find that while providing people with information about inequality and taxes can substantially increase concern about inequality, the impact on support for redistribution is only limited.

The degree of support for redistribution may also depend on the *type* of redistribution. Pontusson et al. (2020) find more support for benefits for the elderly than for the unemployed, which chimes with the hostile attitudes towards the unemployed observed in the UK (Taylor-Gooby, 2013). However, a recent softening of attitudes to welfare is discernible in Britain. In the most recent round of the BSA (2019), people were as likely to say that unemployment benefits are too low and cause hardship as they were to say they are too high and discourage job searching (both at 37%) (Hudson et al., 2020) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Increased belief that unemployment benefits are too high



Note: 'About the level of benefits for unemployed people. Which of these two statements comes closest to your own view: benefits for unemployed people are too low and cause hardship; or, benefits for unemployed people are too high and discourage them from finding jobs?'

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey (National Centre for Social Research, 2020).

Government action on other types of inequalities

The evidence on attitudes towards intervention to address other types of inequalities is much more limited. In general, however, it seems to point towards support for addressing inequalities in principle, but for more general or hands-off measures over more direct interventionist approaches.

Looking at racial and ethnic inequalities, survey data from the UK point to majority support for a requirement on firms to publish their ethnicity pay gap (57% support; YouGov, 2015), and growing support over time for national laws against racial or ethnic discrimination in the workplace. According to the European Social Survey, the proportion of UK respondents who believe such legislation to be extremely good increased from 23% in 2002 to 43% in 2014 (European Social Survey, 2020). Support for the more interventionist measure of using quotas or ethnic minority shortlists to increase representation in top jobs appears to be more muted – Number Cruncher Politics (2020) found that just 11% of white respondents said they strongly supported the measure, though a further 28% expressed general support for it.

Findings from the US, where the body of research on attitudes towards racial inequalities is more developed, indicate that support for government intervention to improve outcomes for black Americans is relatively low among white Americans, and has not increased over recent decades (Samson and Bobo, 2014).

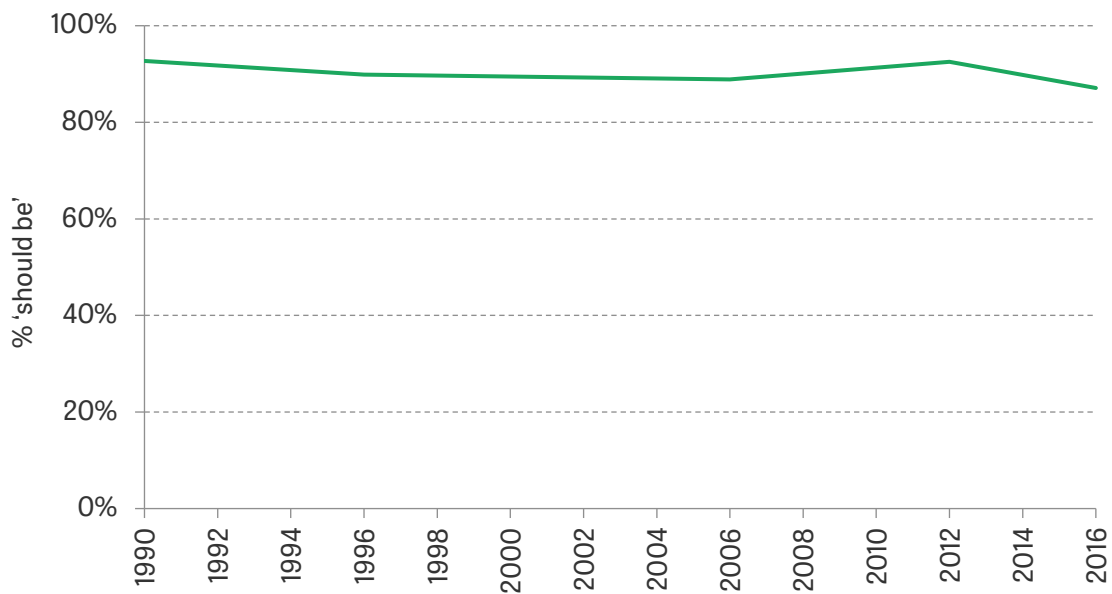
Looking at beliefs about the appropriate response to educational inequalities, the most developed sources of evidence relate to inequalities in access to higher education. While BSA data show high and sustained levels of support for government providing financial support to students from low-income backgrounds (see Figure 5), support for contextual admissions – i.e. where contextual information, such as where a student lives or the school they attend, is considered as part of the assessment of their attainment and potential – is lower, and outweighed by opposition (see Figure 6). However, while support for contextual admissions has been level at around 35% (except in Summer 2020, perhaps in response to the COVID-19-related controversy over A levels), opposition has been steadily declining over the same period, from 47% in July 2019 to 38% in May 2021.

While there is little survey evidence on support for action to address generational inequalities in the UK context, qualitative research has been undertaken, including a Citizen Jury assembled by Britain Thinks in 2016. The public in this exercise recognised the advantages enjoyed by older generations, but were reluctant to support redistribution between the generations (Britain Thinks, 2016). This is mirrored in survey work by the Resolution Foundation (Shrimpton, Skinner and Hall, 2017), which showed support for policy actions to improve the situation for all age groups, such as promoting economic growth, building more homes and increasing access to education and healthcare, but not shifting resources from old to young (see Figure 7).

Concluding remarks

To sum up, while inequalities/poverty might be only infrequently flagged as an issue of public concern in unprompted questions, when people are asked explicitly how they feel about specific inequalities, they typically express concern and discomfort with them, and wish for them to be reduced. Despite this apparent disapproval of inequalities (or the scale of them), people seem to be more reticent to support action by government to address them, apart from supporting low-income students. In particular, there appears to be hostility towards more interventionist remedies, such as the redistribution of income or affirmative action, though lighter-touch measures or those with widely shared benefits garner more support.

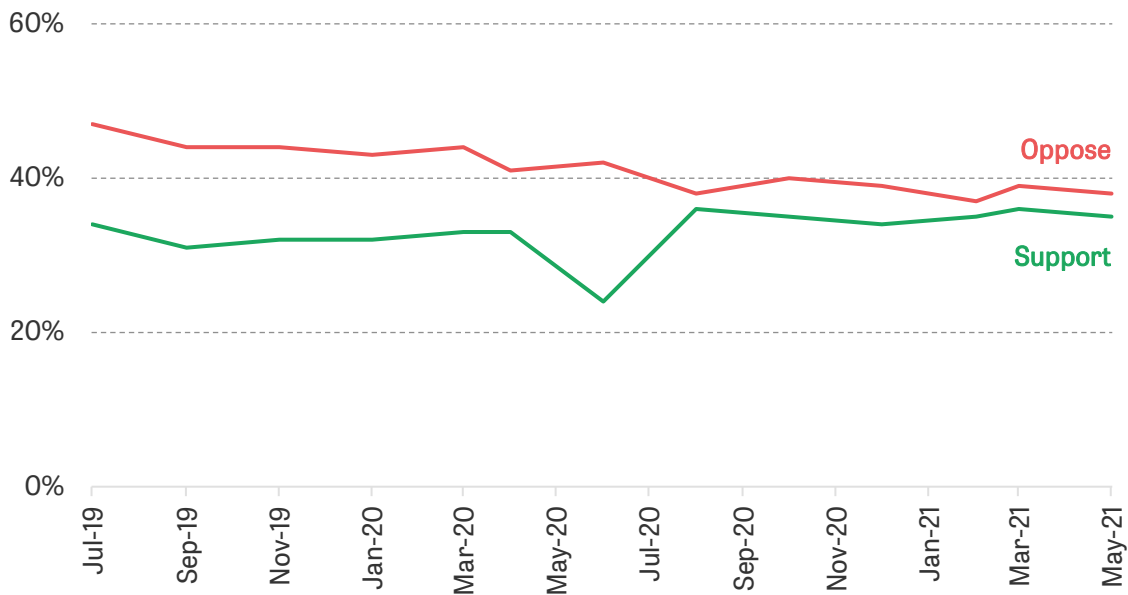
Figure 5. Belief that it should be the government’s responsibility to give financial help to university students from low-income families



Note: 'Do you think it should or should not be the government’s responsibility to ... give financial help to university students from low-income families?'. % saying definitely or probably should be.

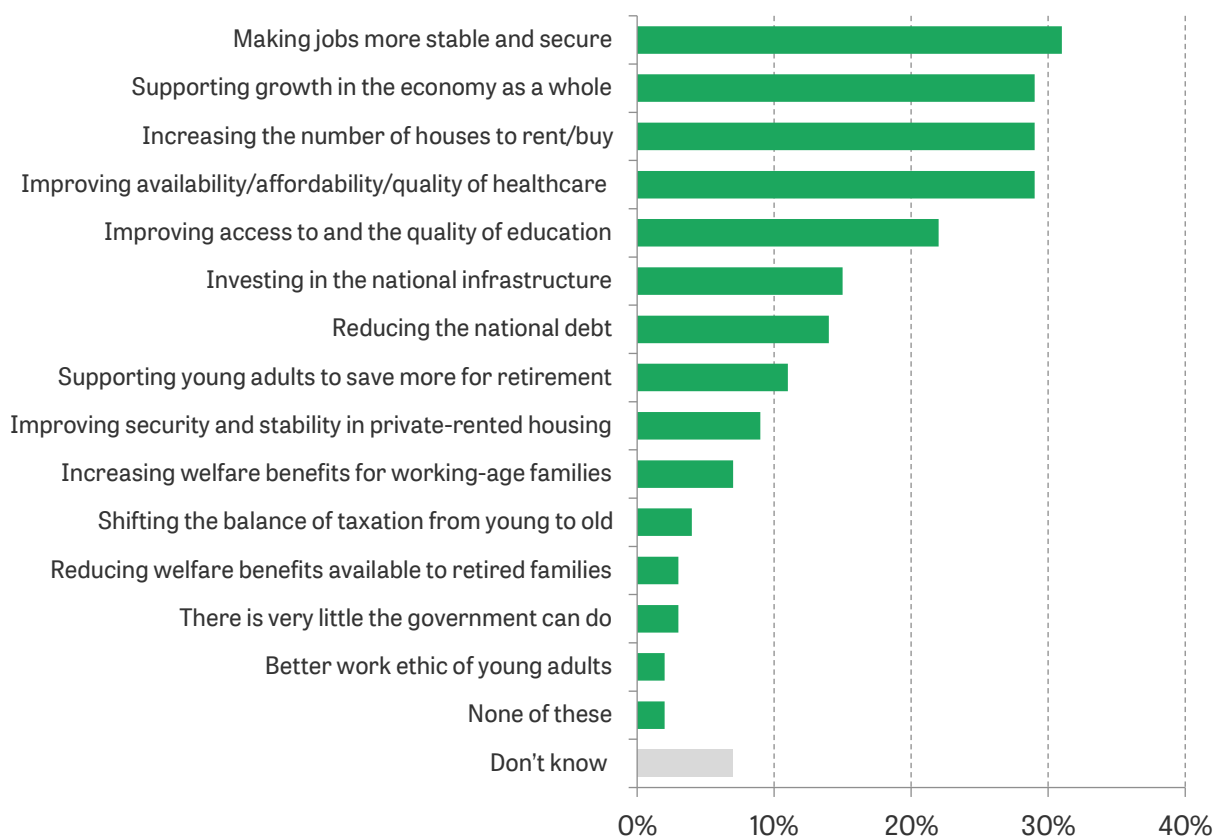
Source: British Social Attitudes Survey (National Centre for Social Research, 2020).

Figure 6. Trends in support for contextual admissions



Note: 'Would you support or oppose universities giving applicants from underperforming state schools lower entry requirements than applicants from higher performing private schools?'

Source: YouGov, 2021b.

Figure 7. Support for policy measures to address intergenerational inequality

Note: 'Of the following areas, which two or three, if any, do you think are most and least important for the government to focus on in order to improve the chances of young adults having a better life than their parents?'

Source: Resolution Foundation (Shrimpton, Skinner and Hall, 2017).

3. What shapes our attitudes towards inequalities and fairness?

Beliefs about how inequalities arise: structuralism versus individualism

The causes of inequalities are contested – both in the theoretical literature and in public attitudes. Two competing explanations dominate: that systematic features of social arrangements create and perpetuate inequalities (the structuralist view) on one hand and that outcomes are determined entirely by individual efforts (the individualist view) on the other.

These views are closely tied to the traditional left–right political ideologies. In practice, both theory and individual beliefs often allow both positions to coexist depending on context. For example, theories around equality of opportunity tend to be concerned with categorising causes as structural or individual (Ferreira and Peragine, 2015).

Several authors have written about the causes of inequalities for a lay audience, with a particular focus on critiquing meritocracy. Among their critiques are (1) that the differences between the educational pathways and types of jobs held by people from different family backgrounds demonstrate there is not a meritocratic system in operation (Bloodworth, 2016; Markovits, 2019; Sandel, 2020), (2) that meritocracy limits the opportunities of people without university

educations, and a societal belief in a functioning meritocracy means that these people deserve to live with insufficient resources and a lack of dignity (Markovits, 2019; Sandel, 2020) and (3) that supposedly meritocratic systems promote populism (Young, 1994; Sandel, 2020).

Understanding the public's *perceptions* of structural versus individual factors as the causes of inequalities is just as important for policymaking as understanding the *actual* importance of structural and individual causes. Just as different policies will be more or less *effective* depending on whether causes are structural or individual, different policies will be more or less *acceptable* to the public if causes are *seen to be* structural or individual.

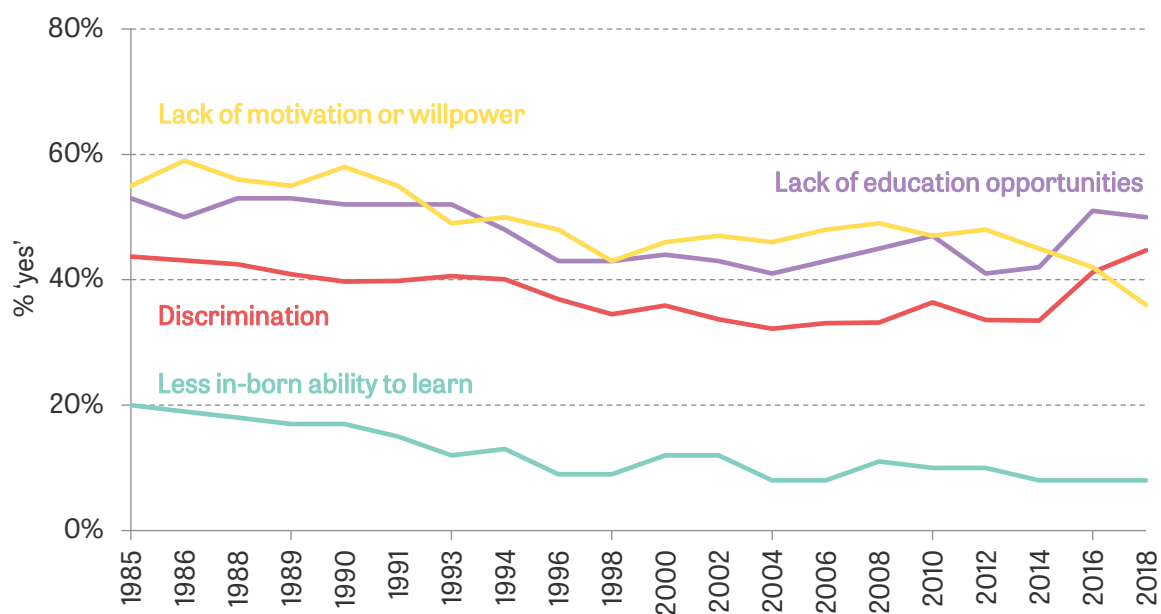
Characteristics of both individuals and the settings they are in predict tendencies towards structuralist or individualistic views. At the individual level, a higher income strongly predicts favouring individualistic over structural explanations (Smith, 1985, 2010). People who have a high sense of autonomy or internal locus of control are more likely to perceive hard work and ability rather than luck as determinants of income inequality (Aldama et al., 2021). At higher levels, countries' welfare regimes and economic trajectory explain differences across Europe in attributions for poverty (Lepianka, Gelissen and van Oorschot, 2010; Kallio and Niemelä, 2014).

Beliefs in structural and individual causes of non-economic inequalities have also been explored. In the UK, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research has shown the public tends to favour individual explanations over structural ones for inequalities in health (Blaxter, 1997; Macintyre, McKay and Ellaway, 2006; L'Hote, Fond and Volmert, 2018). But there is also evidence that there is some nuance to the public's views: Garthwaite and Bambra (2017) find initial responses tended to invoke lifestyle factors, but further probing showed respondents had more nuanced understandings that incorporated material causes such as income and housing, and psychosocial causes such as stigma and community connections.

As for economic inequalities, different lived experiences seem to be related to different understandings of the causes of ill health. Focus groups conducted with more affluent participants talked about the role of poor choices in health outcomes, while similar focus groups with less affluent participants gave more attention to structural/environmental causes. The latter group did consider lifestyle and health behaviour, but in the context that these were constrained directly by economic circumstances and indirectly by the effect of these circumstances on mental well-being and especially stress (Davidson, Kitzinger and Hunt, 2006).

Racial/ethnic inequalities are another area where we see divided views among the public on the role of structural factors and individual effort. Studies have found that white Americans tend to have a strong belief in individualism and that hard work is all that is required for success, attributing their own achievement to this and seeing it as an important explanation for African American disadvantage (DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy and Post, 2011; Croll, 2013).

However, the prevalence of belief in such meritocratic explanations for unequal outcomes between ethnic groups has diminished over time. Since 1977, the General Social Survey has asked Americans whether they attribute the unequal distribution of good-quality jobs, income and housing between black and white people to discrimination, motivation or willpower, access to education, and an innate ability to learn. As shown in Figure 8, the proportion of respondents who believe that motivation or willpower plays a role in unequal outcomes for African Americans has declined considerably since the question was first asked to the full population in 1985, falling from 55% to 36% in 2018. In recent years, this has been overtaken by a belief that discrimination explains the unequal distribution of jobs, income and housing.

Figure 8. Factors associated with unequal economic outcomes between ethnic groups in the US

Note: 'On the average African Americans have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are: mainly due to discrimination; because most African Americans have less in-born ability to learn; because most African Americans don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty; because most African Americans just don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty?'. Response scale: yes, no, don't know.

Source: General Social Survey (Smith et al., 2019).

As well as these shifts over time, studies of beliefs about the causes of racial/ethnic inequalities suggest that individual propensities to see inequalities as driven by structural or individual factors are not fixed; instead, they are amenable to intervention. In the specific case of university students in the US, educational interventions, such as on the history of housing policy, made white students more likely to detect racism (Lopez, Gurin and Nagda, 1998; Bonam et al., 2019).

How people think inequalities arise contributes to whether they are thought to be fair

There are two, not unrelated, literatures dealing with the question of which inequalities are fair. The first, dominated by philosophers and economists, takes an intellectual and normative approach, drawing on early theories of distributive justice from Rawls, Hayek and others. There are a range of principles common to such theories for determining fairness. Some are based on relative principles, such as equality, priority and merit, and others based on absolute principles, such as sufficiency, utility and liberty (von Platz, 2020). In economics, the study and definition of equality of opportunity has developed in recent decades, and rests largely on appropriately categorising determinants of inequalities as being circumstances beyond the individual's control, or else something over which the individual has responsibility (see Ferreira and Peragine (2015)), a view that corresponds with the philosophical position of 'luck egalitarianism'. (Luck egalitarianism is discussed in Satz and White's chapter *What is wrong with inequality?* elsewhere in this review. See also Lippert-Rasmussen (2015).)

The second stream of literature is empirical and applied, seeking to understand how *people* judge what is fair in terms of distribution and inequalities. In a summary of both theoretical work and empirical work from sociology and psychology, Hegtvedt and Isom (2014) highlight the situational

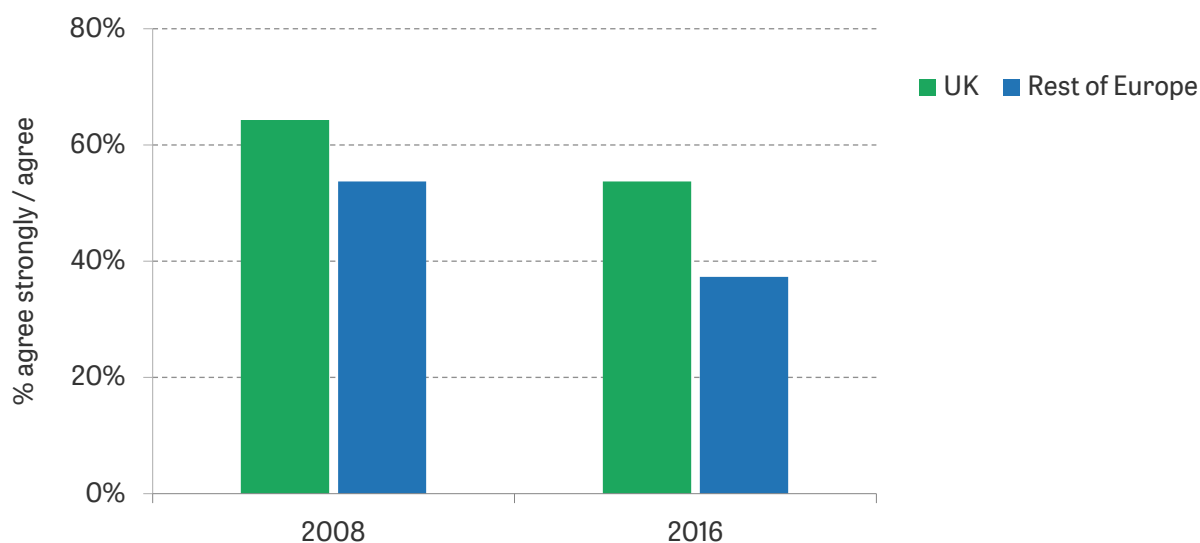
and relational nature of judgements of fairness. Motivations, beliefs, social comparisons, cognitive processing, identity and emotion all contribute to perceptions of fairness, not merely principles or rules of distribution.

In a review of more recent empirical work, Trump (2020) concludes that there are typically underlying principles which are agreed to form the basis of a fair distribution. In general, inequalities that arise through merit or effort are more acceptable than those that arise through luck (Sachweh and Sthamer, 2019; Almås, Cappelen and Tungodden, 2020; Nettle and Saxe, 2020; Trump, 2020). Other studies also point to the strong and growing importance of 'merit' as a principle in how people view unequal distributions of income and wealth. Data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) indicate that a majority of people believe they live in societies where hard work is the most important determinant of getting ahead, a trend observed across countries and increasing since the 1980s (Mijs, 2019). Conversely, people are less accepting of income inequality when it is seen to be undeserved (Clark and D'Ambrosio, 2015). They are more concerned when they perceive income inequality to be driven by structural barriers (such as family background) than by effort (Mijs, 2019).

Belief in meritocratic principles has been associated with a greater acceptance of income inequality. Indeed, people tend not to support pure equality of earnings. Bamfield and Horton (2009) find that, among UK focus-group participants, income inequality was largely seen as fair if it was believed to be the result of allocation by merit, though there was also some sympathy for ideas of needs-based allocation. Similarly, more recent qualitative research in the UK by Irwin (2018) finds that individuals attribute their own advancement to effort, but that they recognise the importance of wider social context in the existence of opportunities for progression.

Comparison with the rest of Europe indicates that UK respondents are more comfortable with large income differences. The European Social Survey shows substantial support for the meritocratic allocation of income in the UK, although attitudes have moved in a slightly more egalitarian direction in recent years (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Support for large differences in income to reward talent and effort



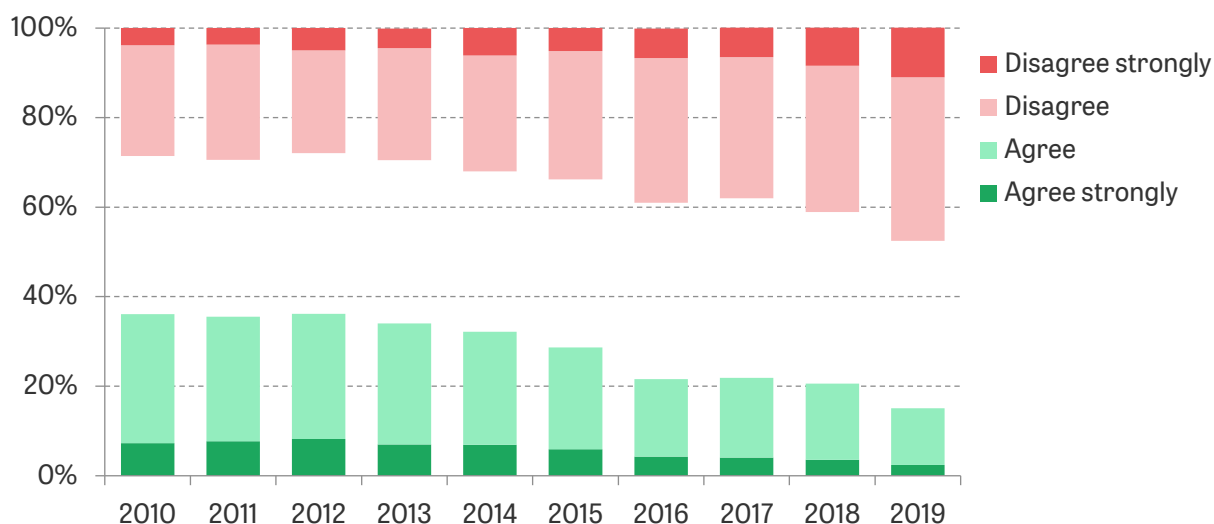
Note: 'Using this card, please say how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: large differences in people's incomes are acceptable to properly reward differences in talents and efforts.'

Source: European Social Survey.

This preference for meritocracy is evident in Britons' views of benefit recipients. In a comparative qualitative study conducted in the UK, Germany, Denmark and Slovenia, Heuer, Mau and Zimmermann (2018) observe that the UK is the only country of the four in which the distinction between 'deserving' working people and 'undeserving' benefits recipients is drawn. In the other countries included in the study, the main divide was seen as being between rich and poor. The authors suggest that this negative view of the disadvantaged in the UK reinforces acceptance of income inequality and limits support for redistribution. Bamfield and Horton (2009) also find evidence of much more positive attitudes towards the rich than towards the poor among UK focus-group participants, with a tendency to ascribe low income (at least in part) to lack of effort, and the belief that those in receipt of benefits would not go on to make a reciprocal contribution to society.

However, negative views of the deservingness of benefit recipients may be abating. Figure 10 shows that the proportion of people agreeing that many people who receive social security do not really deserve help has declined from 36% in 2010 to 15% in 2019, mirroring the trends seen in Figure 4 on whether benefits cause hardship.

Figure 10. Belief that many people receiving social security don't deserve help



Note: 'How much do you agree or disagree that ... many people who get social security don't really deserve any help'. Neither agree nor disagree not shown.

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey (National Centre for Social Research, 2020).

As well as talent and effort, education also appears to be a consideration in the acceptability of unequal incomes. Looking at data from 26 countries in the 1999 wave of the ISSP, Duru-Bellat and Tenret (2012) found that over half of respondents across countries agreed that education or training should be essential or important in determining earnings, i.e. that those with higher educational attainment should be rewarded with higher pay. The authors also found a positive relationship between actual levels of inequalities in a country and support for this type of meritocracy based on levels of education.

In line with this meritocratic lens, people tend to take examples of social mobility as evidence that a system is functioning in a sufficiently meritocratic manner (Shariff, Wiwad and Aknin, 2016; Trump, 2020). Also in line with meritocratic views of fairness, people's support for redistribution

tends to be conditional on the perceived deservingness of the recipients, with emphasis placed variously on recipients' effort, reciprocity and attitude (Trump, 2020).

Merit is not, however, the only principle that is important in thinking about the fairness of inequalities. Need is also an important consideration in the public's preferences for how resources are allocated. In their survey of Western European and US respondents, Pontusson et al. (2020) find that the allocation of resources according to individual effort or investment receives less support than allocation according to need, but more than allocation according to complete equality. In-group/out-group dynamics are also important, with unequal distributions favouring in-groups more likely to be perceived as fair (Becker, 2020; Trump, 2020).

However, like Hegtvedt and Isom (2014), Trump (2020) concludes that underlying principles are insufficient to explain judgements about fairness. She reports that conflicting views on the fairness in inequalities arise not from disagreements about what the rules should be, but from situations where interpretation is necessary to determine whether the rules have been properly applied. Applying abstract allocation rules to concrete situations results in ambiguities and conflicts between principles. Trump concludes that our judgements about the fairness of inequalities, therefore, are systematically affected by the information available to us, our economic self-interest and that of our group, and 'system justification'.

This idea of system justification is used to explain the somewhat paradoxical finding that has been repeated empirically in a range of contexts - that people who are disadvantaged by inequalities believe the status quo to be fair (Jost and Banaji, 1994). This is the opposite of what we would expect if perceptions of fairness were driven by self-interest. The key principle of system justification is that people want to see the world as fair because it benefits them to do so. Importantly, viewing the world as fair is not a passive internalisation, but a motivated act. Jost and others describe system justification as serving a palliative function: it is more comfortable to believe the world as fair. This motivated justification of the system, especially by those who are disadvantaged by the status quo, explains resistance to change such as redistribution, and has been conceptualised as an example of Engels's false consciousness. Empirical work has found that system justification is *stronger* when people are exposed to criticisms of the system or perceive it to be threatened, and when the status quo is thought to be inevitable or is the product of a long history (Jost, 2019).

A common feature of the empirical literature is that cognition, including cognitive biases, plays an important role in our assessments of the fairness of an inequality. Chief among these is the availability heuristic (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). When making judgements about what is fair, we make comparisons with others (Adams, 1965; Folger, 1986) but the set of comparisons we can make is inherently limited by the situations of which we have knowledge (Smith et al., 2012; Ahrens, 2019; Dawtry, Sutton and Sibley, 2019).

Concluding remarks

We have established that people can perceive inequalities to be fair and legitimate even when they lose out. There is a consistent theme in the literature that inequalities that are seen to be based on deservingness – whether effort, talent, education or some other characteristic – are more acceptable than inequalities perceived to be based on luck or characteristics other than merit. This suggests that policymakers seeking to address inequalities will find more public support when reforms are framed in terms of making the system more meritocratic. However, the literature suggests that the meritocratic characteristics of a given situation do not on their

own determine attitudes. Cognitive biases and self-interest affect perceptions too, and these may be more challenging for policymakers when seeking public support.

System justification theory has implications for the use of public attitudes in setting policy. The theory suggests that the public will tend to be biased towards the status quo, taking away political motivation to effect change. This may help to explain the relatively stable trends in perceptions of the level of inequalities and demands for action even when actual levels of inequalities are changing.

4. The Individualists versus the Structuralists: new evidence

The literature points to complexity in how we view inequalities, their causes and what is deemed to be fair. There is no agreement on a single cause of inequalities – structural barriers and discrimination are seen as important, but then so are individual effort and hard work.

What seems likely is that there is no one attitude or set of beliefs across the whole population: these are often divisive issues, that go to the heart of political and values-driven identities, and we therefore should expect to see sharp distinctions in perspectives. Against this background, we wanted to explore different attitudes to fairness and inequalities in our new survey data.

We used latent class analysis to divide the sample into groups, based on responses to questions about structural and individual causes of inequalities, fairness and perceptions of inequalities in the UK: what it takes to get ahead, the reasons for economic differences between black and white people, the equality of UK society prior to the coronavirus pandemic, and equality of opportunity in education, health and the application of law (full details of the model used are provided in the appendix).

Three distinct groups within the population emerged from this analysis:

- *'The Structuralists', 32% of the sample.* When it comes to what it takes to get ahead, this group recognises characteristics outside the individual's control, such as coming from a wealthy family, more than do other groups. Strong majorities in this group attribute economic differences between black and white people to discrimination and a lack of educational opportunities. This group is most likely to recognise inequalities and to describe UK society as unequal before the COVID-19 pandemic. Large majorities, around 75%, strongly agree that there is a different law for the rich and the poor and believe people with money are a lot better able to live healthy lives. This group also rates the fairness of educational opportunities in the UK lower than the rest of the sample.
- *'In the Middle', 39% of the sample.* This group tends not to use the extreme options when responding to our questions: almost nothing is 'essential' or 'not at all' important for getting ahead; almost no one in this group described society as 'very' equal or 'very' unequal. This group seems to recognise inequalities and a range of external and individualistic causes. From these data, it is not possible to tell whether this group is genuinely some intermediate mixture of the other two groups on questions of inequalities, or whether these are people less inclined to describe anything in the extreme.
- *'The Individualists', 29% of the sample.* This group is eager to see the world as fair. It gives the only near-unanimous response to any question across the three groups, with nearly all

describing the role of bribes in getting ahead as 'not important at all'. This group strongly rejects roles for coming from a wealthy family, race and religion in getting ahead, and generally does not consider factors beyond the individual's control to be important. Views are spread on whether there is a different law for rich and poor, whether money facilitates a healthier lifestyle, and whether society was equal before COVID-19 – in all these domains, there is a slight tendency to recognise the inequality, but there is also quite a lot of endorsement for responses that deny these inequalities.

These attitudinal segments capture something distinct from political identities: while, for example, just over half of the Structuralist group are Labour supporters, a large proportion support other parties. There are significant proportions of both Leave and Remain supporters in each group. The groups are also not that different from each other in age, social grade, geography and gender. The segmentation therefore seems to be capturing additional aspects of inequality perceptions, beyond these characteristics. There are, however, differences between educational groups: 38% of people with a degree are Structuralists compared with 22% who are Individualists, while 23% of people who do not have GCSEs are Structuralists compared with 44% who are Individualists.

It is important to recognise that while the distinctions between the groups are clear, they are often matters of degree. For example, while the Structuralists recognise the importance of characteristics beyond the individual's control, they still place *greater* importance on characteristics such as ambition and hard work. Among Individualists, characterised by their rejection of circumstances beyond the individual's control as important determinants of outcomes, the most endorsed explanation for black–white economic differences is still discrimination. However, as we shall see, their world view on inequalities is quite distinct in a number of important ways.

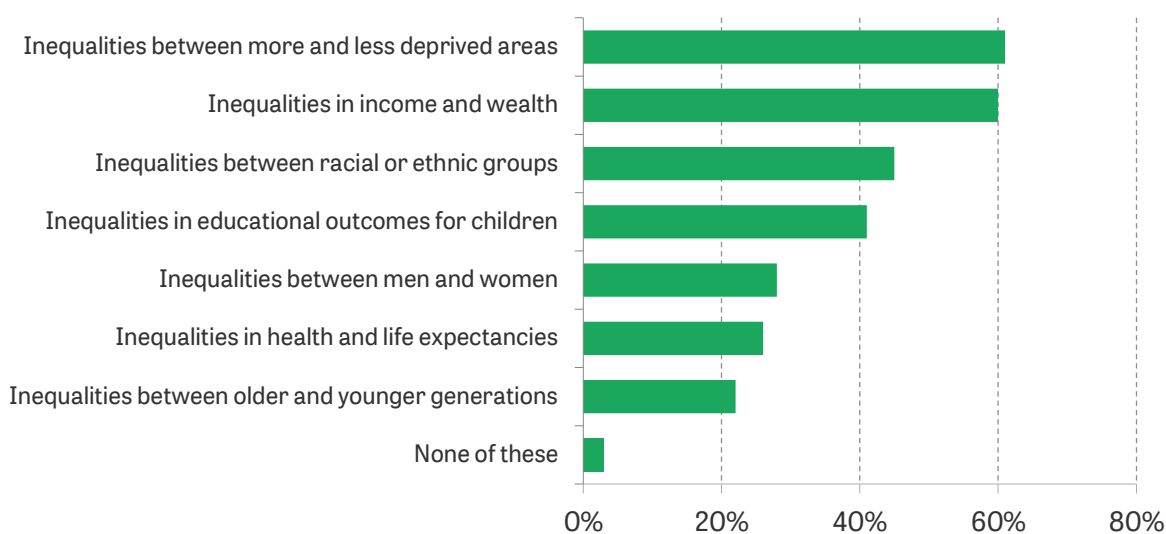
In the section that follows, we present the findings of our survey broken down into the views of the Structuralists, the Individualists and the In the Middle. In a few instances, where particularly revealing, we also present our results according to political party affiliation, which again points to powerful differences between groups. For a more complete description of our results on attitudes towards inequalities segmented according to political views (party affiliation and Brexit identity), please see our publication on the survey data, Duffy et al. (2021).

5. How Individualists, Structuralists and those In the Middle feel about inequalities in Britain today

Concern about inequalities and the prospect of rising inequalities

As already noted, it is very difficult from existing data to compare attitudes towards inequalities across different inequality types. To address this gap, we asked respondents to weigh up the relative seriousness of different forms of inequality in Britain today, allowing them to select up to four inequality types from a list of seven.

For the British public, inequalities between more and less deprived areas and economic inequalities are seen as the most serious (61% and 60% respectively) (see Figure 11). Unequal outcomes in education appear to resonate more with the public than those in health and life expectancy – despite fieldwork taking place at a time when the unequal health impacts of the coronavirus pandemic have been widely publicised.

Figure 11. Public perceptions of the most serious inequalities in Britain

Note: 'Which three or four of the following types of inequality, if any, do you think are most serious in Britain?'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Inequalities between racial or ethnic groups also appear much higher in public concern than those between genders or generations: twice as many respondents said racial inequalities are one of the most serious types of inequality in Britain (45%) as said generational inequalities are (22%); and only one in four people place inequalities between genders as one of the most serious forms of inequalities in Britain (28%).

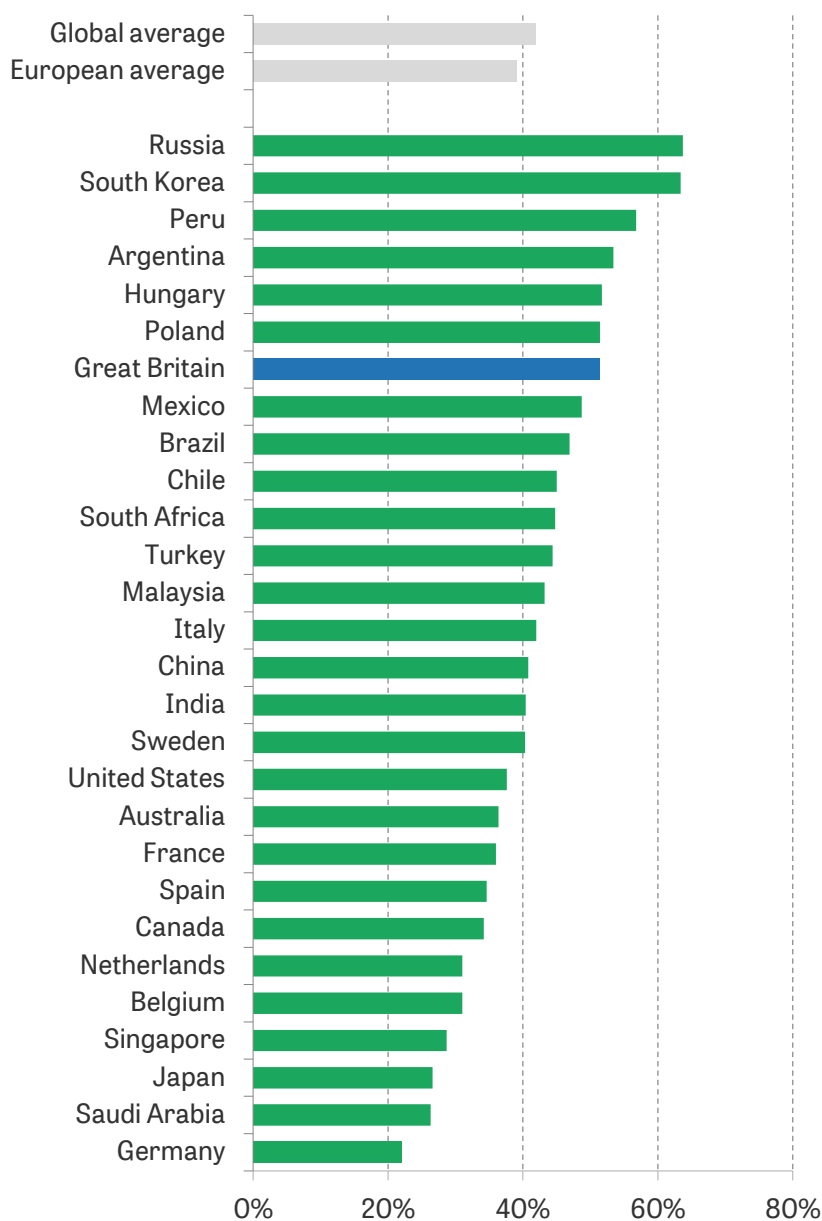
These surprisingly high levels of concern with area-based inequalities do prompt the question of exactly what sorts of places are in people's minds when they consider more and less deprived areas. It could call to mind the North-South divide or divides between the UK's nations and regions, while for others it could be interpreted more locally, as the differences between prosperous and less affluent neighbourhoods within the same town or city. Focus group research by Ipsos MORI for the Institute for Fiscal Studies provides some further insight on this. It finds that geographical inequalities call to mind both inequalities between regions *and* those within them – for example, between urban and rural areas. People also made clear links to differential access to good-quality public services, with those in affluent areas better served in terms of high-quality education and healthcare provision than those in more deprived areas (Garrett and Day, 2021; Pereira, McKeown and Gallacher, 2021).

There is also the possibility that the use of the term 'deprived' in the question could trigger people's concern, leading them to select this option when they might not ordinarily be especially concerned about area-based inequalities.

Looking at how the views of British people compare with those of the publics in other countries allows us to control for some of this possible effect of the question framing. We therefore fielded this question in 28 countries on the Ipsos MORI Global Advisor between December 2020 and January 2021, roughly two months after the YouGov poll (see Duffy and Kaur-Ballagan (2021) for full results). While concern in Britain about inequalities between more and less deprived areas (51%) was slightly below inequalities in income and wealth (56%) in this study, this type of inequality was viewed as serious by a considerably greater proportion of people living in Britain

than in Europe overall (51% in Britain, compared with 39% on average in the European countries in the study) (see Figure 12). Concern about area-based inequalities was also elevated in Britain compared with in other English-speaking advanced market economies such as the US, Australia and Canada, further lending weight to the interpretation that this is genuine national concern, rather than an artefact of the way the question is worded.

Figure 12. Inequalities *between more and less deprived areas* as one of the most serious inequalities



Note: 'Which three or four of the following types of inequality, if any, do you think are most serious in [country]'.

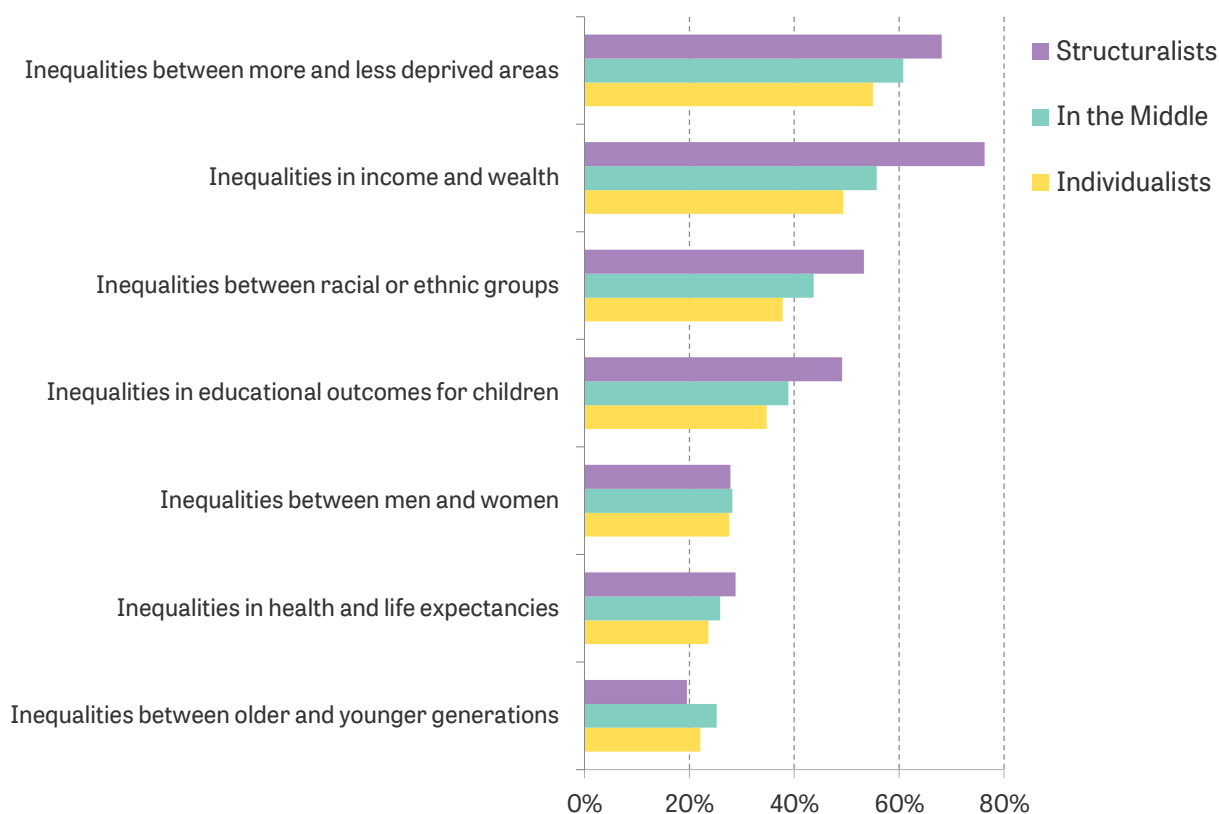
Source: KCL/Ipsos Global Monitor, 23 December 2020 – 8 January 2021.

Both Structuralists and Individualists prioritise inequalities in income and between places, but Individualists are generally less concerned about most types of inequality

Respondents in each of our three group are most likely to choose inequalities between more and less deprived areas, and inequalities in income and wealth, as being the most serious in Britain today (see Figure 13). Structuralists are most likely to express concern about these types of inequality, and are also markedly more concerned about racial and educational inequalities than the Individualist and In the Middle groups. This makes sense given Structuralists’ sensitivity to in-built, systemic disadvantage, and this group’s greater emphasis on life chances being shaped from early on in life.

What is interesting, however, is the lack of differentiation between the three groups when considering inequalities in health and between the genders and older and younger people. All groups are similarly unlikely to select these types of inequality as being among the most serious in Britain today, lending support to the idea that there is a relatively universal hierarchy of concern about inequalities in the country. This could have implications for policy – action on some types of inequality is likely to have broader-based support, while action on others is seen as a relatively lower priority irrespective of views on inequalities more generally.

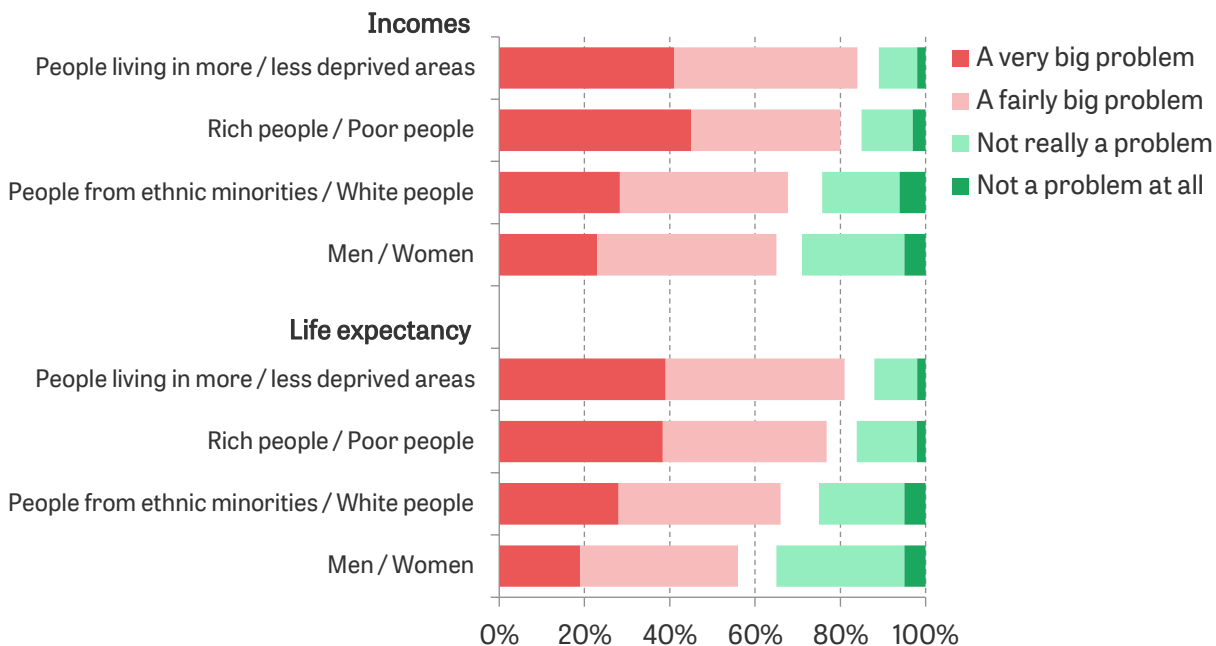
Figure 13. Public perceptions of the most serious inequalities in Britain, by inequality world view



Note: ‘Which three or four of the following types of inequality, if any, do you think are most serious in Britain?’.

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11–12 November 2020.

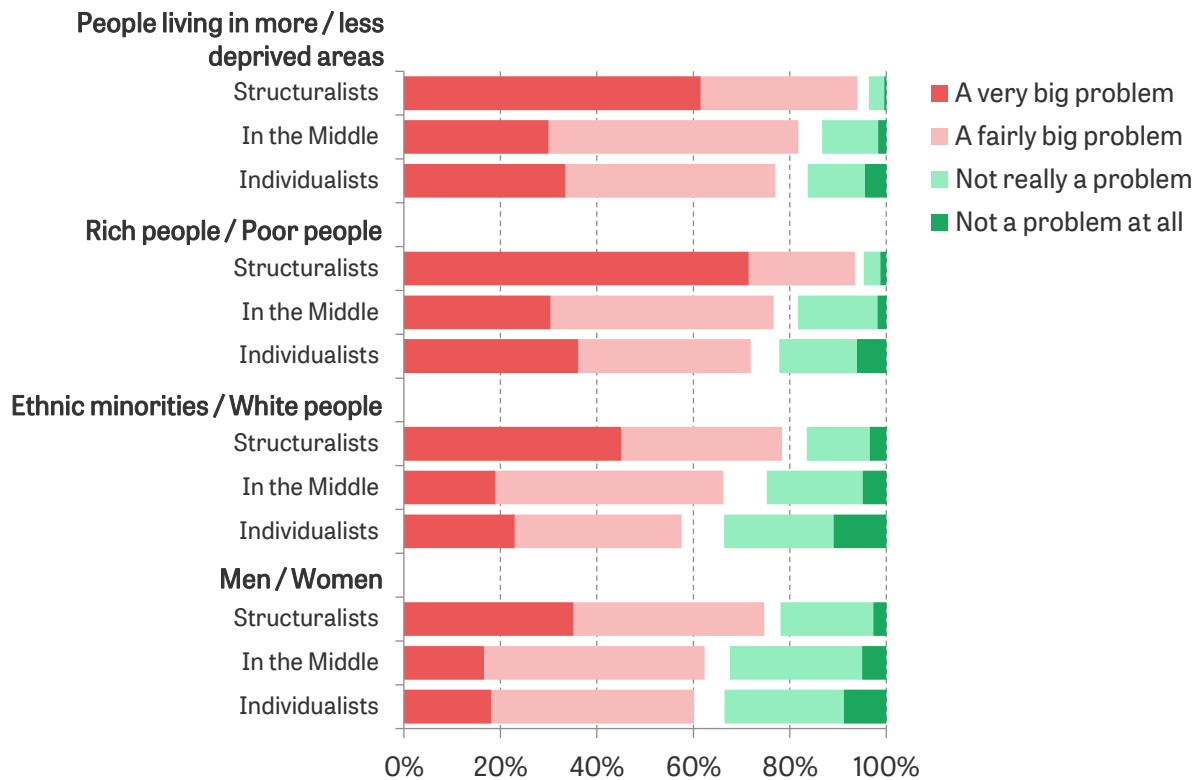
Figure 14. Reaction to a hypothetical increase in income and life expectancy gaps



Note: 'If the gap between the income/life expectancy of the following groups increases, would you consider this ...?'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Figure 15. Reaction to a hypothetical increase in income gaps, by inequality world view



Note: 'If the gap between the income of the following groups increases, would you consider this ...?'

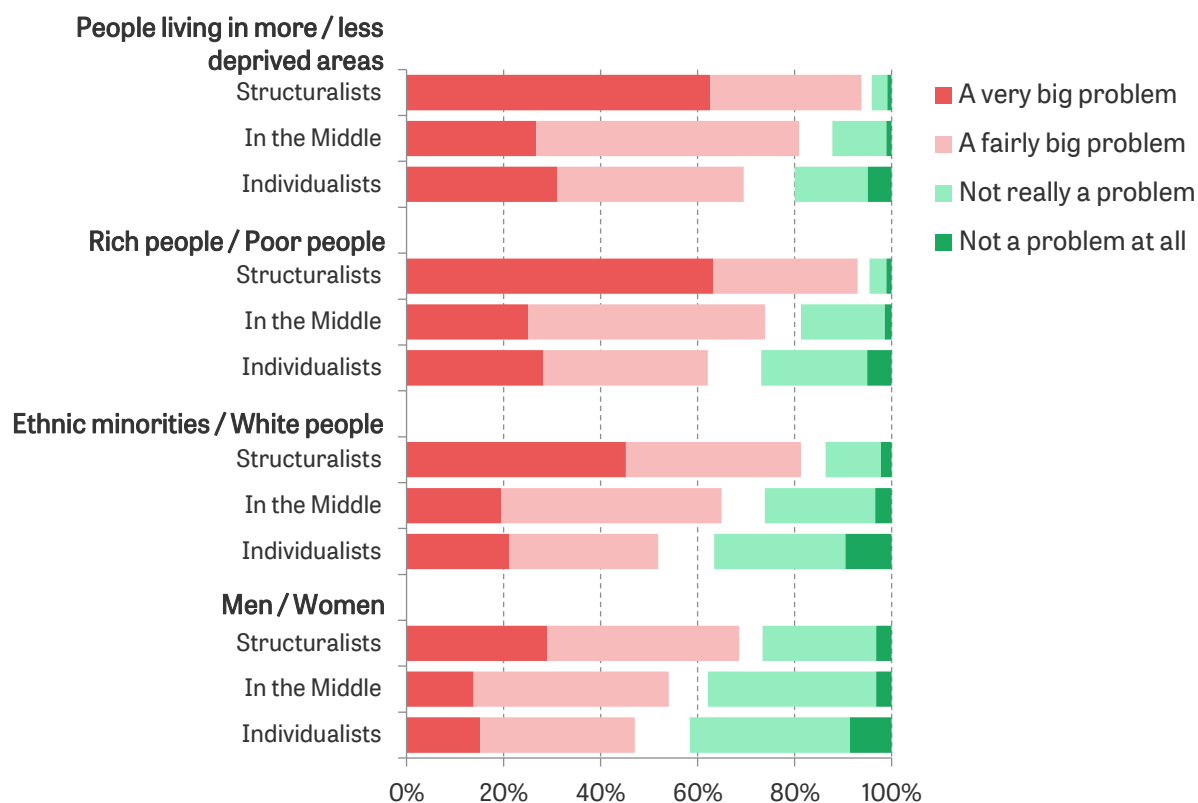
Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

People in Britain consider rising inequalities to be a problem – although increased gender inequalities are less troubling

Asking people how they would feel about rising differences in life expectancy and income indicates that majorities would consider these outcomes to be a (very or fairly) big problem. Figure 14 shows that 45% of respondents would consider an increase in income gaps between rich and poor to be a very big problem, while 38% say this about an increase in life expectancy gaps. People find increases in these inequalities between people living in more and less deprived areas equally problematic. Increasing inequalities in income and health outcomes between genders and ethnic groups are seen as less problematic – notably, almost a third of people (29%) do not consider a rise in the gender income gap to be a problem.

Structuralists are, as we would expect, most likely to object to rising inequalities. For inequalities both in income and in life expectancies, around twice as many Structuralists as Individualists said increases in inequalities between the groups listed would be a very big problem (see Figures 15 and 16). Just as for the sample as a whole, our groups do not seem to make a distinction between income inequalities and inequalities in life expectancies, but do think inequalities between people in different areas and between rich and poor people are more serious than those between men and women or between white people and people from ethnic minorities.

Figure 16. Reaction to a hypothetical increase in life expectancy gaps, by inequality world view



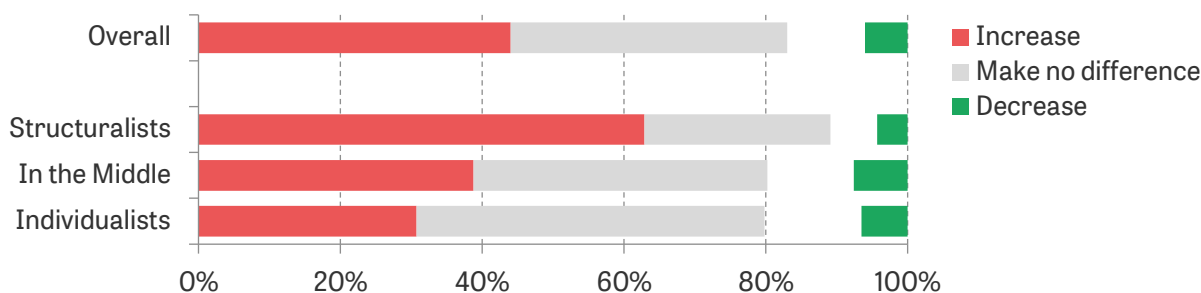
Note: 'If the gap between the life expectancy of the following groups increases, would you consider this ...?'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11–12 November 2020.

Structuralists are most likely to believe the pandemic will deepen inequalities in Britain, and are most likely to consider this a problem

There has been a large amount of research outlining the many ways in which the COVID-19 crisis has hit disadvantaged groups hardest and deepened existing inequalities (for a review, see Nazroo et al. (2020)). But how people *think* the crisis is likely to affect inequalities also matters, particularly for considering the measures people are likely to support to address it. What we see is that the anticipated impact of COVID-19 on inequalities varies according to a person's inequality world view. A majority of Structuralists (63%) expect the pandemic to increase inequality, while the most common response of both the In the Middle group and Individualists is to expect it to make no difference (see Figure 17).

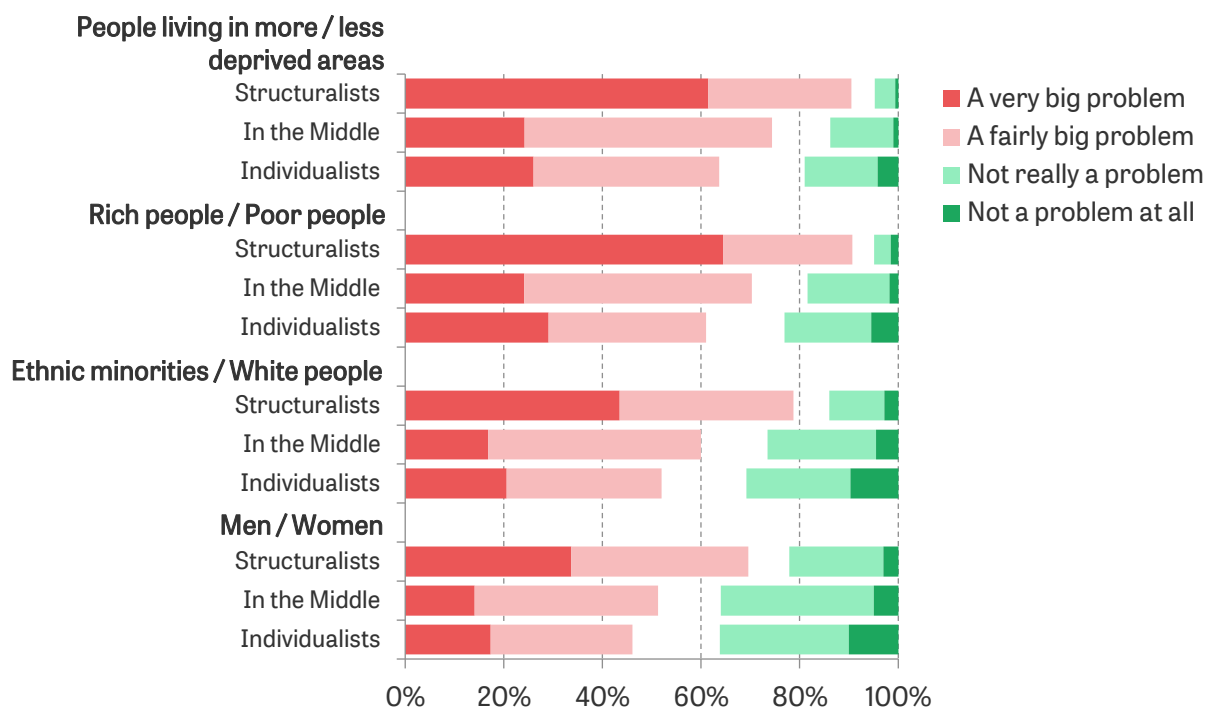
Figure 17. Expected effects of the coronavirus crisis on UK inequality, by inequality world view



Note: 'Do you think the coronavirus crisis will increase or decrease the level of inequality in Britain compared with before the pandemic, or will it make no difference?'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Figure 18. Views on a hypothetical increase in income gaps as a result of COVID-19, by inequality world view



Note: 'If the gap between the income of the following groups increases as a result of the coronavirus crisis, would you consider this ...?'

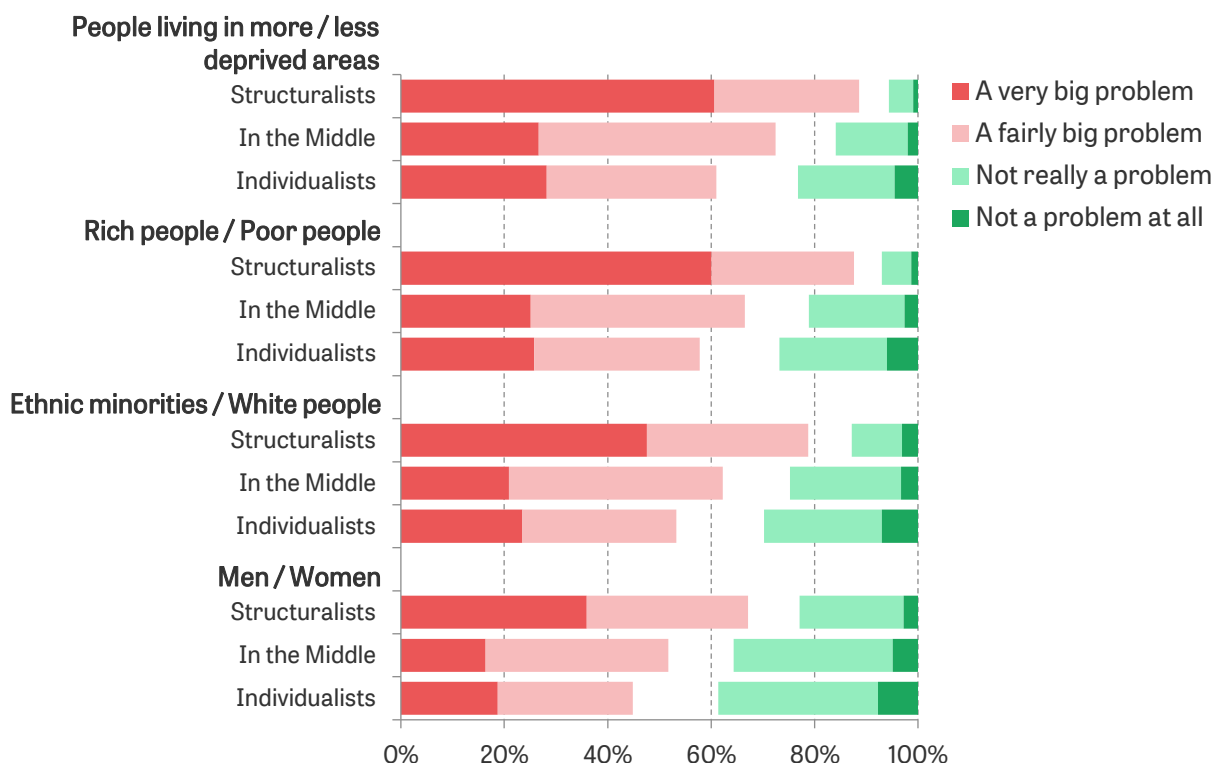
Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Structuralists are not only most likely to expect inequalities to increase as a consequence of the pandemic, but to consider this a problem. The extent and strength of Structuralists' views in comparison with those of other groups is perhaps surprising though – looking first at an increase in income inequality between different groups, Structuralists are typically at least twice as likely to consider an increase in this inequality in the context of the pandemic to be a very big problem – the most serious expression of concern (see Figure 18).

This is not to say that Individualists and those In the Middle are untroubled by the prospect of COVID-19 expanding income inequality, though. Majorities in both of these groups consider rising income gaps between different groups in society to be a very or fairly big problem.

For all inequality world views, the degree to which rising income inequality would be a problem varies according to the groups whom the inequality is between. Looking at the choice of a 'very big problem', we see that while more than 60% of Structuralists consider rising income inequalities between places and between rich and poor to be a very big problem, just 34% feel this about rising income inequality between the genders. Similarly, while only around 5% of Individualists consider rising income inequalities between places and between rich and poor to be 'not a problem at all', this doubles to 10% when considering rising income inequalities between the genders and between different ethnicities.

Figure 19. Views on a hypothetical increase in life expectancy gaps as a result of COVID-19, by inequality world view



Note: 'If the gap between the life expectancy of the following groups increases as a result of the coronavirus crisis, would you consider this ...?'

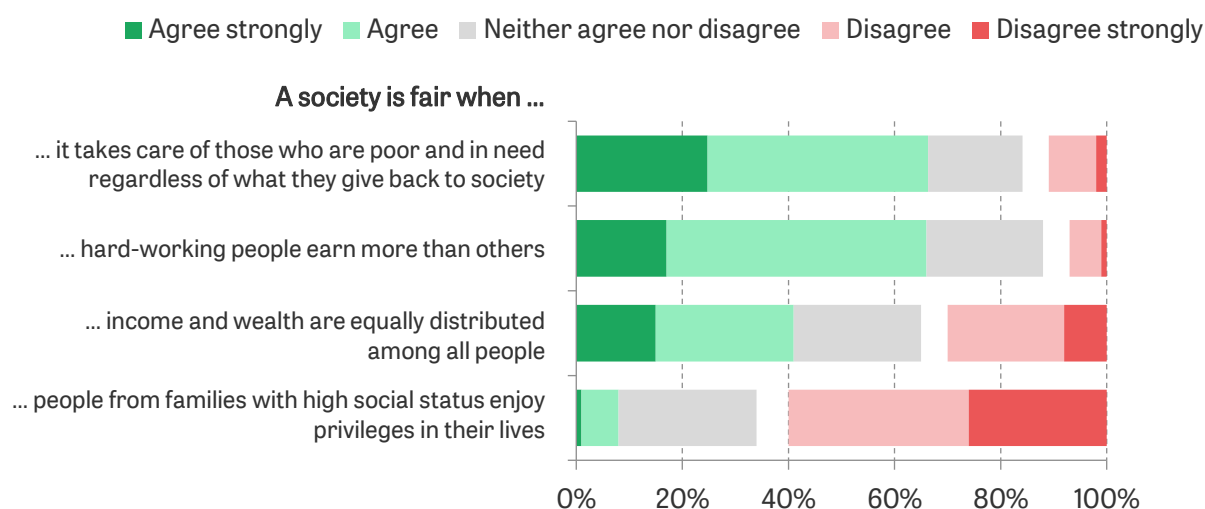
Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

We see similar patterns when considering health inequalities rather than income inequalities. All groups find increasing life expectancy gaps between more and less deprived areas and between rich and poor the most problematic, and increases in the life expectancy gap between the genders the least problematic (see Figure 19). Once again, Structuralists are much more likely to think rising health inequalities as a result of the pandemic are a ‘very big problem’ than Individualists and people In the Middle.

Belief in meritocracy and the perceived fairness of inequalities

The nuanced and multifaceted understanding of fairness among the public that we found in the literature reviewed in Section 3 is also reflected in our new survey. Looking first at the results from the public as a whole, the perceived importance of a meritocratic system in which effort is rewarded is clear, with 66% of people agreeing or strongly agreeing that society is fair when hard-working people earn more than others (see Figure 20). However, people consider it equally vital that a fair society provides for those in need, with 67% expressing agreement with the statement ‘A society is fair when it takes care of those who are poor and in need, regardless of what they give back to society’.

Figure 20. What makes a society fair



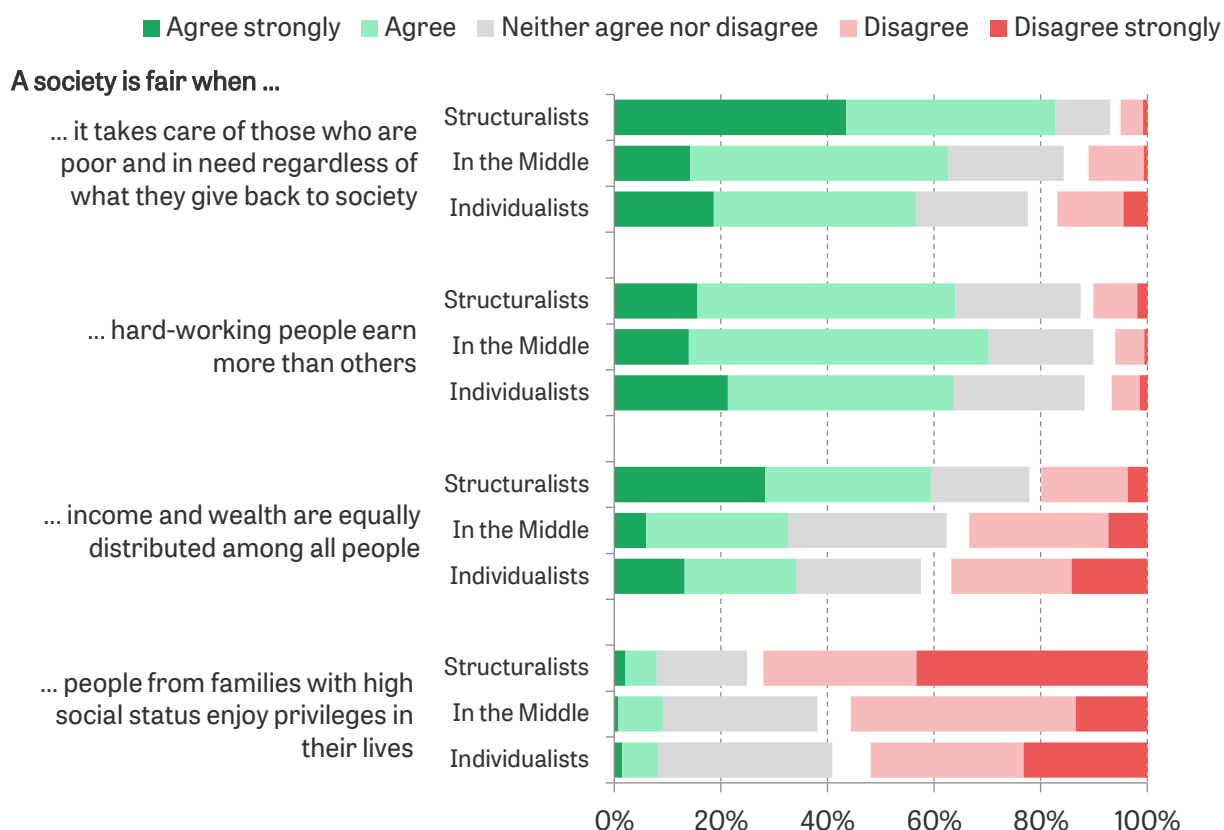
Note: ‘There are many different views as to what makes a society fair or unfair. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?’.

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11–12 November 2020.

What is also apparent is that people do not necessarily equate fairness with complete equality: 41% of people believe that society is fair when income and wealth are equally distributed among all people, while 30% disagree with this. Inherited privilege meets with unequivocal disapproval – just 8% of people agree that a fair society is one in which people from families with high social status enjoy privileges in their lives.

Looking at the results according to inequality world view provides further insight into how fairness is perceived in Britain. Importantly, all groups share a belief in the importance of hard work being rewarded, with 64% of Structuralists and Individualists and 70% of those In the Middle agreeing with this (see Figure 21). Similarly, there is shared support for society taking care of those in need, regardless of their contribution to society. Majorities of all groups express support for this principle, although support is highest by some margin among Structuralists, at 83% (with 44% strongly agreeing).

Figure 21. What makes a society fair, by inequality world view



Note: 'There are many different views as to what makes a society fair or unfair. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

A notable difference between groups is evident when looking at views on the fairness of total equality: 59% of Structuralists believe society is fair when income and wealth are equally distributed, compared with just 34% of Individualists and 33% of people In the Middle. Structuralists are also more likely to reject social status conferring privilege, and to do so strongly, than both other groups, although majorities of all groups disagree with the reward of unearned privilege.

Attitudes towards government action to address inequalities

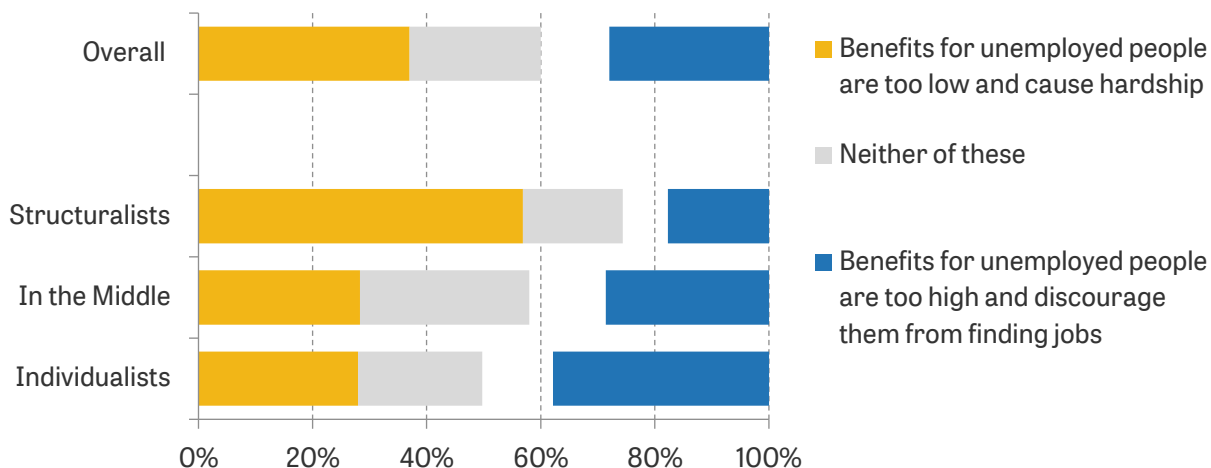
If people are aware of inequalities in society and feel uncomfortable or concerned by them, we might expect them to support action by the state to address them, including by redistributing income from rich to poor. As we have seen, the existing literature and data suggest that this is not necessarily the case in practice, due to the myriad influences on the public's support for action. Our own analysis also shows the importance of people's inequality world view for their support for measures to remedy inequalities.

Structuralists have very different views of welfare benefits

In our data, agreement that unemployment benefits are too low and cause hardship was 37% (see Figure 22), a very similar proportion to that in the 2019 BSA data (see Figure 4). However, somewhat fewer people in our sample thought that benefits were too high and disincentivised work (28%, compared with 37% in BSA). It is possible that the pandemic context could have influenced responses here – people may have come into contact with the benefits system for the first time as

a consequence of the pandemic, and the adequacy of benefit levels has received increased media coverage as anti-poverty charities campaign for a temporary increase in the rate of some benefits to be made permanent.

Figure 22. Beliefs about benefits for unemployed people, by inequality world view



Note: 'Opinions differ about the level of benefits for unemployed people. Which of these two statements comes closest to your own view?'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

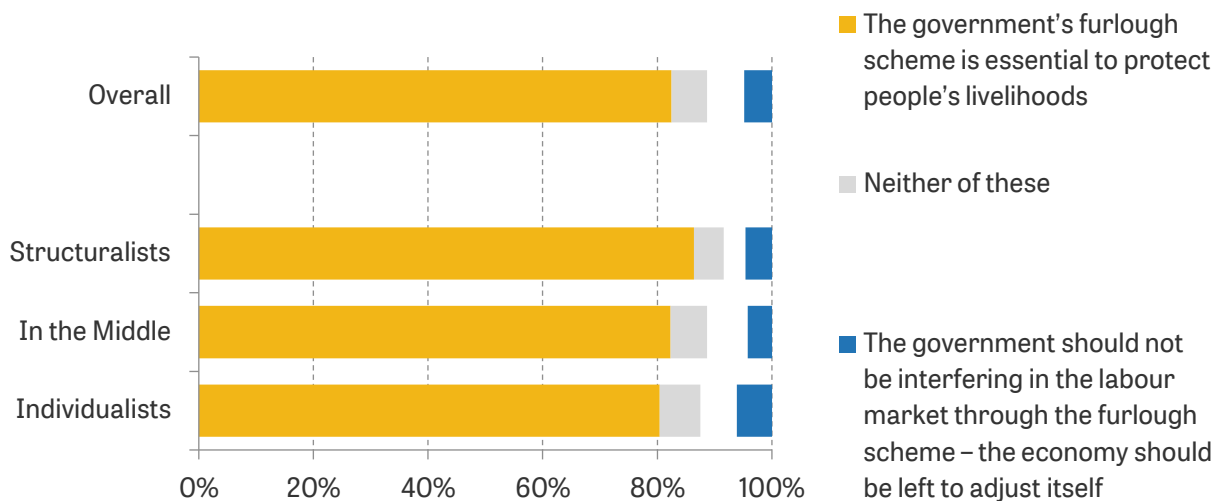
As we might expect, we see substantial differences in views of benefit adequacy by inequality world view. A majority of Structuralists (57%) believe unemployment benefit levels are too low, while Individualists are most likely to believe benefit levels to be too high and a disincentive to job searching (38%). Structuralists are also a little more certain in their views, with fewer neither / don't know responses than either In the Middle or Individualists.

Support for furlough is very high, but the scheme is seen as distinct from other forms of state income support

In response to many people being unable to work due to coronavirus restrictions, the government introduced its Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, or 'furlough' scheme, which paid up to 80% of employees' usual salaries. The scale of the furlough scheme has been huge – by April 2021, a total of 11.5 million unique jobs had been supported by the scheme, and £61.3 billion had been claimed in payments (HM Revenue & Customs, 2021). Given scepticism among the public towards redistribution and welfare that we have already noted, we might expect some criticism of this scheme. What we find, however, is near-universal support, with 82% of people agreeing that the furlough scheme is essential to protect people's livelihoods, and just 5% saying that the government should not be interfering in the labour market and should allow the economy to adjust by itself (see Figure 23).

Figure 23 also shows how our different groups responded to this question. This was a rare area of agreement; slightly more Structuralists than Individualists (86% versus 80%) were supportive of furlough, but overall support was high across all groups.

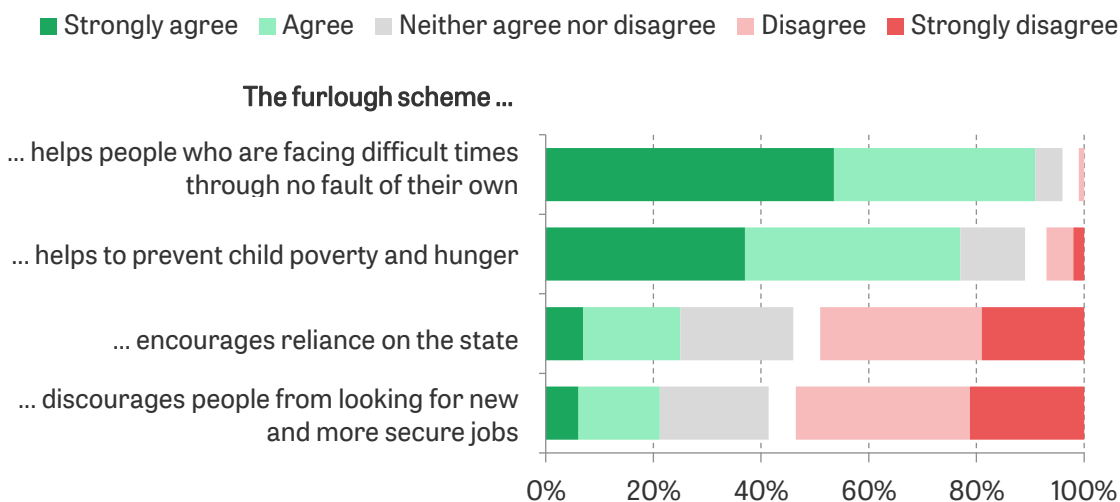
Figure 23. Beliefs about the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ('furlough'), by inequality world view



Note: 'Many people who have been unable to work due to the coronavirus crisis have had most of their wages paid by government under the Job Retention Scheme, or 'furlough' scheme. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Figure 24. Attitudes towards the furlough scheme

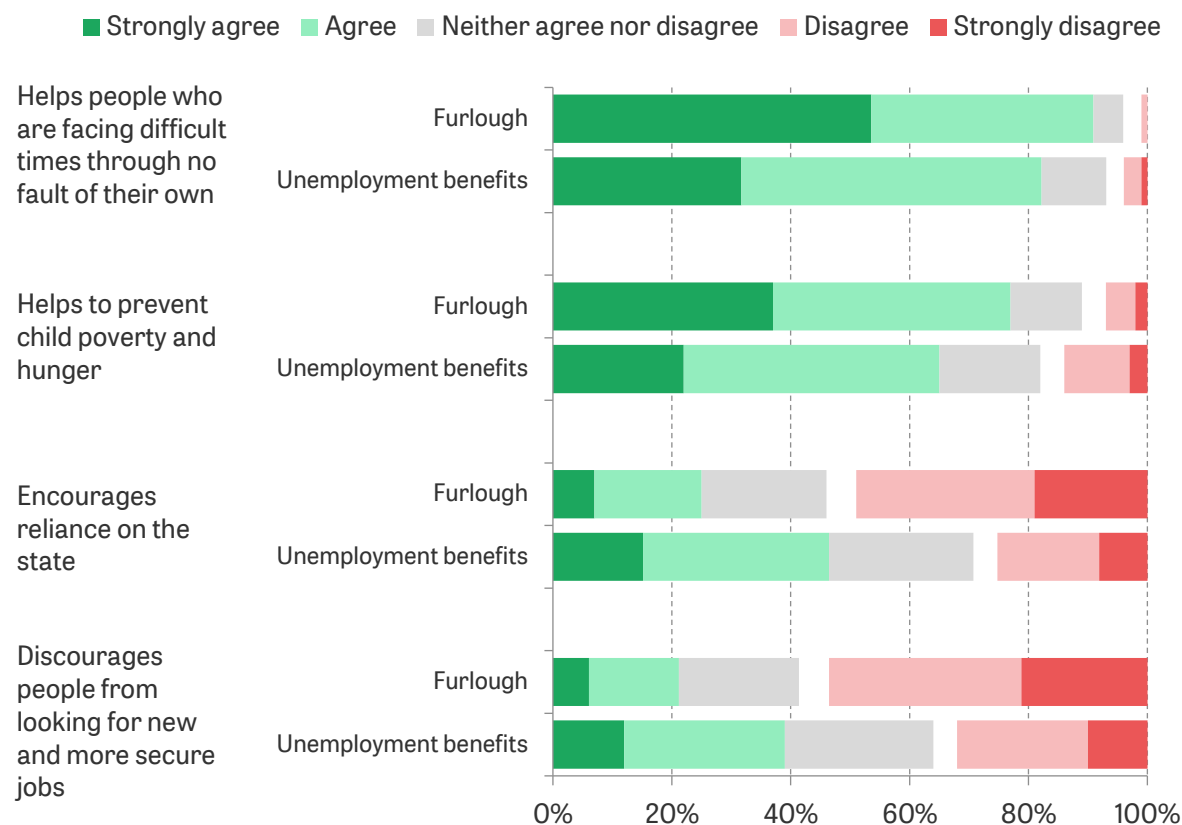


Note: 'Here are some statements of opinion about the furlough scheme. For each statement, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with it.'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Beyond general support for the furlough scheme, people also credit it with more specific positive outcomes, and are unlikely to associate it with potential downsides or unintended consequences: 90% agree the furlough scheme is helping people who are facing difficult times through no fault of their own and 77% say it helps prevent child poverty and hunger (see Figure 24). On the other hand, 25% believe the furlough scheme encourages reliance on the state, while 21% believe it discourages people from looking for new and more secure jobs.

Figure 25. Attitudes towards unemployment benefits compared with the furlough scheme



Note: 'Here are some opinions people have expressed about unemployment benefits/furlough. For each of the following statements, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with it.'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Individualists are more likely to associate furlough with negative effects than Structuralists and those In the Middle, but these views are still the minority within the group: for example, 26% of Individualists agree or strongly agree that furlough discourages job seeking, while 48% disagree or strongly disagree. Large majorities of all groups see positive effects of the furlough scheme, with 90% of Individualists and 94% of Structuralists agreeing it helps people facing difficult times through no fault of their own, and 71% of Individualists and 84% of Structuralists agreeing it helps to prevent child poverty and hunger (see Figure 26).

The indications from our survey are that people view the furlough scheme quite differently from unemployment benefits. When we asked people for their views about unemployment benefits along the same four dimensions as used to elicit views about furlough (i.e. helping people who are facing difficult times through no fault of their own; helping to prevent child poverty and hunger; encouraging reliance on the state; and discouraging people from looking for new jobs), we found that people are less likely to associate unemployment benefits with positive outcomes and more likely to believe they have negative effects (see Figure 25).

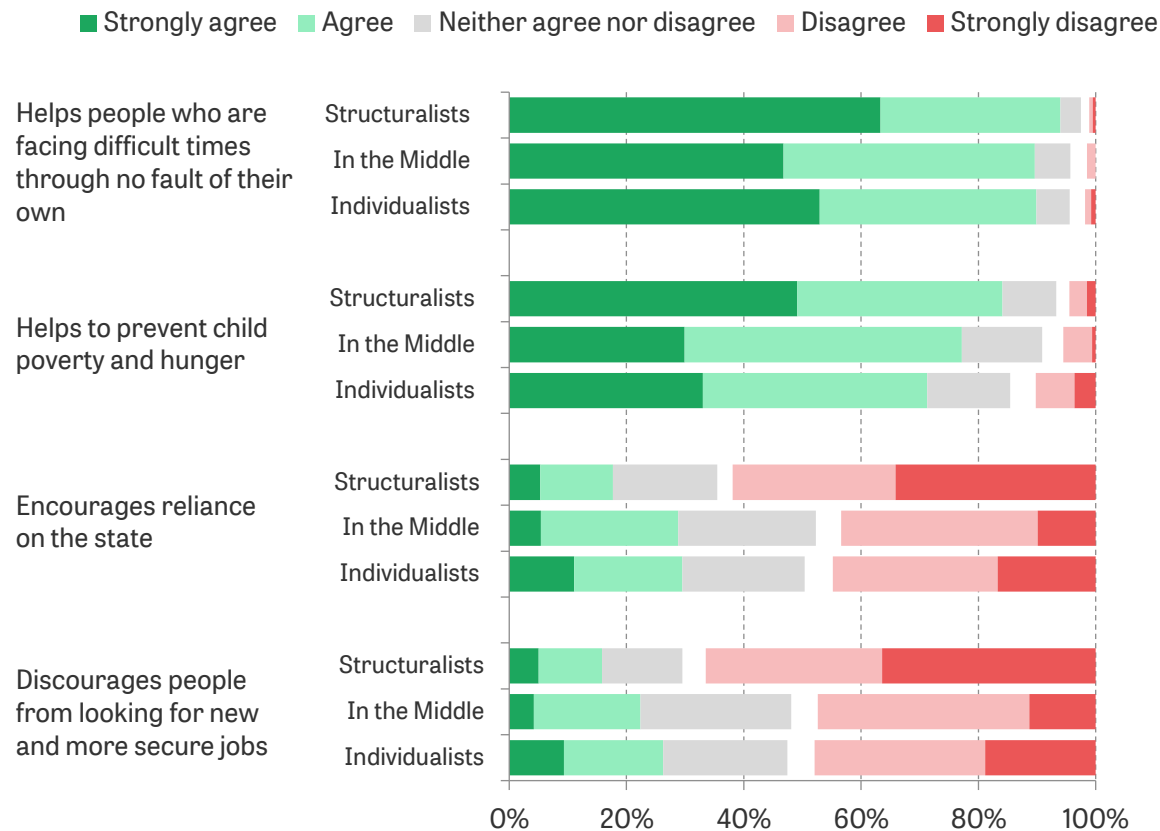
Even Individualists, who are generally wary of state intervention and emphasise the role of individual effort in determining outcomes, are much more supportive of the furlough scheme than of unemployment benefits. For example, 53% of Individualists strongly agree that the furlough scheme helps people who are facing difficult times through no fault of their own (see Figure 26), while just 29% of the same group believe this about unemployment benefits (see

Figure 27). Looking at the potential downsides of the two forms of state support reveals a similar pattern – while just 11% of Individualists strongly agree that furlough encourages reliance on the state, 24% believe this about unemployment benefits.

In contrast, Structuralists draw less sharp distinctions between furlough and unemployment benefits. Taking the same examples as above, 63% of Structuralists strongly agree that the furlough scheme helps people who are facing difficult times through no fault of their own, and 47% hold this view about unemployment benefits. Meanwhile, 5% of this group agree strongly that the furlough scheme encourages reliance on the state, rising only marginally to 11% when this question is asked about unemployment benefits.

The foregoing is not to say that Individualists are entirely negative in regard to benefits. Although far fewer strongly agree that unemployment benefits help people facing difficult times through no fault of their own, a strong majority of this group (81%) agree – whether strongly or not – with this statement. For comparison, 90% of the same group agreed with the statement with regard to furlough, and 87% of Structuralists agreed with regard to unemployment benefits.

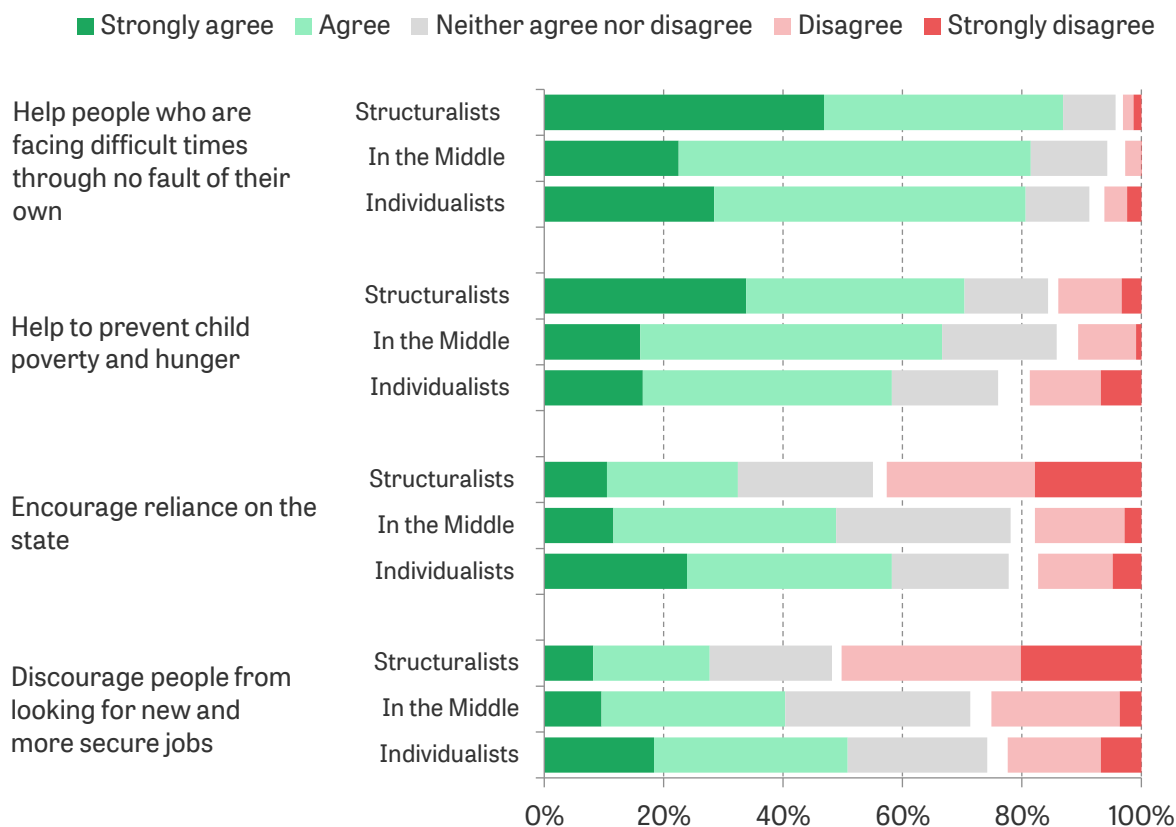
Figure 26. Attitudes towards the furlough scheme, by inequality world view



Note: 'Here are some opinions people have expressed about furlough. For each of the following statements, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with it.'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Figure 27. Attitudes towards unemployment benefits, by inequality world view



Note: 'Here are some opinions people have expressed about unemployment benefits. For each of the following statements, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with it.'

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Framing effects and support for government action to tackle income inequality

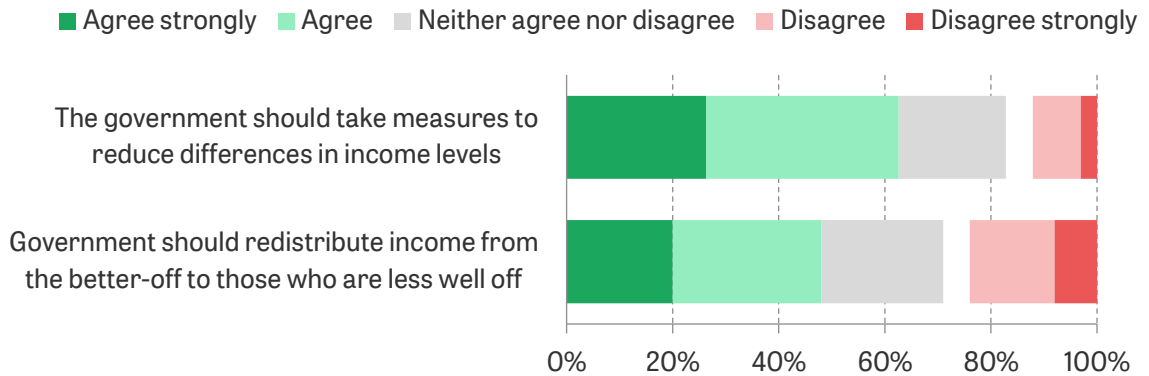
Given the substantial and persistent gap observed in the data between concern about income differences and support for redistribution (see Figure 3), and the suggestion of some public aversion to the term 'redistribution' (Rowlingson, Orton and Taylor, 2010), we decided to investigate these attitudes further in our own survey.

In particular, we looked to test the impact of framing questions around government intervention to address inequalities in different ways, both including and excluding the term 'redistribution'. Our findings show that people are more supportive of government 'taking measures' to reduce differences in income levels than they are with redistribution. Around half of people (48%) agree or strongly agree that government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off, while 62% agree or strongly agree with government taking measures to reduce differences in income (see Figure 28).

This pattern suggests people interpret 'redistribution' to be a stronger intervention than 'taking measures to reduce differences': if you agree with the former, you are likely to also agree with the latter. Redistribution also has the obvious connotations of one group gaining while others are made relatively worse off. It is possible that people are more supportive of 'taking measures' as they interpret this as being relatively costless, or at least without a direct cost to themselves. This framing could therefore win the support of those who may shy away from redistribution.

We also see very stark differences in responses according to political party affiliation, which is likely to have important implications for political messaging. In particular, question framing exerts much more of an influence on the views of Conservatives than on Labour supporters. While just 26% of Conservatives express agreement with the government 'redistributing' income (and only 6% strongly agree), this rises to 46% agreement with government 'taking measures to reduce income differences', including 13% who express strong agreement. In comparison, the views of Labour voters change little between the two statements (see Figure 29).

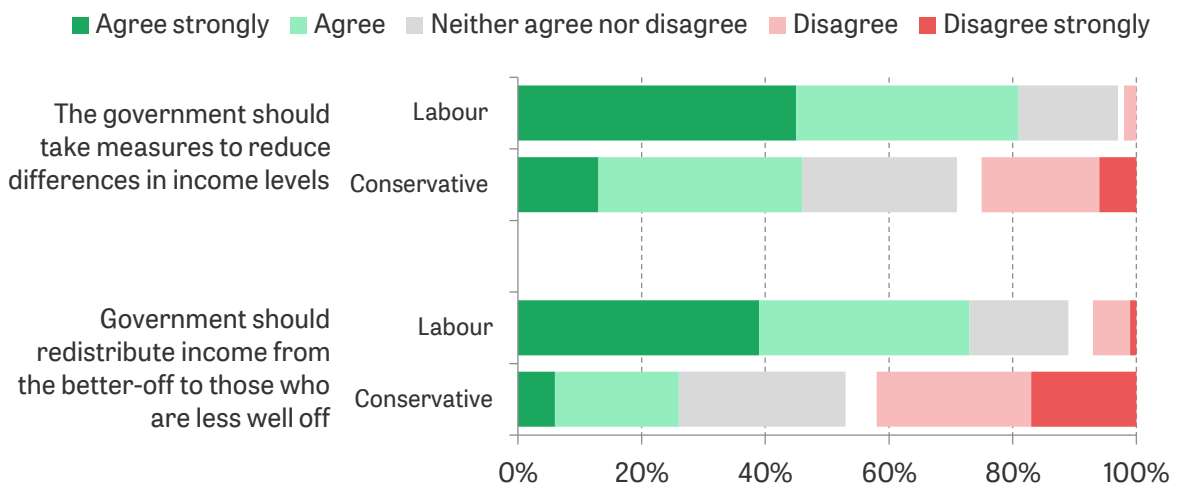
Figure 28. Support for government measures to reduce differences in income levels versus redistribution



Note: Split sample; top line: n=1,100, 'Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels".'; bottom line: n=1,126, 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off"?'.

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

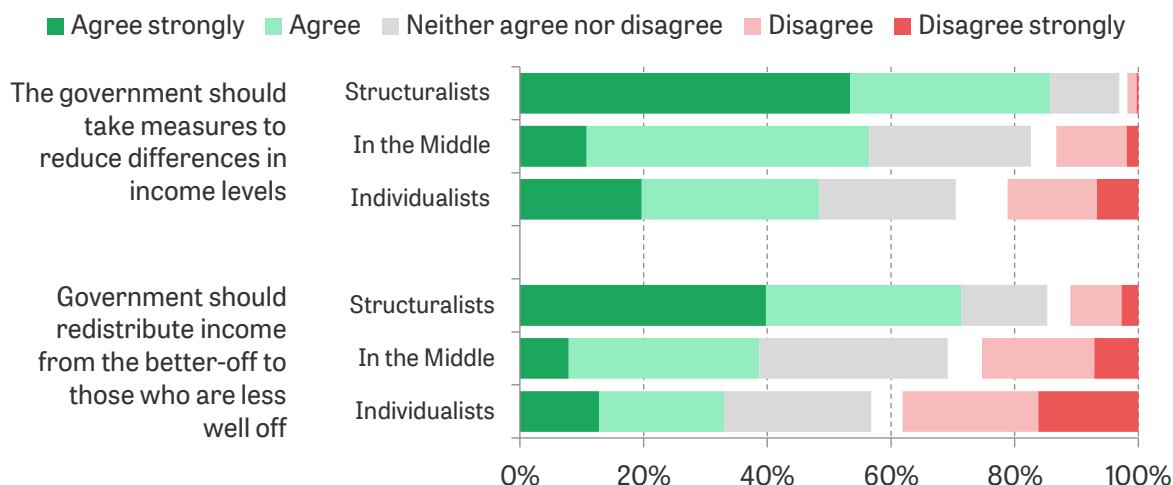
Figure 29. Support for government measures to reduce differences in income levels versus redistribution, by party vote in 2019 General Election



Note: Split sample; top line: n=1,100, 'Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels".'; bottom line: n=1,126, 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off"?'.

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Figure 30. Support for government measures to reduce differences in income levels versus redistribution, by inequality world view



Note: Split sample; top line: n=1,100, 'Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels".'; bottom line: n=1,126, 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off"?'.

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

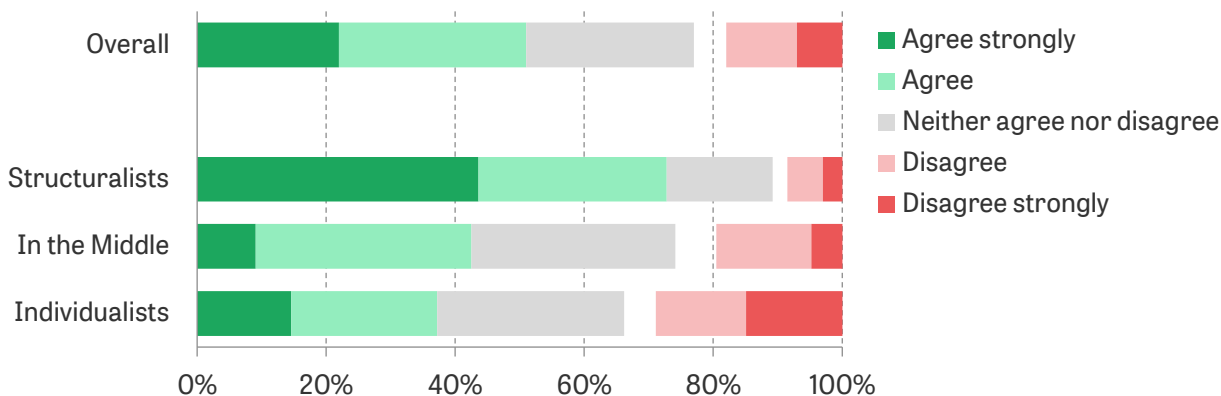
The effect of question framing differs according to the inequality world view of the respondent. Structuralists were a little more positive about 'taking measures' than 'redistributing' (86% agree or strongly agree versus 71%). The effect of adjusting the question framing was proportionately greater on the responses of Individualists and people In the Middle, though. For example, while 39% of those In the Middle agreed or strongly agreed with the government redistributing income, this rose to 57% when the framing of 'taking measures' was used (see Figure 30).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public support for redistribution

There is widespread belief that the pandemic strengthens the case for redistribution, with half of the public (51%) agreeing that the coronavirus crisis means there is more of a need for government to redistribute income, compared with 18% who disagree. Structuralists are much more likely to believe the coronavirus crisis strengthens the case for redistribution than either people In the Middle or Individualists (see Figure 31), but it is important to observe that there is a substantial support base for redistribution even among the Individualists. Over a third (37%) of Individualists agree that the coronavirus pandemic increases the need for government to redistribute income. Similar patterns were observed when the question asked about 'taking measures' rather than redistribution, with a smaller framing effect than described above without the COVID context.

It is not necessarily the case, though, that referencing the coronavirus crisis substantively affects people's underlying views on the need for redistribution. For example, a similar proportion of Individualists support redistribution in general (33%; see Figure 30) as believe the crisis strengthens the case for it (37%).

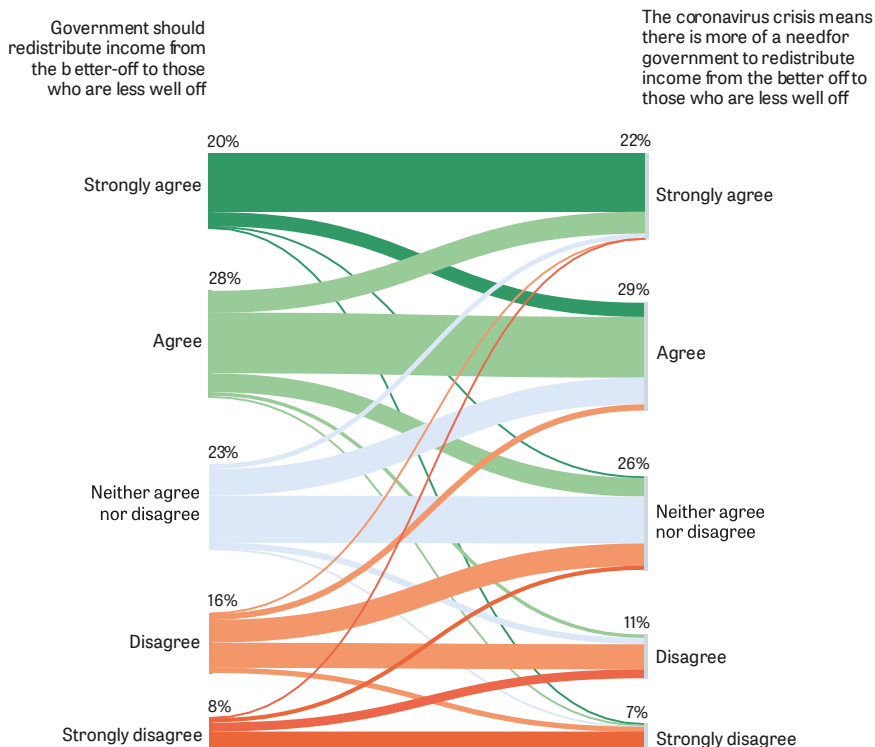
Figure 31. Support for redistribution in the pandemic context, by inequality world view



Note: 'To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "the coronavirus crisis means there is more of a need for government to redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off"?'.

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Figure 32. People who believe government should redistribute versus support for redistribution due to the coronavirus crisis



Note: n=1,126; left side: 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off"?'; right side: 'To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "the coronavirus crisis means there is more of a need for government to redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off"?'.

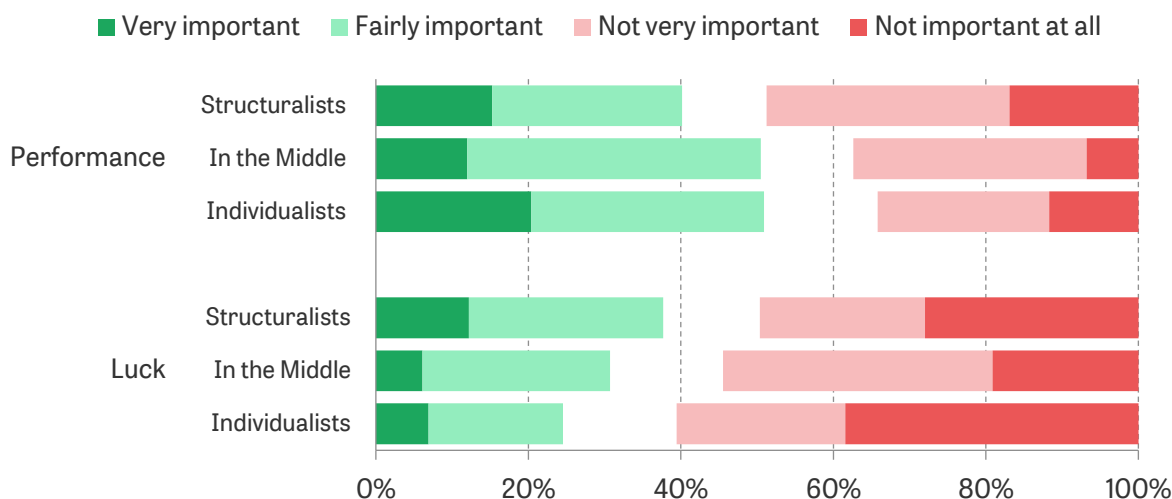
Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

This idea is further reinforced when we directly compare responses to these questions. Those who expressed support for the principle of redistribution by government were likely to agree that the pandemic strengthens the case for it, while those who opposed redistribution in general were

very unlikely to believe that the pandemic strengthens the case for it (see Figure 32). For example, only 8% of those who disagree with government redistributing income in general go on to agree that there is more need for it now in light of the coronavirus crisis. This suggests that the pandemic has not been transformational in terms of its effect on our attitudes towards inequalities, and that bringing the crisis to the front of people’s minds has a limited impact on how they respond.

One reason the COVID crisis does not appear to have generated support for redistribution may be that many people take a meritocratic view of reasons for job loss during the pandemic. When asked about how important luck and performance respectively were to people losing jobs during the pandemic, a majority of the sample said that performance was very or fairly important, while fewer people said the same about luck. As Figure 33 shows, even among Structuralists, more people perceive performance as being important than perceive luck as important.¹

Figure 33. Beliefs about the causes of job loss during the pandemic, by inequality world view



Note: Bottom line, ‘Some people have already lost their jobs as a result of the coronavirus crisis, and others are likely to in the coming months. How important do you think luck is in determining whether people lose their jobs at this time?’. Top line, ‘And how important do you think how well people are performing at their jobs is in determining whether people lose their jobs at this time?’.

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11–12 November 2020.

The role of government after the pandemic

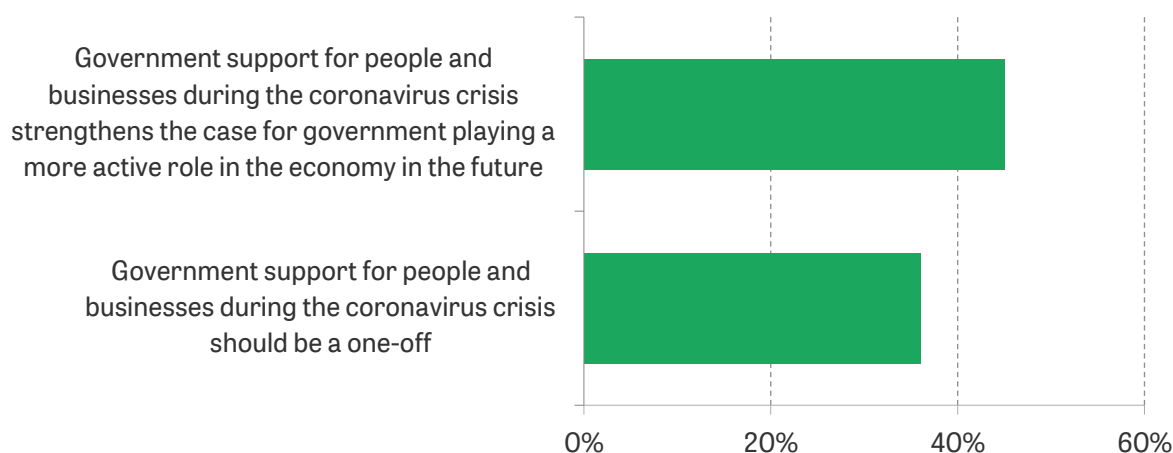
The comparison above, and the fact that our survey results on support for redistribution or reductions in gaps are comparable to those from surveys conducted before the pandemic, suggest no sea change in views of government intervention, even following a once-in-a-generation crisis. However, other findings suggest it is at least possible that the experience of furlough, and the other direct interventions of government in response to the crisis, could lead significant proportions of the population to rethink the role of government, and the acceptable scope of its involvement in a market economy.

¹ These questions were among those used to identify the groups, and so direct comparisons between the groups on this question would be tautological.

Overall, we find that people are split on whether the government’s support for workers and businesses during the coronavirus crisis strengthens the case for more government intervention in the economy in the future: 45% believe that the government should play a more active role in the economy, while 36% believe the kinds of government intervention observed in response to the crisis should be a one-off (see Figure 34).

As we would expect, this is related to existing inequality world views. Structuralists are noticeably more likely to say the coronavirus crisis has strengthened the case for government intervention in the economy than the average respondent, while this is a minority view (albeit substantial minorities) among both Individualists and the In the Middle group (see Figure 35). However, this still reflects significant minorities, even of the Individualist group, who say that the crisis has shifted their perspective.

Figure 34. Public views on the future role of government in the economy

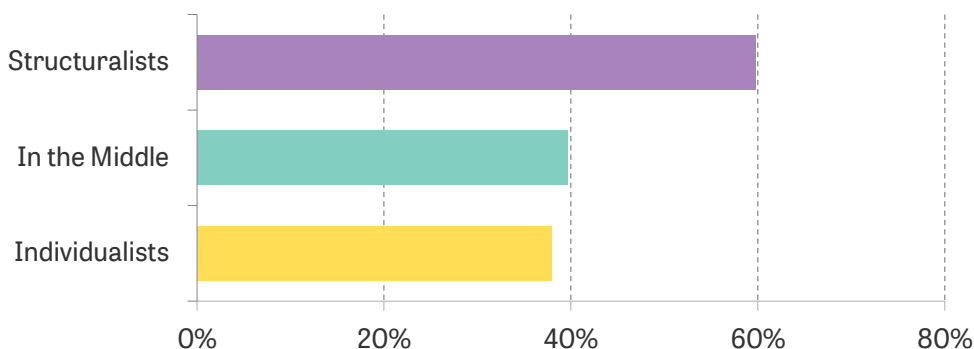


Note: ‘Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?’.

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Figure 35. Public views on the future role of government in the economy

% agree ‘Government support for people and businesses during the coronavirus crisis strengthens the case for government playing a more active role in the economy in the future’



Note: ‘Which of the following statements comes closest to your view? Government support for people and businesses during the coronavirus crisis strengthens the case for government playing a more active role in the economy in the future; or Government support for people and business during the coronavirus crisis should be a one-off’.

Source: KCL/YouGov, 11-12 November 2020.

Concluding remarks

What these new data show very clearly is that there is not just one set of public attitudes to inequalities – our beliefs are an expression of an underlying world view about inequality, fairness and the causes of unequal outcomes, and there are multiple world views within society.

We find that those with a Structuralist world view are more likely to be concerned about inequalities of all types, and to believe that the COVID-19 pandemic will deepen inequalities, than those with Individualist world views or those who are 'In the Middle'. The groups also have different ideas about 'fair' inequalities – the equal distribution of income and wealth, and support for those in need, are relatively more important for Structuralists than for the two other groups. On actions to address inequalities, Individualists are more likely to be critical of the welfare system, and to be hostile to the term 'redistribution'. Individualists and those In the Middle are also less likely than Structuralists to believe that the COVID-19 pandemic strengthens the case for redistribution, or that it justifies a more active role for the state in the economy in the future.

Despite their differences, there are also beliefs that unite these groups. The importance of hard work being rewarded (and family privilege *not* being rewarded) for society to be fair are among these. The three groups also appear to have a shared prioritisation of inequality types, with inequalities between rich and poor and between more and less deprived areas of concern to all groups, and inequalities between the genders and generations seen as relatively less important. This may point to at least some common ground on priorities for policy action.

Conclusions

Attitudes to inequalities have real-world implications, so tracking them and trying to understand them matters. As we have demonstrated, this can be difficult to do with the available evidence, which is often limited and skewed towards attitudes to economic inequalities.

Our review of the existing literature and data, plus the analysis of our own survey findings, does however point towards new and important insights for policymakers.

1. **There is no one national set of attitudes towards inequalities. Instead, a few distinct world views are discernible**

While attitudes towards inequalities are usually assessed in the aggregate, there are different inequality world views. We identify three major groups – the Structuralists, the Individualists and those In the Middle, with the Structuralists more aware of inequalities and more likely to see them as the result of forces outside of an individual's control. By contrast, Individualists are less aware of and concerned by inequalities, and more likely to see them as a product of individuals' own decisions and efforts. These groups cut across traditional political party affiliations, indicating that we cannot rely on voting patterns as a complete proxy for attitudes to inequalities. It also suggests that action to address inequalities can garner cross-party support, if framed and targeted correctly.

2. **Some inequalities worry us more than others**

There is, for example, a particular, and relatively distinct, concern in Britain with area-based inequalities (between more and less deprived areas). It comes top of our list of priorities, on a par with income and wealth inequalities, and we stand out in our concern when comparing our views with those of Western Europeans and North Americans. We are also notably worried about the potential for COVID-19 to exacerbate these inequalities. These findings provide a strong endorsement for 'levelling up', and for this to be a central component of the coronavirus recovery strategy. In particular, qualitative research suggests that addressing differential access to good-quality public services, notably education and health, is a crucial part of this. For comparison, there is much less concern in Britain with inequalities between the genders, between old and young and in health outcomes. And, crucially, this concern with area-based inequalities is seen pretty equally across our three groups of Structuralists, Individualists and those In the Middle, and supporters of different political parties.

3. **Our views of *fair* inequalities are nuanced – merit matters, but so does need**

The stereotype suggests that Britain shares the US's obsession with meritocracy, and the reward of talent and hard work. In this vision, inequalities are not just inevitable, but desirable in that they create incentives to work harder and better one's situation. The evidence is more nuanced. While all groups (Individualists, Structuralists and those In the Middle) emphasise the importance of a fair society rewarding hard work, there is also a shared belief that those who are in need should be taken care of, irrespective of their reciprocal contribution to society. This implies that the case against inequalities can be persuasively made on fairness grounds in Britain.

4. Though there is some wariness of the term ‘redistribution’, there is clearer support for government action to address inequalities

Though we express concern about inequalities, we are more reticent to support action to address them, particularly when the element of redistribution is made explicit. This aversion to redistribution is not universal, however – while it is evident among Individualists, those In the Middle and (to look at the population in a different way) Conservative voters, it is not shared by Structuralists and Labour voters. What is also clear, however, is that the way action to address inequalities is framed can help to win over these sceptical groups. Notably, their support is markedly higher when intervention is framed as ‘taking measures’ to address inequalities, rather than redistribution specifically. Understanding what these ‘measures’ are should be a key area for further testing.

5. Our attitudes are not necessarily fixed, and the coronavirus crisis may provide an opening for a more active approach to tackling inequalities

While our identification of inequality world views does suggest that individuals have a relatively well-established set of views about inequalities, this does not mean they can never be changed. Time-series data attest to this – we see support for redistribution oscillating over time, and quite pronounced shifts in attitudes towards benefits, for example. Moreover, there are indications that the pandemic has in some ways provided a window for change – more than a third of each group (rising to three-quarters of Structuralists) believe the COVID-19 crisis increases the need for government to redistribute income from rich to poor. Further, we also seem more willing to rethink the scope of state intervention – almost half of us believe the experience of the pandemic has strengthened the case for a more active role for government in the future.

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Appendix

Methods

A review of the literature: We conducted an extensive review of academic and policy research into attitudes towards and perceptions of inequalities, including both general searches (i.e. not domain-specific) and targeted searches on perceptions of / attitudes to unequal outcomes in health, education and political participation, and inequalities between genders, areas, generations, and ethnic, racial and religious groups and inequalities based on immigration status. Relevant literature was identified through journal database searches (including ProQuest Social Science Database, British Library Explore and Scopus) and searches in Google and Google Scholar, as well as by asking experts to recommend studies and snowballing from the references of relevant papers. We focused largely on the most recent literature, published since 2010.

Analysis of public opinion data: We also analysed existing public opinion data, identifying relevant questions from major survey series and one-off surveys conducted in Britain and the UK. We have sought to present trend data where possible to show how perceptions might have shifted over time, drawing on survey sources including the European Social Survey, US General Social Survey and Ipsos MORI studies – but particularly relying on the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA), which has collected data for a number of indicators of interest over many years.

Collection of new survey data: We fielded a new survey on attitudes to inequalities among 2,226 British respondents in November 2020. This survey allowed us to address a gap in the evidence by examining views on inequalities in multiple domains simultaneously. It also enabled us to take a snapshot of public opinion during the COVID-19 pandemic, to provide an insight into how attitudes towards inequalities may be shifting in response.

Primary data collection

Our data were collected via a YouGov online omnibus survey between 11 November 2020 and 12 November 2020. Supplied weights make the sample representative in terms of EU referendum vote, age–gender–education, attention paid to politics, and region–2019-election-vote. It is important to note that this weighting does not account for ethnicity. Participants from ethnic minority backgrounds are under-represented in this sample, and therefore the results cannot be considered representative of the British population.

Identifying groups

To identify the three groups referred to throughout this chapter, we performed latent class analysis (LCA), using the `gsem` suite of commands in Stata 16.1. The variables that went into defining latent classes were a mix of ordinal and binary measures, and a measure asking participants to choose a rating between 0 and 11 which we treated as continuous. For some of the ordinal measures, we combined two response categories where there were very few responses in a given category. We allowed the variance of the continuous measure to differ between classes. The variables included in the LCA are as shown in Table A1.

Table A1. Survey questions used in latent class analysis

Question text	Original responses	Recoded responses
<p>How important is each of the following for getting ahead in life?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. coming from a wealthy family 2. having well-educated parents 3. having a good education 4. having ambition 5. hard work 6. knowing the right people 7. having political connections 8. giving bribes 9. person's religion 10. being born a man or woman 	<p>essential very important fairly important not very important not important at all don't know</p>	<p>all: don't know → missing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'essential' and 'very important' combined 2. 'not very important' and 'not important at all' combined 3. 'not very important' and 'not important at all' combined 4. 'not very important' and 'not important at all' combined 5. 'not very important' and 'not important at all' combined 6. 'not very important' and 'not important at all' combined 7. n/a 8. 'essential' and 'very important' combined 9. 'essential' and 'very important' combined 10. n/a
<p>Do you think [economic differences between Black and White people] are</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. because of discrimination? 2. because most Black people don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty? 3. because most Black people don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty? 	<p>yes no don't know prefer not to say</p>	<p>all: don't know → missing all: prefer not to say → missing</p>
<p>Some people have already lost their jobs as a result of the coronavirus crisis, and others are likely to in the coming months. How important do you think [the following are] in determining whether people lose their jobs at this time?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. luck 2. how well people are performing at their jobs 	<p>very important fairly important fairly unimportant very unimportant don't know</p>	<p>all: don't know → missing</p>

Question text	Original responses	Recoded responses
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? There is one law for the rich and one for the poor	agree strongly agree neither agree nor disagree disagree disagree strongly don't know	don't know → missing
How equal or unequal do you think Britain was before the coronavirus outbreak?	very equal somewhat equal neither equal nor unequal somewhat unequal very unequal don't know	don't know → missing
To what extent do you think this statement applies in Britain? Overall, everyone in Britain has a fair chance of getting the education they seek	0 (does not apply at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (applies completely) don't know	don't know → missing
Some people think that those in Britain with more money are better able than those in Britain with less money to live healthy lives. Others disagree. How about you? Would you say that people with more money are:	a lot better able to live healthy lives a little better able to live healthy lives it makes no difference a little less able to live healthy lives a lot less able to live healthy lives don't know	don't know → missing

For some classes, the probability of the class choosing a particular response was close to 0 or 1. This caused the estimated parameter to tend toward extreme values, preventing convergence. In these cases, we constrained the parameter estimates at either 15 or -15, the inverse logit of 1 and 0 respectively. The need to constrain too many parameters suggests a model is unidentified, but we are aware of no basis for determining how many is 'too many'.

To facilitate convergence, we accepted models in which convergence was found in non-concave regions of the likelihood function by allowing a maximum to be detected on the basis of the first derivative rather than the second. The risk of this approach is that any maximum detected may be local rather than global. To mitigate this, we used at least 100 randomly selected starting values to perform the analysis and inspected the reported log likelihoods to satisfy ourselves that a global maximum was being detected.

With no a priori reason to believe there were a particular number of classes, we used an iterative process. Beginning with two latent classes, we followed the procedure above, and repeated it adding one additional class at a time until we believed the model to be unidentified, which

occurred at six random classes. We selected the three-class solution on the basis of BIC (Bayesian information criterion).

Differences between groups

LCA does not directly assign individuals to groups, but instead produces probabilities for each individual of belonging to a particular group. Some individuals will have a very high probability of belonging to one group and very low probabilities of belonging to others, while other individuals may have moderate probabilities of belonging to two or three groups. We incorporated this uncertainty by treating the probabilities of group membership as weights when producing the summary statistics in this report.