

NatCen

Social Research that works for society

Introduction to the British Social Attitudes survey

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What we'll cover

- NatCen – who we are
- Why measure attitudes?
- The British Social Attitudes survey series
 - Overview, topics and coverage
 - Methodology
- Analysis example
- Dissemination and analysis
 - Practical considerations for carrying out BSA analysis
- Accessing the data
- Questions



Who are NatCen?

- Britain's largest independent social research agency, founded in 1969
- Not-for-profit
- Variety of clients and funders
- Wide range of different types of research and methodologies



Why we're here

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

[Read more about us](#)



National Travel Survey publishes latest report

[Read more](#)



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

[National Diet & Nutrition Survey report](#)

Sign up for our newsletter



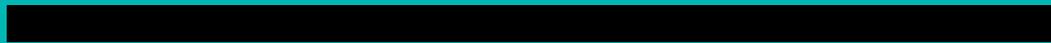
Our research: All our reports are free to download



Britain's first online probability-based panel

[Read more](#)

Attitudinal research



Legitimate concerns?

“Attitudes don’t matter”

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

“You can’t measure attitudes”

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

Attitudes do matter

An important part of our social world

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

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

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

Ways to address measurement challenges

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

Financial Times, September 2012



Overview of BSA

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



Example topic areas

Health

Transport

Education

Social security and welfare

Pensions

Work-life balance

Housing

Immigration

Euthanasia

Genomic science

Redistribution of income

National identity

Disability

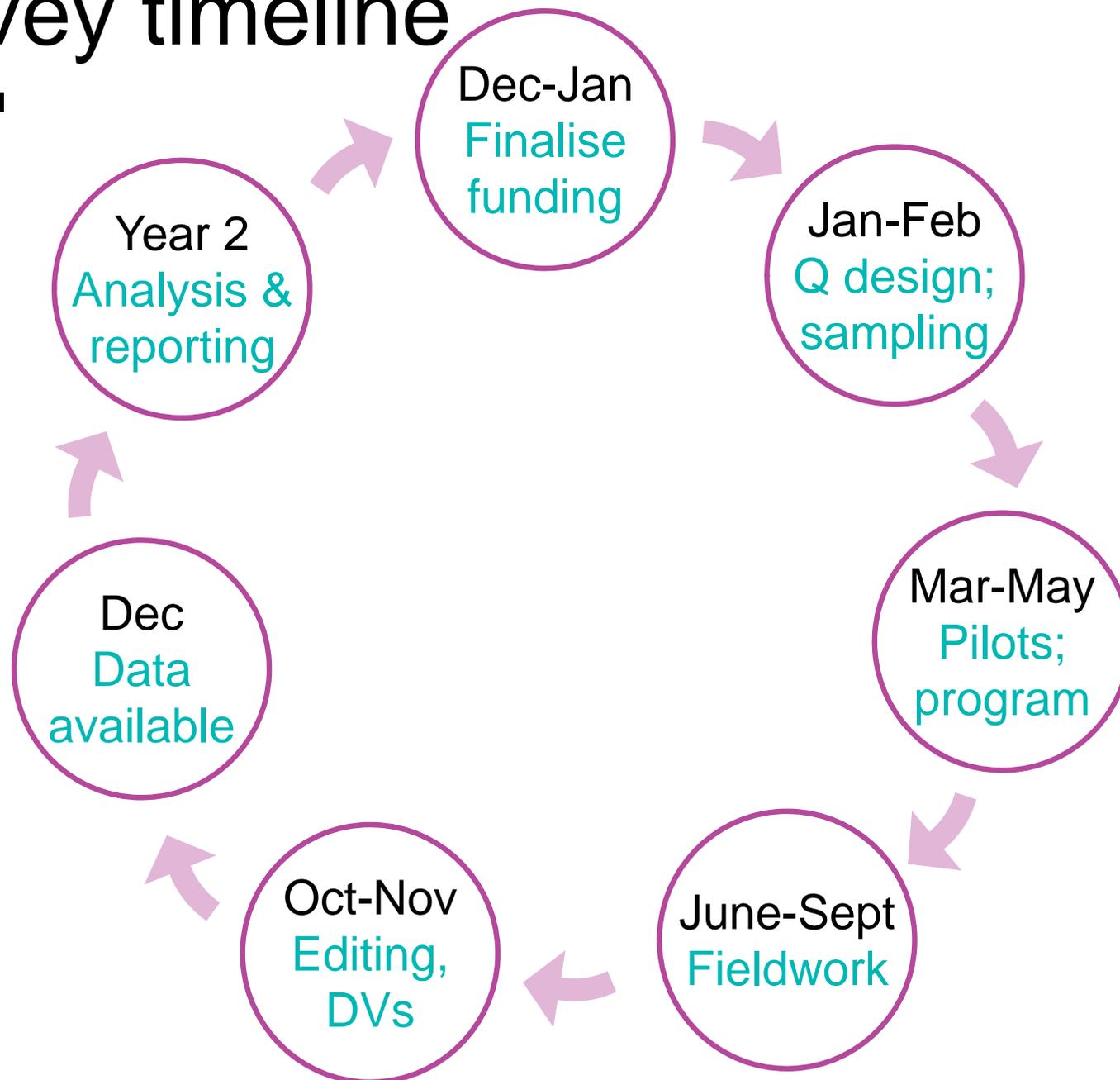
Political attitudes and
voting behaviour

Attitudes to Armed
Forces

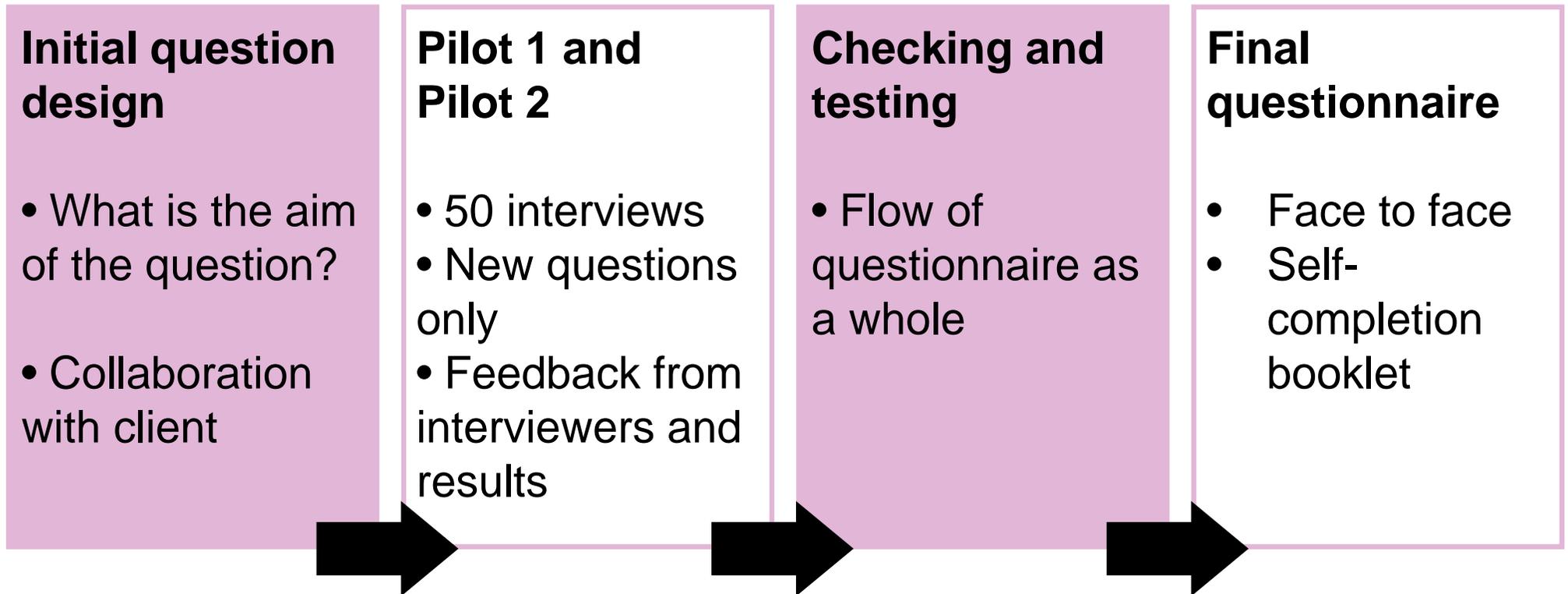
Poll

How long is the BSA fieldwork?

BSA survey timeline



Questionnaire design process



Sampling

Achieved sample needs to be:

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

Random probability sampling

Sample frame - Postcode Address File

Multi-stage sampling

→ Postcode sectors

→ Addresses

→ Flat (if necessary)

→ Person



Fieldwork

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



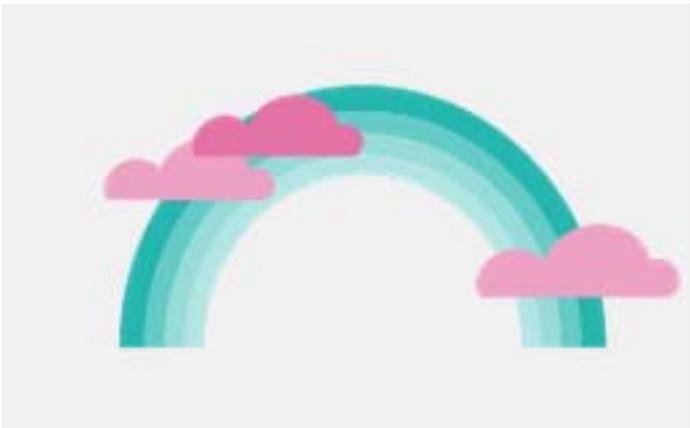
Analysis example



2.

Personal relationships analysis

- NatCen funded
- Part of our 30th annual BSA report
- Focus on change since 1983
- Area where we have seen a lot of change



Questions of interest

If a man and woman have sexual relations before marriage, what would your general opinion be?

What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex?

Sex before marriage

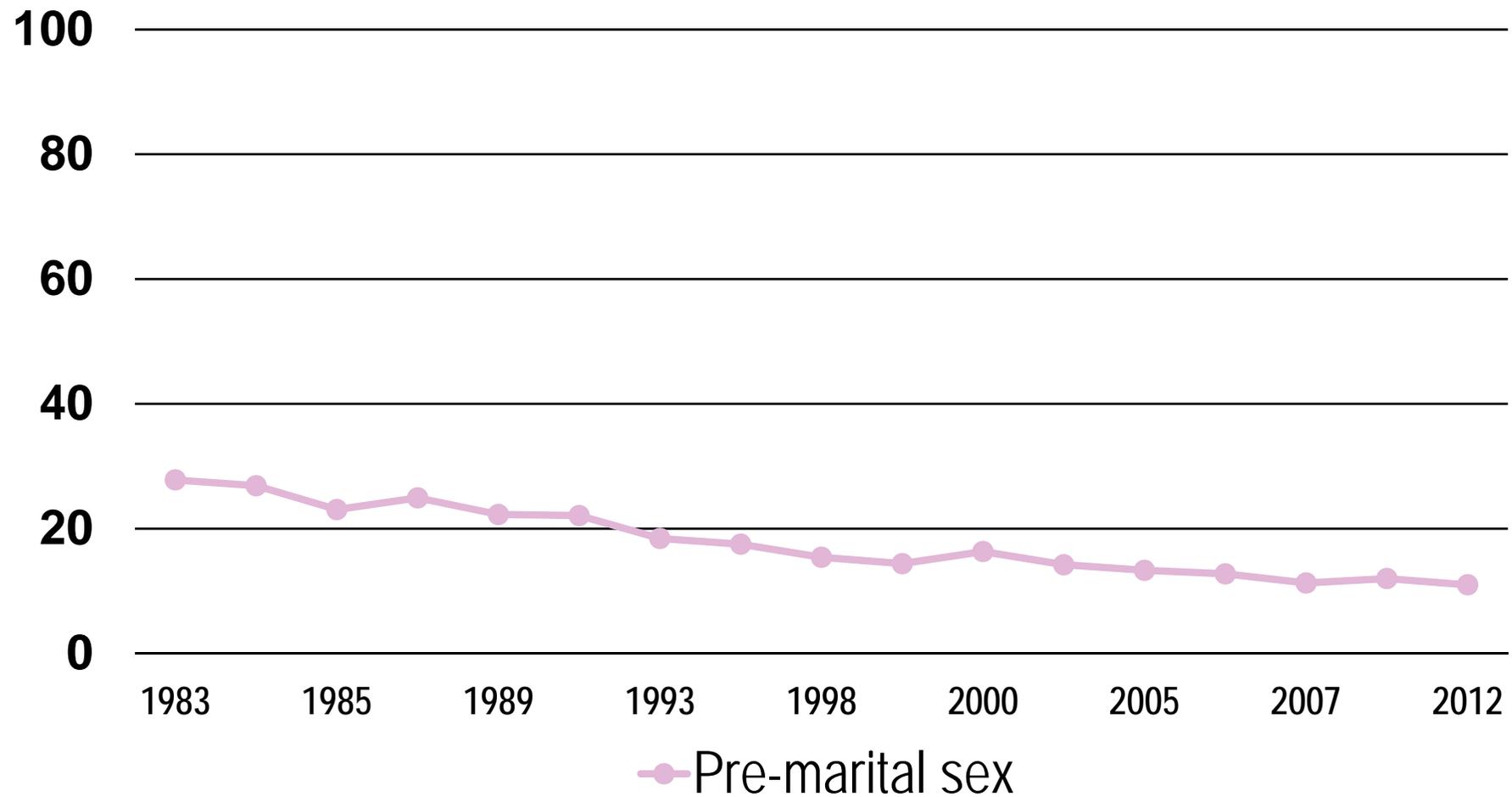
11% said always or
mostly wrong

2012 survey

28% said always or
mostly wrong

1983 survey

Pre-marital sex (% 'wrong')



Poll

In 2012, 28% of people said that same-sex relationships are wrong. What % said this in 1983?

28%

2012 survey

??%

1983 survey

Same-sex relationships

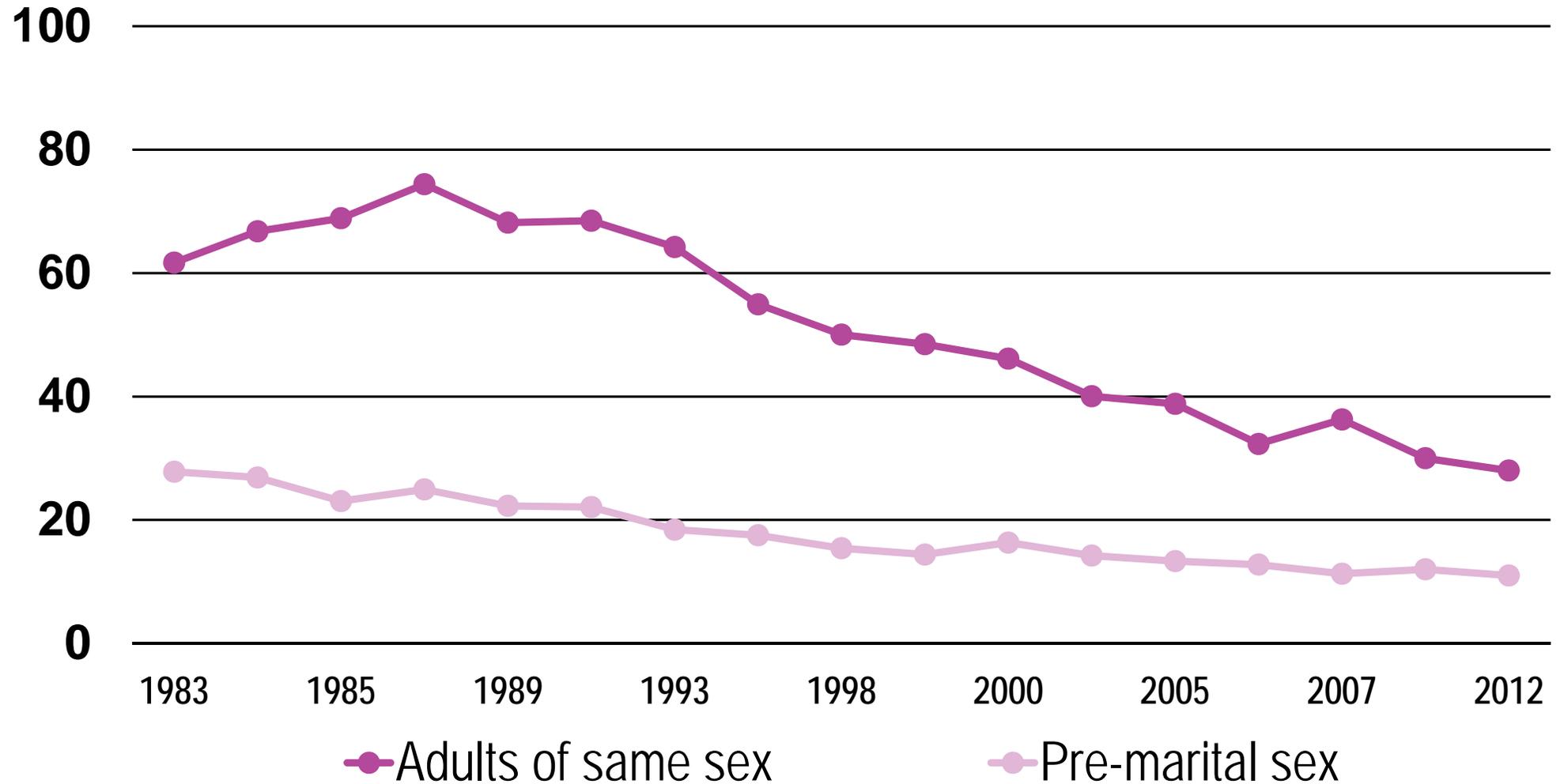
28% said always or
mostly wrong

2012 survey

62% said always or
mostly wrong

1983 survey

Sexual relationships (% 'wrong')



Whose views have
changed?

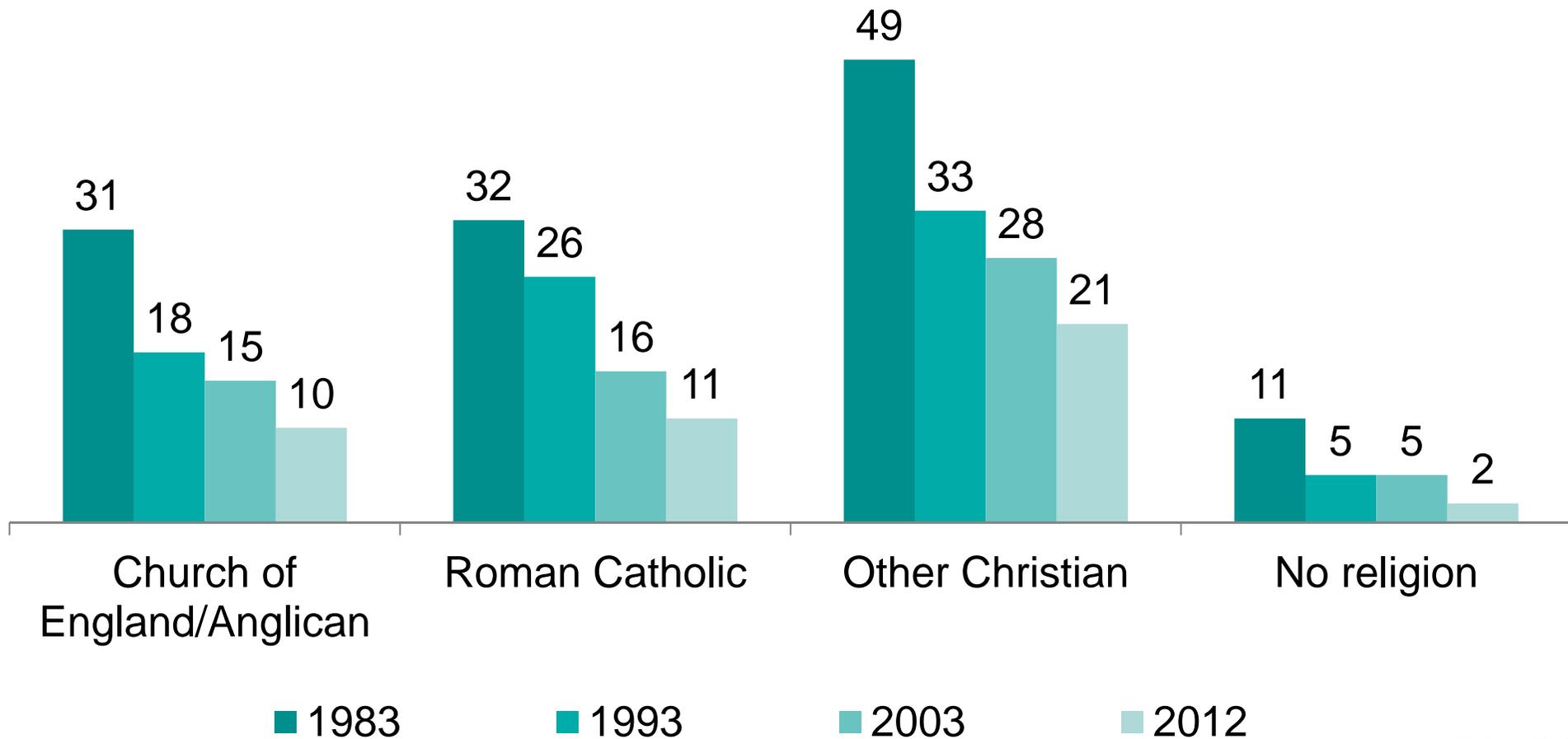
Whose views have changed?

Analysis by

- Religion
- Political party support
- Age

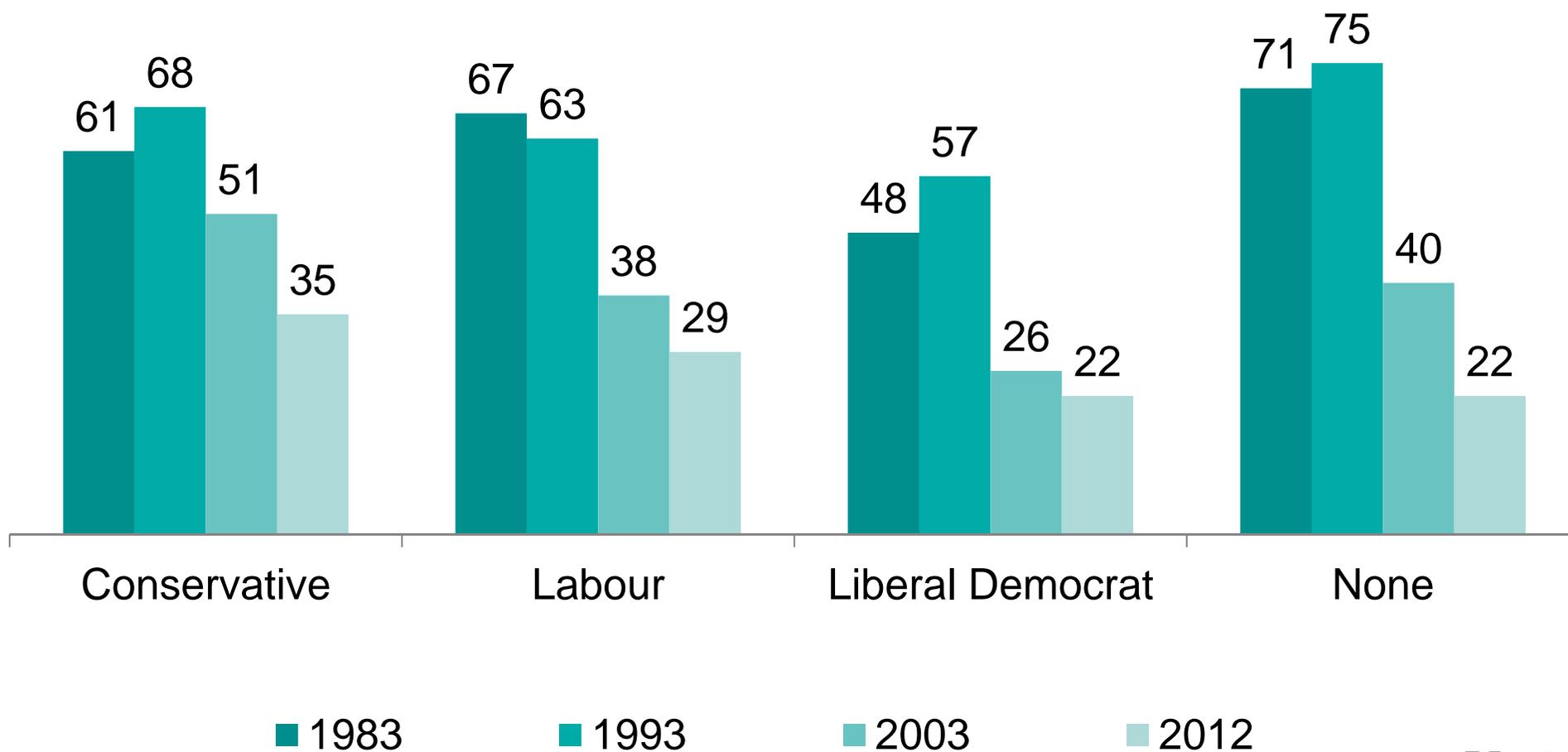
Religion: views on pre-marital sex

% saying pre-marital sex is wrong

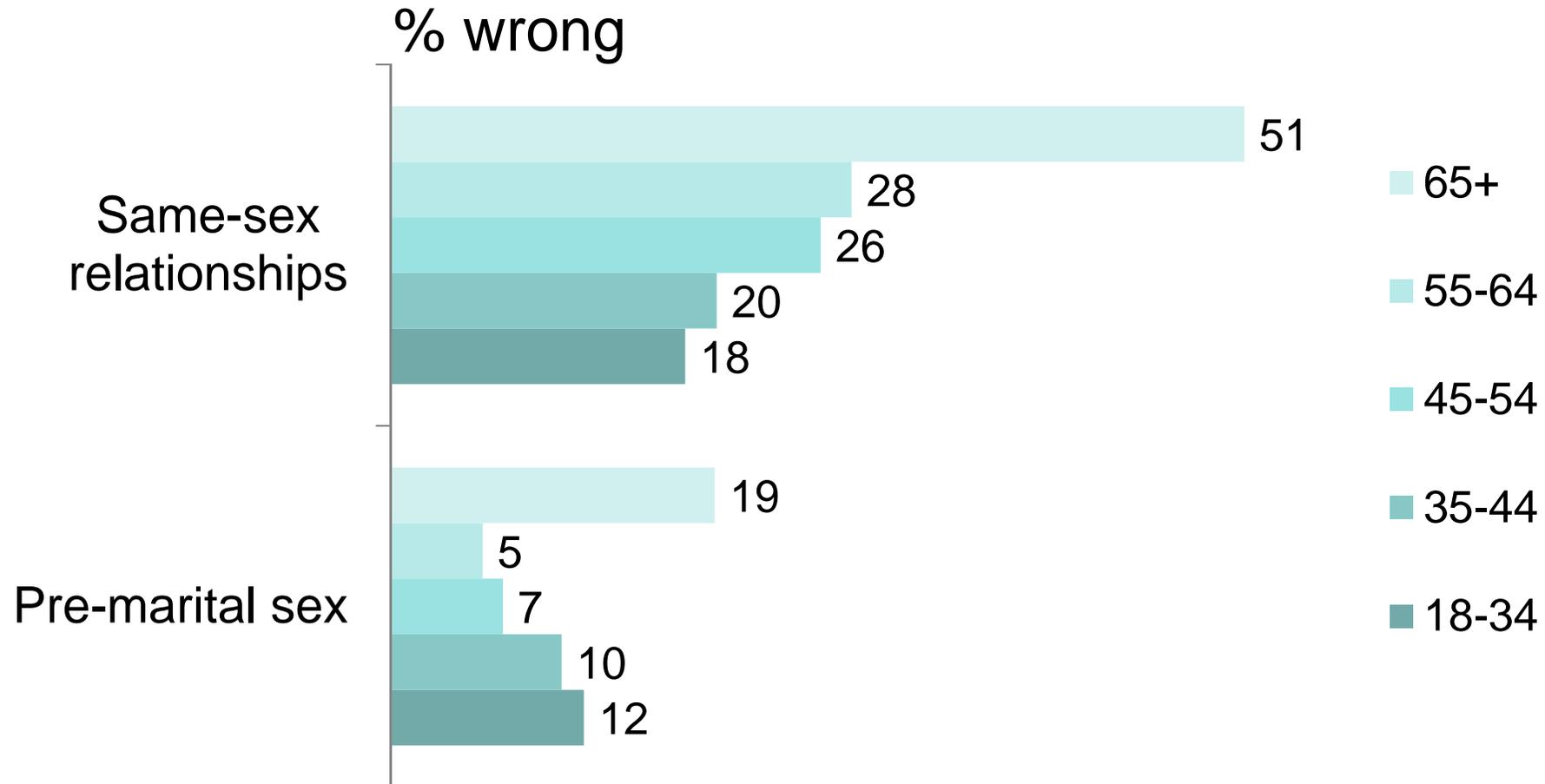


Political party support: views on same-sex relationships

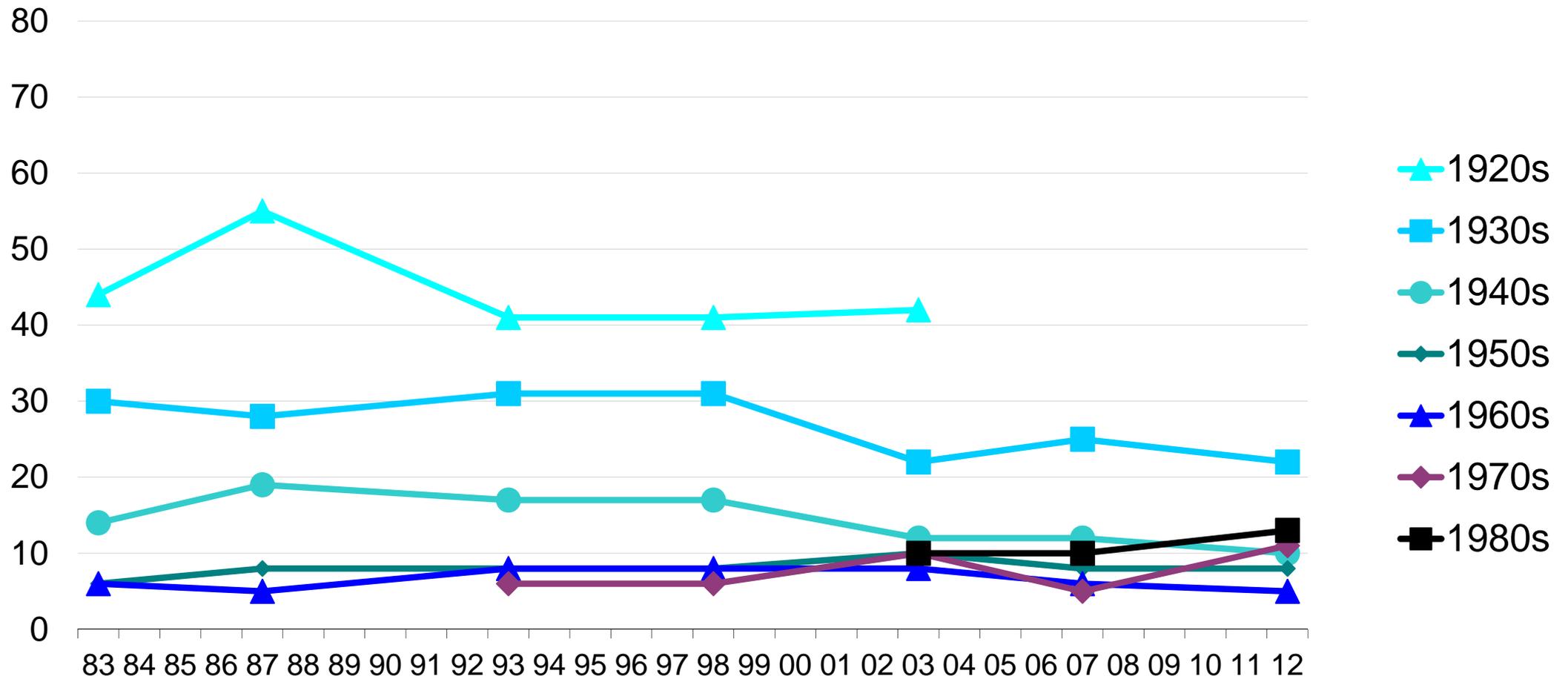
% saying same-sex relationships are wrong



Views on sexual relationships, by age, 2012

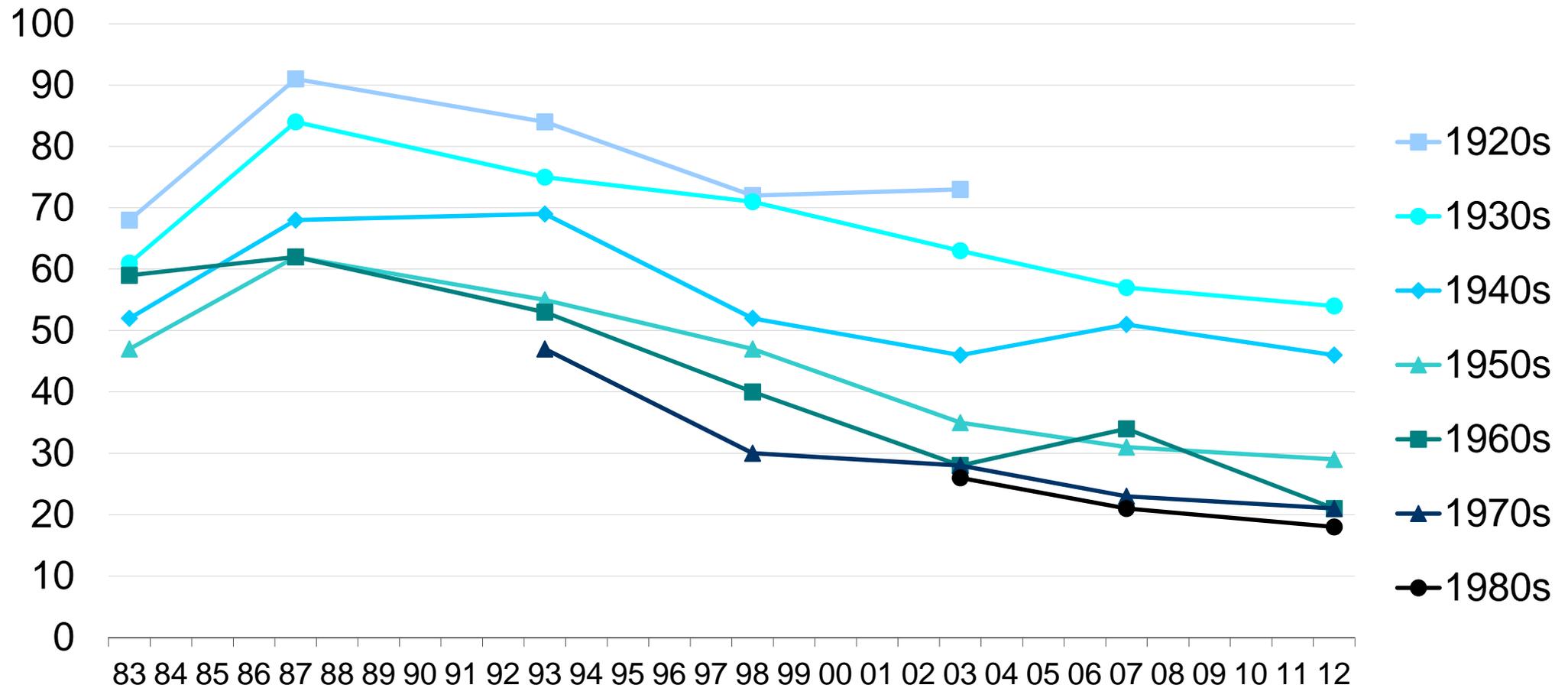


Generational change – attitudes to pre-marital sex



Generational change – attitudes to same sex relationships

% saying same-sex relationships are wrong



Conclusions

- Large shifts since 1980s
- Changes in attitudes across society
- Analysis by age has shown different cohort trends for the two questions
- Still a sizeable minority who say homosexuality is wrong (28%)
- However latest data points to further decline

Publicity



Britons more liberal, cynical and individual than 30 years ago, says survey

Brits more relaxed about class and sexuality, and more sympathetic to unemployed - but less so to banks and Europe



The Telegraph

HOME » NEWS » POLITICS

Revolution in attitudes to homosexuality is biggest change in generation

A transformation in attitudes to homosexuality ranks as the most dramatic change in British public opinion in a generation, according to the biggest study of its kind.



Snapshot of British society in 2013: More tolerance, less trust for politicians and royals are getting more popular

We have lost faith in politicians and banks, but are far more willing to accept gay relationships, according to the Social Attitudes survey, which also reveals a renewed respect for the Royal Family, and the jobless

Cahal Milmo | @cahalmilmo | Monday 9 September 2013 | 0 comments



Dissemination and analysis



3.

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

Editors: John Curtice, Miranda Phillips and Elizabeth Clery

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



Introduction



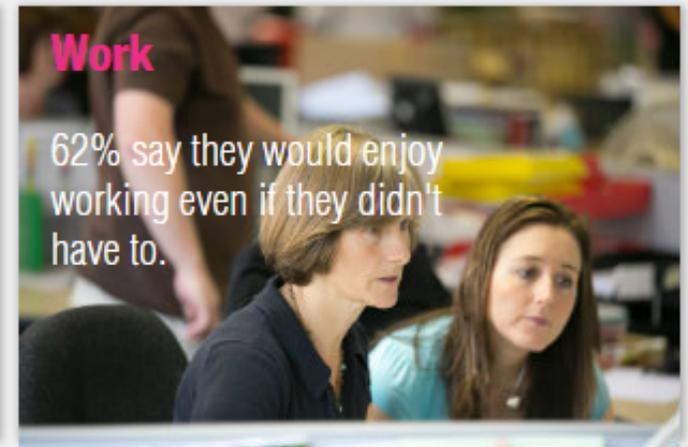
Social Class



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

Work

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



Welfare

NHS



Politics

When to use BSA

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

When not to use BSA

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

Weighting and missing values

- Weights must be applied for all analysis (the datasets are not pre-weighted)
 - Single weight variable = “wtfactor”
 - Same in all years
- On BSA ‘Don’t Know’ and ‘Refuse’ are **not** considered ‘missing’ values
 - Included in analysis as they are a *valid attitudinal response*
 - Don’t know= code 8/88/888; Refusal= code 9/99/999
 - On most surveys these will be set to missing (-8/-9)
- Are some actual missing values, e.g. question not on route
 - Set to negative values (-1, -2 etc.) and excluded from analysis

Analysis: other practical issues

- Time series
 - Separate datasets
 - All variables will have the same name (variable label) if the question wording is not altered
 - Frequency of repeat questions may be sporadic
 - Focus on the overall trend – changes from year-to-year seen in that context
- General
 - Questionnaire split into 3 versions (A, B, C)
 - Some questions on full sample (c.3000), others asked of 1000 or 2000 respondents – implications for analysis

Accessing the data



4.