



# Britons say no to Nanny!

Modern attitudes to paternalism and state provision

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## Introduction

By large majorities the British public reject many aspects of the nanny state and prefer to make their own decisions. This is revealed in a YouGov poll commissioned by the Institute. The YouGov poll (details below) was carried out on August 12th and 13th 2012, and sought to ascertain people's reactions to various aspects of government activity. In particular it asked people's attitudes to government advice, the competence of politicians and bureaucrats to make personal decisions on behalf of people, where people think their pensions will come from, whether they or government are responsible for securing them a job, if it is government's duty to provide them with secure housing, and whether or not they would like to run their own business.

## Listening to Nanny

*Statement 1: "Government should provide advice on what foods people like me should eat and how much to drink."*

By big majorities, people in Britain do not think government should do this. 48% disagree, and only 22% agree with this. Disagreement is strongest among older people, with those aged 60 or over disagreeing by 57% to 20%, while women disagree somewhat more strongly (49% to 18%) than men (45% to 27%).

All regions of the UK concur in disagreement to this statement, as do supporters of all three major parties. Social group C2DE disagree with it more (51% to 15%) than to those from group ABC1 (44% to 27%).

## Letting Nanny Decide

*Statement 2: Politicians and civil servants are well-equipped to make personal decisions on my behalf."*

Nearly two out of three Britons (65%) disagree with this statement, and fewer than one in ten (9%) agree with it. Disagreement with the notion that politicians and civil servants are competent to choose for us is large among all categories, all ages and across all regions of the UK. Strongest disagreement to the idea comes from those aged 60 or over (73% to 9%) and in Scotland (71% to 8%).

Although some commentators claim that people in lower social groups are unable to make wise decisions for themselves, disagreement with decisions by politicians and civil servants is higher among group C2DE (67% to 8%) than among those from group ABC1 (64% to 9%).

## Saving For My Own Pension

*Statement 3: "I think most of my retirement pension will probably come from a pension fund I have saved myself."*

Well over two to one people in Britain think that their pension will come from their own savings. 51% agreed, while only 22% disagreed. Among Tories the agreement was ever higher (61% to 19%), but those who agreed easily outnumbered those who disagreed in all categories, age groups and regions.

One of the biggest margins is among 25-39 year-olds, with 60% agreeing and only 13% disagreeing, but all age groups have many more in agreement than in disagreement.

## Getting A Job Myself

*Statement 4: "It is up to me, rather than the government, to secure myself a job."*

Plainly, people in Britain think that getting a job depends

on their own efforts, not the government. 71% of Britons agree with this position, versus only 7% who disagree. The biggest margin is among Liberal Democrat voters (86% to 4%), but supporters of the three parties agree, as do all age-groups and all regions of the country. The lowest agreement level is in Scotland, but even here 61% agree and only 11% do not.

The figures for people in the North (72% to 8%) are very close to those for Londoners (71% to 7%). Social group ABC1 (75% to 5%) are somewhat more in agreement than those from group C2DE (63% to 8%).

## Views on Housing Reflect Party Affiliation

*Statement 5: "The government has a duty to provide secure housing for people like me."*

Views on whether it is part of government's job to make secure housing available break along party lines. Only 21% of Tory voters agree with this, but 48% disagree. It is the opposite among Labour voters, where 55% agree that it is government's duty, and only 16% disagree. This might reflect the fact that a larger proportion of Labour voters might already be in social housing or on waiting lists for it. Liberal Democrats tended to disagree (39%) rather than agree (32%).

Those from social group ABC1 were somewhat in disagreement (35% to 32%), whereas those from C2DE were more in agreement (46% to 21%).

## Running My Own Business

*Statement 6: "At some stage I would quite like to run my own business instead of working all my life for other people."*

Despite the recent financial crisis and the economic downturn, the desire to run their own business at some stage is high amongst young people. Of the 18-24 age-group, 49% agreed, versus 27% who did not. Among 25-39 year-olds some 44% agreed that they would like to do this, versus 30% who disagreed. Among the two oldest age groups a majority do not agree, perhaps because many of them are beyond the stage where they might reasonably do so.

There is a regional divide on this, with Londoners agreeing (36% to 33%) and also more respondents from the rest of the South agreeing (37% to 33%), but the Midlands/Wales disagreeing (39% to 28%), Northerners disagreeing (37% to 31%), and Scots disagreeing most of all (44% to 28%).

## Conclusion

The poll's findings present welcome news. They confirm that, despite recent economic troubles, there is still considerable self-confidence among the British, coupled with a determination to make decisions for themselves instead of having them imposed by politicians and bureaucrats. A majority of people think it is up to themselves to secure a job and save for a pension, and do not think people in authority are qualified to make decisions for them.

Despite being hectored by officials and told how they should live, most people in Britain retain a firm belief that they, not officialdom, should decide these things and make their own choices.

It is particularly encouraging that large numbers of young people aspire to run their own businesses because it is new businesses that create the jobs and the future wealth of the nation. The fact that young people want to set up in business for themselves is a very positive indicator for the nation's future well-being, as well as for the young people themselves.

Endnote:

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,742 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 12th - 13th August 2012. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).