

# NatCen

Social Research that works for society

# Acceptance, backlash or revolution: how did the public respond to five years of coalition government?

Naomi Jones

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7<sup>th</sup> July 2015



# Talk outline

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- Consider the attitudinal changes we might have expected over last 5 years
- Look at what shifts actually occurred in following areas:
  - Attitudes to welfare
  - Attitudes to the NHS
  - Attitudes to Britain's membership of Europe
- Reflect on why these changes occurred in each case and consider where attitudes might go next.



**The last five  
years.....**



**1.**

# Some notable characteristics of the last 5 years

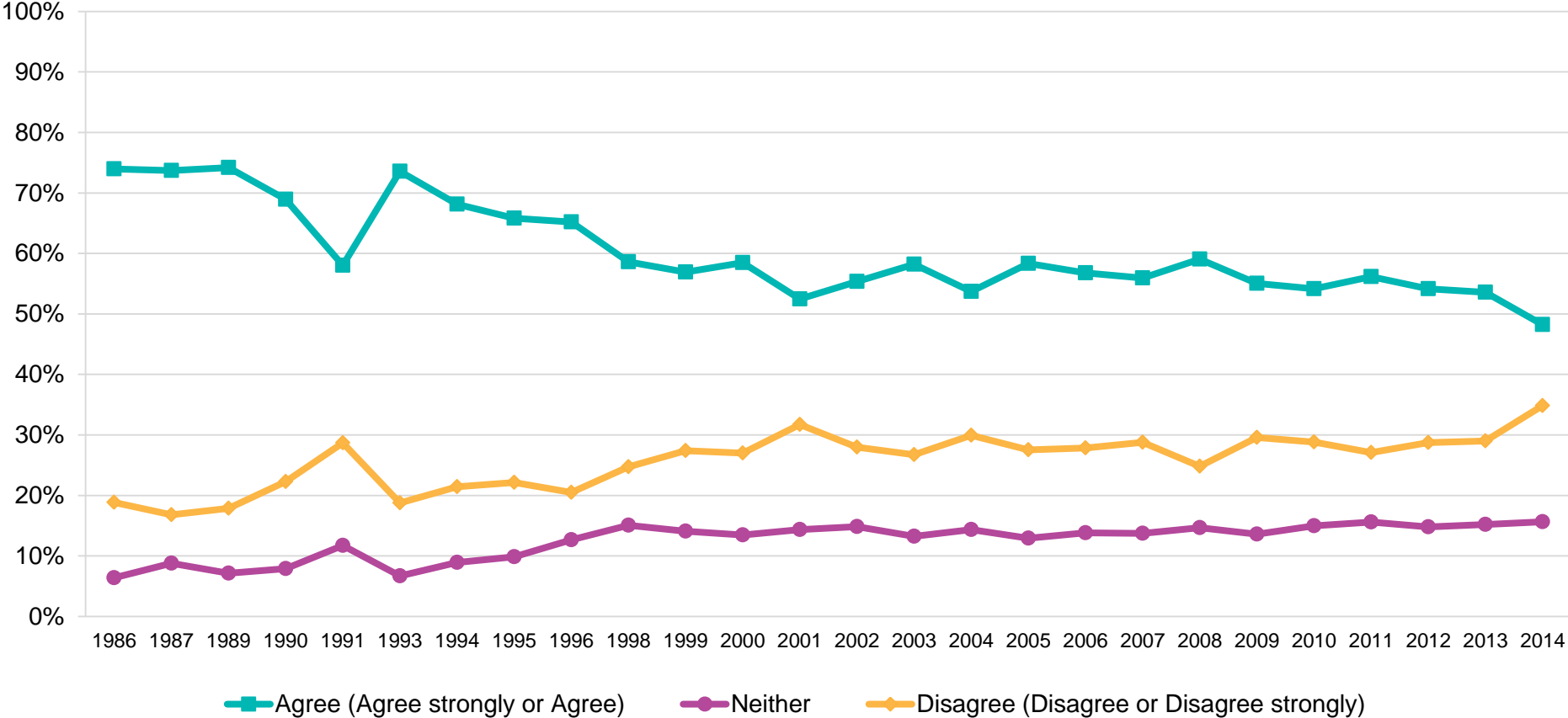
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- Large cuts to public spending
- Wholesale reform of the benefits system
- Radical reform of the NHS
- Rise of UKIP and heightened European membership debate
- Scottish independence referendum
- Same Sex Couples Marriage Act passed



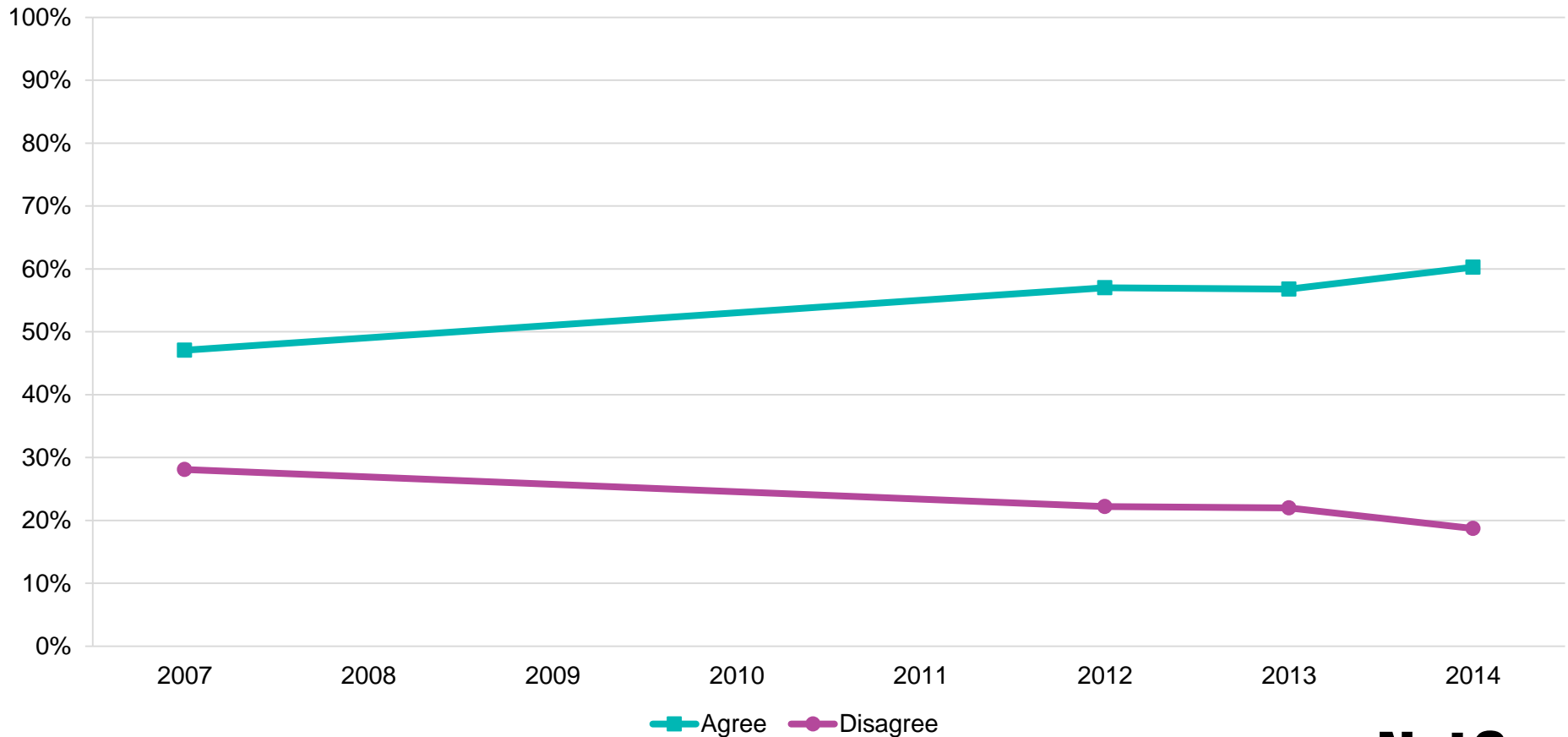
# Attitudes to the death penalty

For some crimes death penalty is appropriate



# Support for gay marriage

Gay or lesbian couples should have the right to marry one another if they want to



# What we expected

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- A backlash against the cuts – or at least appetite for increased tax and spend
- Concern or dissatisfaction about the NHS given the level of changes
- Increased Euroscepticism on the back of UKIP's meteoric rise and political calls for a referendum/renegotiation of powers in Europe



**What we saw:  
Welfare**

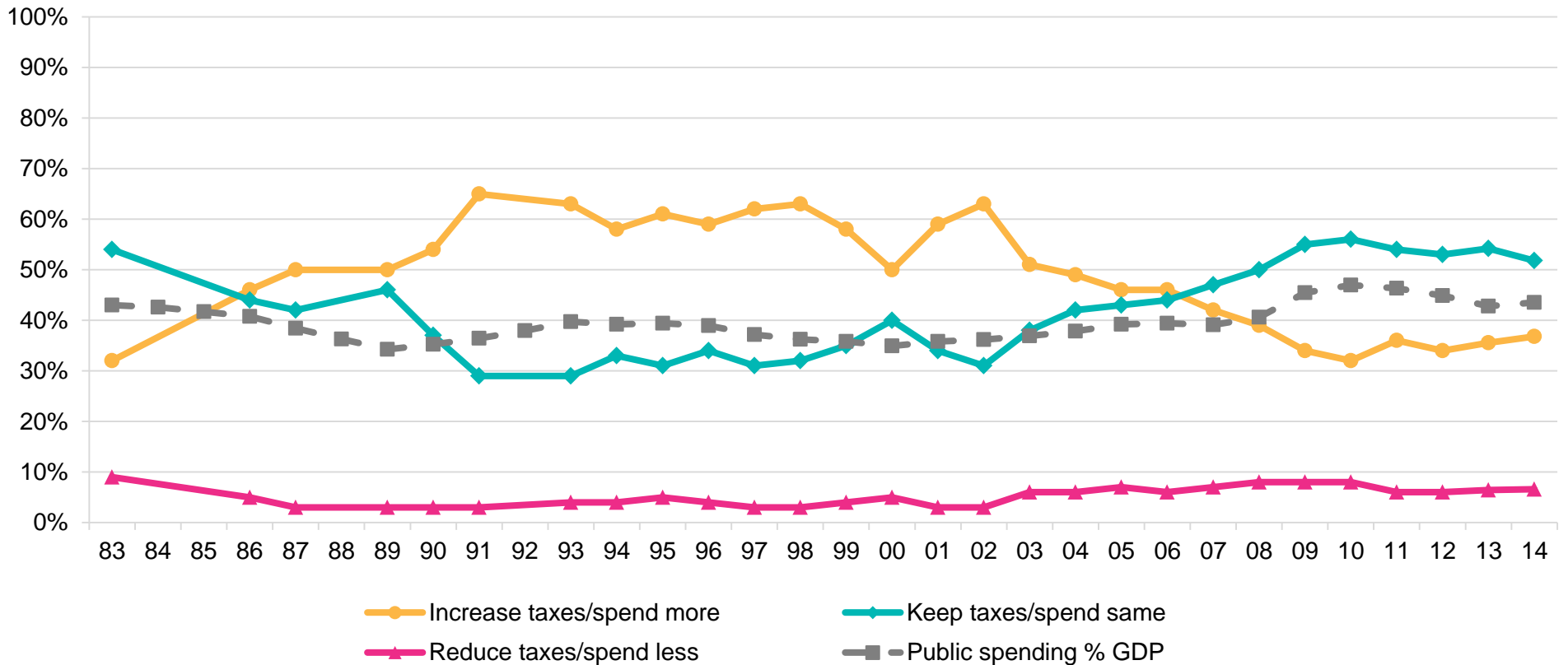


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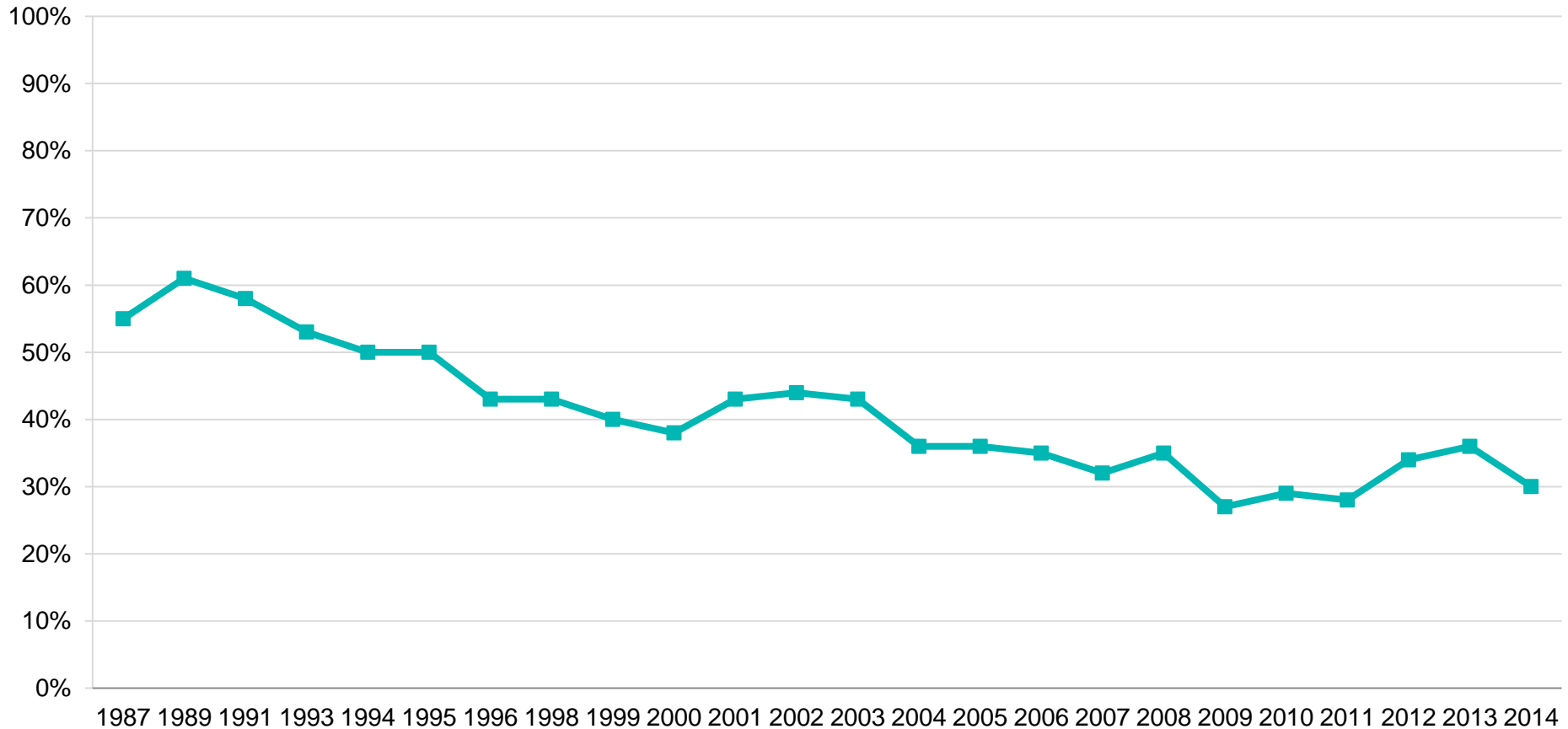
# What we saw: Tax and spend

Attitudes to taxation and spending on health, education and social benefits, 1983 - 2014, and public spending as a percentage of GDP



# What we saw: Welfare

Agree government should spend more money on welfare benefits



# Why not as expected?

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- Attitudes to benefits system:
  - A majority of people (59%) in Britain believe that most unemployed people in their area could find a job if they really wanted one.
  - More than half (52%) think that benefits for the unemployed are too high and discourage work.
  - And although 56% think the current benefits system supports people on low pay, only 18% of people believe that the benefits system effectively encourages people to move off benefits.
- But is there also just a broader public acceptance of austerity?



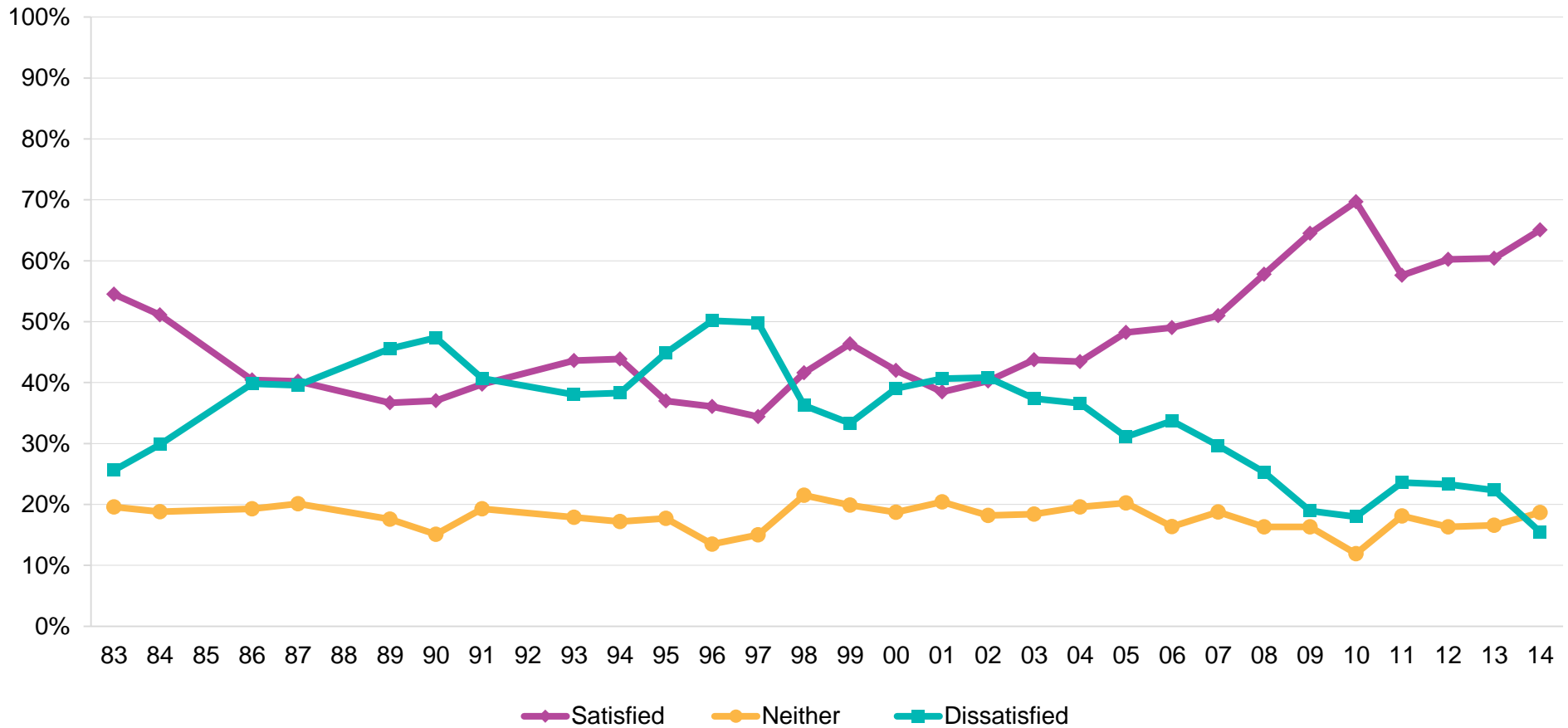
**What we saw:  
NHS**



**3.**

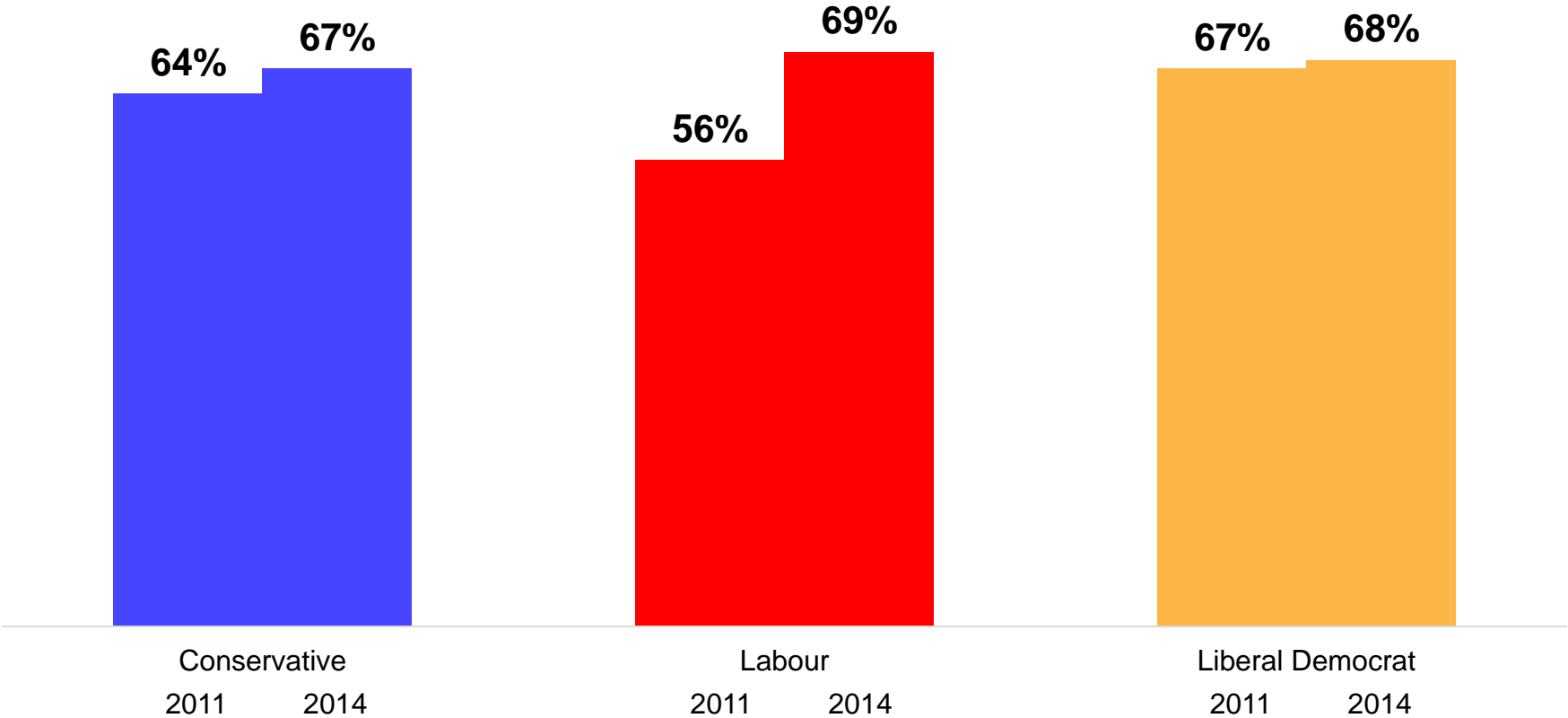
# What we saw: NHS

## Satisfaction with the NHS, 1983–2014



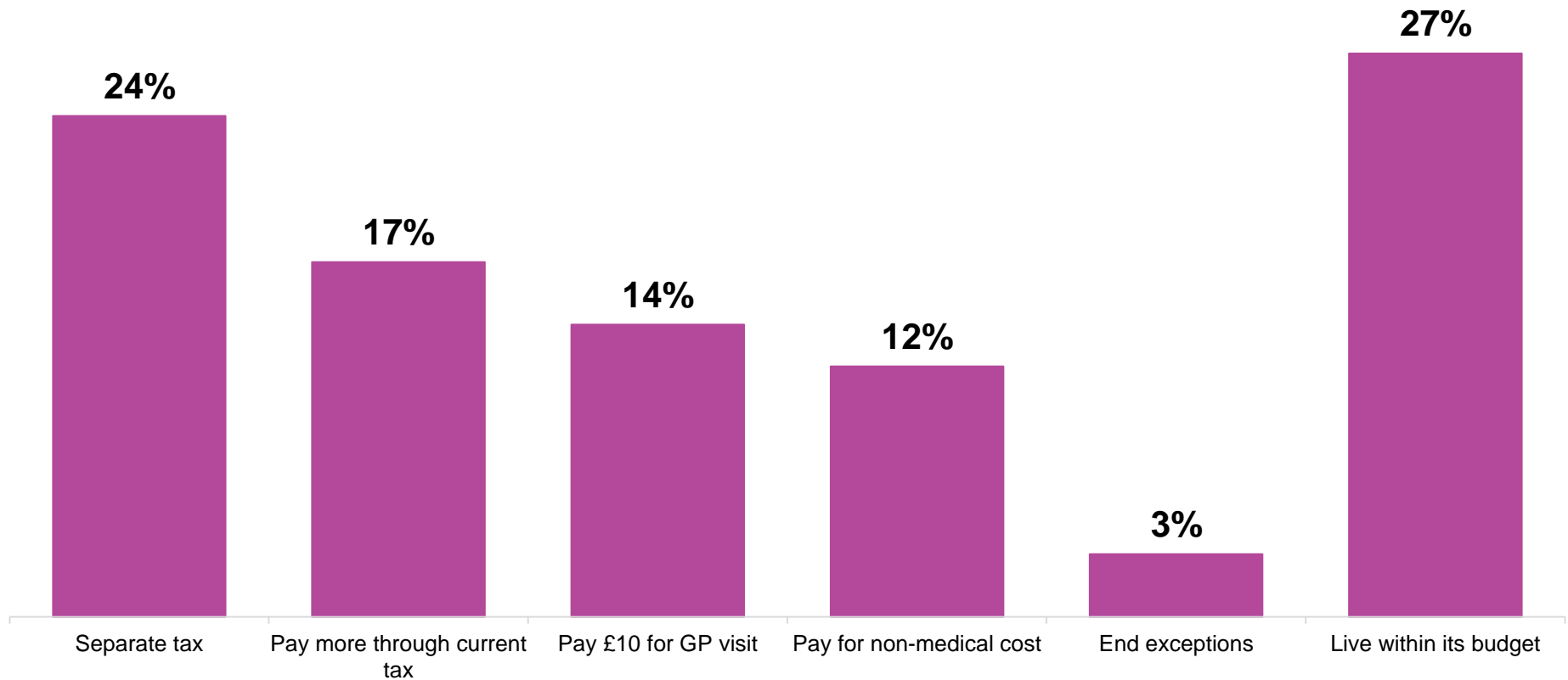
# What we saw: NHS

Satisfaction with the NHS by party id



# NHS funding options

If the NHS needed more money, which of the following do you think you would be prepared to accept?



**What we saw:  
Europe**

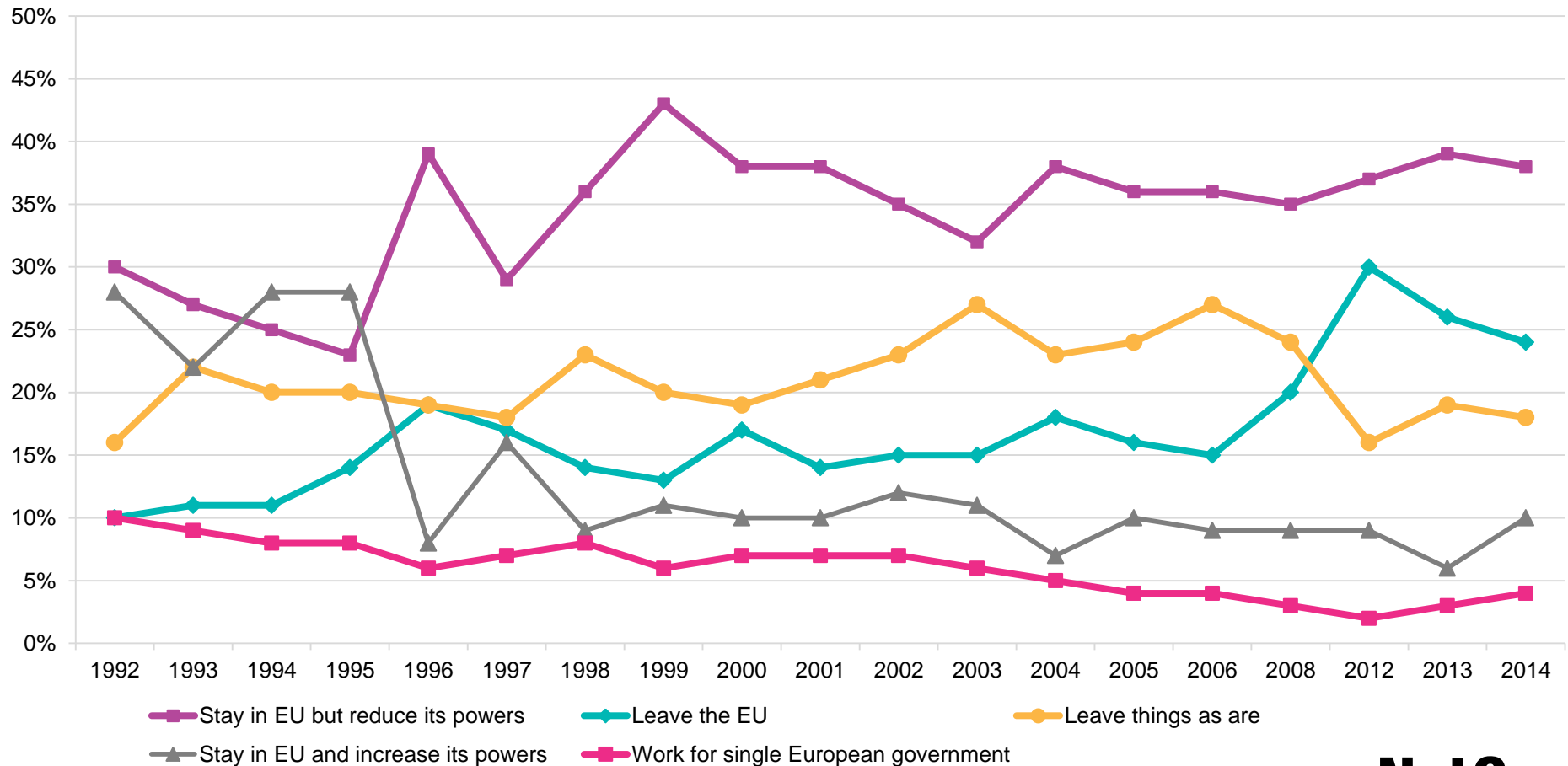


**4.**



# Should we stay or go?

## Attitudes to Britain's relationship with the European Union



# Where next?

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- **Welfare** – The new government has announced a further round of cuts and they may represent tipping point on public acceptance of austerity
- But it's clear that there are still fundamental concerns about the benefits system and its efficacy
- **NHS** – Government will need to be brave and find a potentially controversial solution to the funding crisis
- **EU** – even though we're highly Eurosceptic, when it comes to the crunch we're a long way from a vote to withdraw, unless there's a wildcard....



# Contact

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