

**The future of the welfare state: paths of social policy
innovation between constraints and opportunities**

Urbino, 17-19 September 2009

**COHORT, CLASS AND ATTITUDES
TO REDISTRIBUTION:
BRITAIN AND THE US, 1996-2006**

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Paper presented at the 7th annual ESPAnet Conference, Urbino, 17-19 Sep 2009.

Session: nr. 7A – The Role of Welfare Attitudes in Welfare State Change

Prepared for Goerres, Achim & Pieter Vanhuysse (Eds.)

Generational Politics and Policies: Comparative Studies of Ageing Post-industrial Democracies.

Draft. Please do not quote or cite without the authors' permission.

Abstract

Do economic and institutional integration lead to citizens of the advanced capitalist societies becoming more similar also in their attitudes? The received wisdom of the field implies that no convergence should be expected and that none can be found. However, recent analyses, using data from the ISSP surveys on attitudes toward the Role of Government, show substantial convergence tendencies between western countries in their citizens' attitudes toward government responsibilities. In this chapter, we aim to further analyse and explain these convergence tendencies, using ISSP data and comparing Britain and the US as a particularly interesting pair of countries. We compare cohort and class patterns in attitudes towards income redistribution and towards unemployment policies in these two countries, in order to analyse how convergence patterns are played out in different generations and classes. We find that the convergence in attitudes cannot be attributed to cohort replacement. In fact, cohort differences in these countries are small, and tend to become even smaller over time. It is not the case that younger generations are more similar across countries, or that the gradual cohort replacement among respondents accounts for the attitudinal convergence. Changing class patterns in Britain account for some of the convergence, since the drop in support for unemployment policies seems to be particularly pronounced among workers. However, neither changing class patterns nor cohort replacement account for the substantial convergence between these two liberal welfare regimes. We discuss these findings in relation to changing patterns of risk exposure, and to different policy predicaments in Europe and the US.

Acknowledgement

The research has received economic support from the Swedish Research Council, the Swedish Council for Social and Working Life Research, and Umeå University. It is produced within the European Science Foundation's Human Values, Institutions and Behaviour (HumVIB) program *Welfare Attitudes in a Changing Europe*.

Cohort, class and attitudes to redistribution: Britain and the US, 1996-2006

Although a lot of ink has been spilled expressing the features of a new boundary-less "globalized" world, serious comparative research has rather emphasised that national differences between different political economies are and will stay highly resilient to change. Since institutions tend to affect the interests, interpretations and norms of social actors, the argument is that the interplay between institutions and orientations are likely to display a high degree of "lock-in" and "ratchet" effects which makes convergence across countries highly unlikely (Pierson 2000a; 2000b). This argument applies both to actual policy developments across countries and to orientations among mass publics.

However, in this chapter we report and elucidate findings which suggest a substantial convergence across countries in their citizens' views about government responsibilities (see also Edlund 2009). Since views about what governments should or should not do in relation to redistribution of resources is a key indicator of welfare state orientations among mass publics, this poses something of a puzzle for comparative research in this field. We take a first stab at explaining these findings by elucidating the cohort and class differences in attitudes in Britain and the US. This will allow us to gauge whether the attitudinal convergence has different effects across cohorts, and how it takes place among people who are differently placed in the stratification order. As will be shown, Britain and the US constitute a particularly interesting pair of countries related to attitudinal convergence.

Our chapter is structured as follows. We begin by outlining different arguments about why no attitudinal convergence should take place, and show that previous research on the issue indeed found no signs of convergence. We then cite recent research that on the contrary shows substantial convergence taking place across a broad selection of countries. In the data section we present the data from the *International Social Survey Program* on which our analyses build, and the variables and indicators we apply. In the first empirical section, we replicate the finding of substantial attitudinal convergence for a thirteen country sample, using our specific variables.

We then concentrate on the two country cases, with the analysis focussed on cohort and class differences between countries and over time. In conclusion, we offer our interpretation of the findings. Far from espousing a "cultural globalization" argument, we argue that it is still an institutional and political perspective which offers most purchase on the issues at hand. However, where previous institutionalist arguments (including our own) have argued that institutional specificities have created divergent attitudes, we argue that at the current political-economical moment such institutional specificities rather tend to create attitudinal similarities.

Previous arguments and research: why no convergence was expected and none found

Existing scholarship tends to emphasise stability over change in relation to welfare attitudes. Institutional inertia and social-structural factors are argued to provide a set of highly stabilising factors when it comes to peoples' view about what government should do in various respects.

For example, in their recent major study of the impact of welfare opinions on policy-making, Brooks & Manza argue for an "embedded preferences" approach, in which attitudes to welfare policies are the combined result of (a) the interests individuals have through their structural locations; (b) their participation in discursive communities such as schools and churches; and (c) the collective memories forged through long-term feedback processes from institutions (Brooks and Manza 2007: Ch. 5). Political power constellations and the distributive effects of the welfare state tend to form different distributional coalitions in different countries. That is why, for example, citizens in the Nordic countries display a higher degree of popular support for welfare policies than what is found in the US.

The "embedded preferences" approach implicitly assumes that attitudes towards the welfare state will be quite stable over time. This is also something that would be expected from more "pure" institutionalist approaches, where it is argued that feedback processes from the historical development of institutions tend to create "lock-in" effects, in which material interests and policy interpretations are affected to an extent that make abrupt changes in policy

preferences unlikely (Pierson 1993). Other institutionalist scholars have added that normative feedback effects, affecting not only citizens' perceptions of their material interests but also of the desirable state of affairs, should be added to factors that will make for a large degree of inertia in citizens' preferences regarding welfare policies (Svallfors 2007: Ch. 8).

Still other scholars, less concerned with institutions than with the relation between material interests and redistribution preferences, would also seem to agree that such preferences should be quite stable over time. Regardless if the determinants of redistributive preferences are sought mainly in the "skill specificity" of incumbents of various occupations (Iversen and Soskice 2001), or more broadly in the risk profile of various individuals, occupations and classes (Cusack et al. 2006; Svallfors 2006: Ch. 4-5), a large degree of stability in attitudes towards different welfare state arrangements should be expected.

These expectations seemed for a long time to be supported by empirical research. Comparisons based on data from the International Social Survey Program, for example, showed that while inter-country differences in citizens' views about government responsibilities were substantial, even between OECD countries at the same economic level, intra-country changes from the mid-eighties until the mid-nineties were negligible (Bean and Papadakis 1998; Evans 1996; 1998; Taylor-Gooby 1998; Svallfors 2003; Svallfors 2004). Neither convergence nor divergence was thus found in the attitudes towards welfare state intervention among different welfare regimes. In this way, findings from comparative attitude research mirror those of research on policy developments: little in the way of convergence is found in the more deregulated capitalism of the 1980s and 1990s (Scharpf and Schmidt 2000; Pierson 2001; Huber and Stephens 2001; Swank 2002; Brooks and Manza 2007). In contrast to widespread pronouncements about the coming "globalisation" of policies and ideological standpoints, national differences proved highly resilient to change.

Even more specific within-country comparisons of changes in attitudes towards redistribution and welfare policies could not detect any clear tendencies in overall support for the

welfare state. Depending on exactly which domain or aspect was surveyed, countries as different as Sweden, Germany, Britain and the US either displayed complete stability or some amount of trendless fluctuation in attitudes towards welfare policies (Pettersen 1995; Taylor-Gooby 1995; Svallfors 1995; 2004; Andress et al. 2001; Brooks and Manza 2007: Ch. 5). Furthermore, the impact of different social cleavages on attitudes was also found to be stable, with the impact of class and "class-related" factors such as income and education being clearly dominant in structuring attitudes towards welfare policies and redistribution (Svallfors 1995; Svallfors 2004).

However, recent findings using data from the *International Social Survey Program* fly in the face of received wisdom. Here, a substantial convergence in citizens' views about government responsibilities is detected, across a broad section of countries (Edlund 2009; Svallfors 2010).

In an analysis of attitudes towards the responsibilities of government 1985-2006, covering 22 countries, the empirical evidence suggests substantial attitudinal convergence (Edlund 2009). Increased opposition against the welfare state has principally occurred in countries where the welfare state previously enjoyed strong support. Increased support has primarily taken place where the welfare state was comparatively unpopular two decades ago. Attitudinal convergence does not operate uniformly across welfare programs. Increased welfare state support is mainly fueled by rising popular demands for income redistribution. Decreased support is primarily caused by growing numbers who do not support unemployment policies. For some welfare policies – support for the elderly and health care – public support is solid and stable over time across nearly all countries. Thus, convergence has mainly taken place within the domain of redistribution. It is also found that among advanced industrial economies, attitude change seems to be more common among market-oriented "liberal" welfare states than among other types of political economies.

In this chapter, we extend this line of research into a focussed comparison of Britain and the US. As will be argued in the following, the recent welfare state history and aggregated attitude patterns in these two countries make such a focussed comparison highly warranted. We

will compare cohort and class patterns in attitudes to elucidate the group patterns of attitudinal convergence 1996-2006. These patterns show some substantial differences between these two "liberal" welfare states in how cohort and class patterns play out and change over time. We relate these findings to current debates about possible changes from class-based to generation-based conflicts, and about current policy predicaments in the Western political economies.

Data and variables

The data upon which the analyses are based derive from the *International Social Survey Program* (ISSP; www.issp.org). The ISSP represents an attempt to create a truly comparative dataset with which to analyse attitudes and values among the populations of industrialised countries. The programme was inaugurated in the mid-eighties, and now (2009) incorporates more than 40 countries spread of six continents. A wide variety of topics have been surveyed, and from 1990 previous modules have been replicated allowing comparison both between nations and over time.

The ISSP is currently the only available data set that will allow questions about cross-national convergence, stability or divergence in welfare state attitudes to be addressed. Alternative comparative data sets, such as the European Social Survey (ESS), or the World Values Survey (WVS) have either not been around long enough (ESS), do not contain enough relevant attitude indicators (ESS, WVS), or suffer from omission or dubious coding of key explanatory variables (WVS).

The 2006 module on "The Role of Government" is the third replication of this particular module; the previous surveys were fielded in 1985, 1990 and 1996. Two thirds of the items are replications from previous fieldings of this module, including a large set of items on government responsibilities, some of which will constitute the dependent variables in the analyses.

In the search for items to use as indicators of support for government intervention, the ISSP survey offers a range of possibilities. One battery of questions concerns "what the

government might do for the economy”, in which respondents were invited to respond to a list of government actions by stating how much they were for or against each one. However, the questions seem far too dependent on the prevailing circumstances in each of the countries and, besides, several of the measures listed have little to do with welfare policies.

Another question battery listed different areas of government spending and invited respondents to state whether they thought more or less tax money should be spent on them. Even if answers to these items may be quite useful for many purposes they seem less suitable for comparisons over time or between countries, since views about “more or less” are naturally affected by actual spending levels.

Instead it was decided to use items from a question battery which asked respondents how much they considered it “should or should not be the government’s responsibility to” intervene in certain ways. It was felt that such a battery would give a more accurate estimation of levels of principled support for government intervention in different countries.

In tapping attitudes towards redistribution, we used a selection of items from this battery that asks whether it should be the government responsibility to “...provide a job for everyone who wants one / ...provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed / ...reduce income differences between the rich and the poor”.¹ We then constructed a summed measure by summing the items, dividing the scale by its (theoretical) maximum value and multiplying it by 100. The new summary measure, the “Redistributive Index,” can thus vary between 0 and 100 with higher values indicating stronger support for redistribution. We chose the most obviously redistributive and class-related items instead of the whole battery related to various areas of government intervention. Since patterns of change show to be different for the item related to

¹ . Answer scale and codes: Absolutely (3); Probably (2); Probably not (1); Absolutely not (0).

income inequality and the ones related to unemployment, we also use these items separately (also standardised to a 0-100 range).

In the analysis, we compare cohort and class patterns in Britain and the US. When we compare class patterns in the two countries, we use a recoding schema into the well-known Erikson-Goldthorpe class schema. We use a six-class version of the schema, which builds on recodings from the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), and the British national Standard Occupation Classification (SOC).²

Cohorts are divided into a five-category schema. We use 1960 as a dividing line, to test whether people who reached adulthood after the conservative ascendancy in Britain and the US display different attitudes from those who had already entered adult life at that time. In order to achieve large enough subgroups, we then divide the “pre-conservative” generations into three groups, and the “post-conservative” generations into two categories. The results we discuss remain fairly stable regardless of exact cohort cut-off points.

². The recoding of occupations into a common schema is based on the current occupation of the individual. In cases where the individual is outside the labour market, the relevant classification is based on his or her most recent occupation; should this person never have had an occupation, the coding is made according to that of his or her spouse or cohabiting partner (if any). The data sets from the US and the 2006 data set from Britain code occupation according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations 1988 (ISCO88) at a four-digit level. When reclassifying the ISCO codes into Erikson-Goldthorpe classes, the reclassifications made by (Ganzeboom and Treiman 1996; 2003) proved immensely helpful. Minor deviations between their recodings and the ones used here occur, but the deviations seem to be very minor at the six-category level of detail aimed for here. As for Britain, the occupational data archived in the data material in 1996 were not detailed enough to make relevant classifications, but more detailed codes were available in data files from the British archive, and these have been matched against those from the ISSP archive. This data set contains classifications using the Erikson-Goldthorpe schemae based on the British Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code and Employment Status Variables (Goldthorpe and Heath 1992). The recoding algorithms for converting ISCO88 into Erikson-Goldthorpe classes are obtainable from the authors on request. For the British recodings for 1996, see Goldthorpe & Heath (1992).

Attitude convergence 1996-2006

In Figure 1, values for the Redistributive index are plotted for thirteen Western countries.³ Results indicate a substantial convergence across countries.⁴ Of the countries that had comparatively high index values (>60) in 1996, only Norway displays stability 1996-2006, while all other countries experience a decline in support for redistribution. Among countries with low (<60) index values in 1996, only New Zealand had lower index values in 2006 than it had in 1996, and Canada and the US have significantly higher index values in 2006. So in sum we find a substantial degree of convergence among these thirteen country samples.⁵

[Figure 1 about here](#)

As shown in Figure 1, Britain and the US stand out as an interesting pair for comparison. No country experienced such a steep decline in index values as Britain 1996-2006.⁶ The US (in parallel with Canada) experienced the most dramatic increase in index values over the period. So these supposedly similar "liberal" welfare regimes display completely differing

³ . Only countries from the North-Western hemisphere have been included, leaving Israel, Japan and the Phillipines out even though they conducted both the 1996 and 2006 surveys. To avoid the particular complications of the transformations of Eastern Europe, these countries have also been omitted from the analysis (the Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland and Russia). For the same reasons, data are displayed separately for Eastern (former East) and Western (former West) Germany.

⁴ . Solid lines indicate statistically significant decline (0,05-level), dotted lines stability and dashed lines statistically significant increases in index values.

⁵ . We also find a slight decrease in overall values on the index, from 63,8 in 1996 to 61,1 in 2006.

⁶ . That is the case even when we include the particular case of Eastern Germany, with its unique history of institutional rupture and transfer (Svallfors 2010).

developments as regards their attitudes towards redistribution: a sharply declining degree of support in Britain paired with a sharp increase of support for redistribution in the US.

[Figures 2-3 about here](#)

A closer look at the separate issues of income inequality and measures related to unemployment (*Figures 2-3*) reveals an interesting pattern: in countries where support for redistribution has declined, this decline relates to support for unemployment related measures; in countries where support for redistribution has increased, the increase concerns support to lessen income inequalities. So in our two country cases, support for employment policies and for amelioration for the unemployed has decreased substantially in Britain, while support for income redistribution is stable. The drop in support for job related measures in Britain is unparalleled: in no other country does the support for unemployment policy measures drop as markedly as here. The reverse pattern applies in the US: support for income redistribution has increased, while support for employment related measures remains stable. The increased support in the US for income redistribution is surpassed only in Canada, and is similar to two other “liberal” welfare regimes: Australia and Switzerland (see also Edlund 2009).

Britain and the US: cohort and class patterns

In this section, we ask to what extent the convergence tendencies detected in Britain and the US play out differently in different cohorts and classes. Is it the case that later cohorts are more similar between the two countries than earlier cohorts, and that this may explain the convergence tendencies? Does overall convergence also imply class convergence, so that classes tend to become less distinct over time in their attitudes towards redistribution?

In order to place the analyses in context, a brief expose of the welfare state characteristics and recent political history of the cases is necessary. Britain and the US currently both represent “liberal” welfare and production regimes, where the market is the cornerstone for providing resources and insurance protection. Public benefits are typically given as low flat-rate

or means-tested benefits, while insurance against income loss for the broad middle class is market-based – although heavily subsidized by the state.

But they have arrived at this common destination through quite different routes. The US has always been a peculiar case as viewed through European lenses. State-subsidised corporate welfare plays the main part in allocating resources and supplying insurance protection for the employed (Hacker 2002; Dobbin 2002). The publicly provided welfare policy is meagre and, with the important exception of an income-related public pension system, largely targeted to those unable to obtain insurance protection through their employment. Benefits are largely means-tested and as of 1996 there is no legal right to social assistance. The country has no universal health insurance, although the combination of Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for the destitute provides coverage for large sections of the population. Public child care and elderly care services are mainly targeted to the poorest citizens, but private child care is subsidized through tax credits (Dobbin 2002; O'Connor et al. 1999: 114-21; Olsen 2002: Ch. 2; Gornick and Meyers 2003).

In short, when only the publicly provided welfare policies are in the focus, the US stands out as a particularly meagre not to say rudimentary welfare state, but when the focus is widened to include also privately provided but heavily subsidized policies, the picture changes. Then the social spending in the US becomes comparable to many European countries. However, this “private welfare state” tends to distribute coverage and benefits according to corporate hierarchy, producing a very “top-heavy” distribution, where risks are not equalized between social groups to the same extent as in a welfare state of traditional European design (Hacker 2002).

In recent years, the main form of social protection for middle-class America – employment-based insurance – has eroded significantly (Hacker 2004; 2005; 2006; 2008). This hidden retrenchment of “semi-public” welfare policies has been one main aspect of what has been described as the “great risk shift” in American society, including also lower employment stability, and growing income volatility and inequality (Hacker 2005; 2006). A growing number of

Americans now find themselves less well protected through their employment contracts, which may and does affect their orientations towards public policies.

The British welfare state is a blend of different system principles, reflecting its mixed conservative-socialist heritage. Just as in the US, there is no national income-related social insurance in Britain, as benefits are a mix of universal, low, flat-rate benefits and occupational income-related cover, which is private, although largely regulated by the state. In contrast to the US, however, we find a universal child benefit and a free tax-financed national health service.

British post-war social policy history displays a peculiar “proto-social democratic” character. Labour governments would embark on building up an income-related social insurance only to have it dismantled by their Conservative successors (O'Connor et al. 1999: 121-8; Rhodes 2000). The most dramatic liberalisation, including a determinate dismantling of the budding income-related social insurance, came under the consecutive conservative governments under Prime Minister Thatcher (1979-1990) (Clasen 2005).

In recent years, “New Labour” has by and large shed any attempts to continue the “proto-social democratic” path of its Labour predecessors, and largely formulated policies within the perimeters of a liberal market-oriented policy regime. Market-emulating reforms have been ripe within the public sector, and the introduction of a subsidised system of child care is the only major pro-welfare policy initiative (Clasen 2005).

So these two “liberal” welfare states have arrived at their current destination through quite different routes. This points to the importance of a cohort perspective, in which the formative experiences of different generations are taken into account. One should ask to what extent the long labourist tradition in Britain, compared to the virtually non-existent political left in the US has affected attitudes in different generations. The different public policy paths followed by the two countries are also in themselves a reason to take different generational experiences into account. In this respect, one could point to 1979/80 as an important dividing line, as this was the year for a conservative power-shift in both countries, but one which included

a more radical shift in welfare policy programs in Britain (Pierson 1994). One question to be explored is therefore whether cohorts who reached adulthood after 1980 display different attitudes compared to those who had already fully entered adult life before that point in time.

We also ask to what extent the “recommodification” of policies and distributive outcomes have affected class patterns in attitudes (Breen 1997). It could be ventured that such change would affect the middle sections in the class structure most, since these groups should feel most clearly the increased risk exposure connected with increased marketization. Workers, who have always been quite exposed to risk, and the higher echelons in the class structure, who are still quite well protected, could be expected to experience less change.

In *Figures 4 and 5* cohort differences are displayed for the two countries in 1996 and 2006.⁷ The Figures show the point estimates and confidence intervals (0.1-level) for each cohort, year and country. In *Figure 4*, we find that there are no significant cohort differences at all in Britain, and no significant changes within any cohort 1996-2006 (shown by the fact that all confidence intervals overlap both 1996 and 2006, and that confidence intervals for different cohorts overlap when we compare 1996 and 2006). In the US, on the other hand, we find that in 1996, there are significant cohort differences, in that the 1931-45 and the 1946-60 generations are clearly less supportive of redistribution than the younger cohorts. However, between 1996 and 2006 we find convergence between cohorts in their views about income redistribution, since this

⁷ . The estimates we provide in Figures 4 and 5 are not substantially affected by controlling for lifecycle related factors, such as labour market status, number of people in the household and dependent children in the household. However, some differences occur and are commented in footnotes (results may be obtained from authors on request).

support rises more in the 1931-45 and 1946-60 birth cohorts than in the other cohorts. In 2006, there are no longer any statistically significant differences between cohorts in the US.⁸

Figures 4-5 about here

In *Figure 5*, we find a uniform decline in support for unemployment policies in Britain. All cohorts display declining support 1996-2006. Neither in 1996 nor in 2006 do we find any statistically significant differences between cohorts in Britain.⁹ In the US, the 1931-45 and the 1946-60 cohorts are significantly less supportive on unemployment than the younger ones, in both 1996 and 2006. None of the intra-cohort changes 1996-2006 is statistically significant.¹⁰

In *Figures 6 and 7*, cohort is replaced by class. In Britain, we find that class differences in attitudes towards income redistribution are substantial in both 1996 and 2006 (*Figure 6*), but that a slight decline in class differences among the employees is detectable (the sharp increase in support for income redistribution among the self-employed is a curious fact that we fail to make sense of). In the US, the overall class differences in attitudes towards redistribution are stable from 1996 to 2006, but we find a particularly steep increase in support among lower-level managers and professionals (“Service Class II”). It is only here that the changes are statistically significant.

⁸. After control for the lifecycle factors, the two oldest cohorts are in 2006 still significantly less supportive of income redistribution policy compared to the younger cohorts. However, the pattern of convergence 1996-2006 in *Figure 4* is little affected.

⁹. When controlling for lifecycle factors, cohorts 1946-60 and 1961-75 are, in 2006, significantly more positive to employment policy compared to the two oldest cohorts. This suggests that the drop in support for unemployment policies is less emphasized in the 1946-60 and 1961-75 cohorts.

¹⁰. After control for lifecycle factors, attitude change between 1996 and 2006 becomes more uniform across cohorts. The three oldest cohorts show a similar size of increased support, while the attitude change in the two youngest cohorts is best described as stable.

Figures 6-7 about here

A similar but less marked pattern is found in the US concerning unemployment policies: a slight increase in all classes but a somewhat larger one in Service Class II (*Figure 7*). In Britain, support for unemployment policies decreases markedly in all classes, but particularly so among workers. Overall, British class differences in support for unemployment policies are therefore smaller in 2006 than in 1996.

In *Table 1*, we display summarised measures of the development of cohort and class differences in the two countries. As a measure of the inter-cohort and inter-class dispersion of index values, we apply the Bounded Coefficient of Variation (CV_b) (Escobar 1997), which can vary between 0 and 100 and where higher values indicate more dispersion.¹¹

Table 1 about here

As shown in *Table 1*, overall support for income redistribution strengthens in the US 1996-2006, while it is stable in Britain (as we could see already in *Figure 2*). Support for unemployment policies drops substantially in Britain while it is stable in the US (cf. *Figure 3*). We also find that class dispersion diminishes markedly in Britain for both indicators, while it is stable in the US. Dispersion between cohorts, on the other hand, diminishes considerably in the US 1996-2006. It also shrinks in Britain, but less so and from a smaller dispersion in 1996. In none of the countries are there any signs that cohorts become increasingly divided in their opinions; in

¹¹ . $CV_b = 100 * s / \sqrt{(m-0) * (100-m)}$, where m =mean, s =standard deviation. This measure takes into account that a standard deviation of a mean needs to be interpreted in the light of that particular mean. Compared to the more commonly known *Coefficient of Variation* ($CV = s/m$), the CV_b has the desirable property of taking values between 0 (all units have the same variable value) and 100 when the variable has only two values that are at the bottom and top limits of the distribution. Moreover, it is insensitive to the ordering of the scale (e.g., whether a high value should indicate "support for income redistribution" or "resistance against income redistribution") (Escobar 1997).

fact, the opposite seems to be true. At the same time, while Britain in 1996 was clearly more class divided than the US, this is no longer true in 2006.

In a final stage of the empirical analysis, we apply formal tests of interactions between cohort/class, survey year and country. The results are reported in *Tables 2 and 3*, for both attitude indicators. *Table 2* relates to the cohort differences, while *Table 3* concerns the class differences. We report F-values and their statistical significance for a series of models, while no estimates are included in the tables (they are available from authors on request). All models also include main effects for cohort/class, survey year, and country, but these are excluded from the tables in order to decrease the tabular output and not report non-pertinent findings.

[Table 2 about here](#)

Turning to the series of models for cohort, survey year and country reported in *Table 2*, we find that the interaction Year*Country is significant in all models except one, indicating the overall convergence tendencies between the two countries 1996-2006. We also find, in Models 2 and 4, that Cohort*Year is significant for attitudes towards income redistribution, but not regarding unemployment policies. This indicates that the diminished cohort differences are significant for one of our attitude indicators, but not for the other. Furthermore, we see that the Cohort*Country interaction is significant for both indicators (Models 3-5), indicating the different cohort patterns in the two countries. Finally, we find that for none of the indicators is the most complex Cohort*Year*Country interaction statistically significant. This means that changes in the Cohort*Year pattern are not significantly different between the two countries.

[Table 3 about here](#)

Replacing cohort with class in *Table 3* we find both similarities and differences with the cohort interactions from the previous table. As should be expected, the Year*Country interaction consistently significant, showing that the convergence tendencies between countries are not due to the main effects of class. The Class*Year interaction is significant for the income redistribution indicator, but not for the unemployment policy measure. This means that class

patterns change significantly between the survey years for attitudes towards income redistribution, but not for attitudes towards unemployment policies. The Class*Country interaction is nowhere significant, which means that class patterns are basically similar in the two countries. However, in the last model we find that the Class*Year*Country interaction is significant in the case of attitudes towards income redistribution. This indicates that changes in class differences look different between the two countries: class differences become clearly smaller in Britain, while they remain stable in the US (cf. *Figure 6*). The same basic pattern applies for attitudes towards unemployment policies (cf. *Figure 7*), but these differences-in-changes are not large enough to be statistically significant (*Table 3*, Model 5, second indicator).

Conclusion

The analyses of cohort and class patterns in Britain and the US show a number of things. First, they indicate that the convergence in attitudes towards redistribution cannot be attributed to cohort replacement. In fact, cohort differences in these countries are small, and tend to become even smaller over time. It is not the case that younger generations are more similar across countries, and that the gradual cohort replacement among respondents accounts for the attitudinal convergence. Changing class patterns in Britain account for some of the convergence, since the drop in support for unemployment policies seems to be particularly pronounced among workers.

These findings also speak against any scenario of an emerging “generation war” in these two liberal welfare regimes. There are absolutely no signs of cohort differences becoming more pronounced over time; the opposite seems rather to be the case. There are no signs that the “post-Thatcher” generations in Britain are very different from older cohorts, and while cohort differences were substantial in the US in 1996, they become less so over time. Still, it is interesting to note that cohort patterns are “reversed” in the two countries, so that the youngest

cohorts are more in favour of redistribution in the US, but (slightly) less in favour of redistribution in Britain.

Furthermore, compared to class differences, generational differences in attitudes towards redistribution seem rather muted. Kohli (2006) have argued that age and class work as competing cleavages across countries, so that polities that are more structured along lines of class conflicts seem to be less prone to generating age conflicts and vice versa. Turner have argued that age is overtaking class as an important stratifying status dimension in contemporary Western societies (Turner 1989). So far, however, there are no signs in these two countries that cohort differences tend to become more pronounced and supersede class differences. The diminishing class differences in Britain are not accompanied by any increasing cohort differences; in the US class differences are stable while cohort differences virtually disappear over time.

Instead, we find some more complex and fascinating differences when we compare cohort and class differences between these two countries. It seems that the increased support for redistribution in the US is particularly evident among (formerly) relatively well protected “insiders” such as lower level managers and professionals (Service Class II), and the “golden” generations, born in the 1930s-1950s. This could plausibly be explained by middle class anxieties in an age of severe constrictions of corporate welfare in America (Hacker 2004; 2005; 2006). Many formerly well-protected groups now find themselves more exposed to risk than before; some of them look to public policies to fill the gap.

Conversely, the dramatic decline of support for unemployment policies in Britain is particularly marked among workers, the formerly bastions of support for state intervention. One could speculate that the moralistic British debate, often demonising the unemployed as welfare scroungers – even by commentators on the political left – has left a clear imprint on the attitude development in general and especially so among workers (cf. Levitas 2005).

Overall, however, neither changing class patterns nor cohort replacement seems to fully account for the substantial convergence between these two liberal welfare regimes. What

does then? A decade ago, Iversen and Wren (1998) described the policy “trilemma” in which the advanced political economies found themselves. It was not possible, the authors argued, to maximise all the three central policy goals of high employment, earnings equality and price stability. Different policy regimes chose different routes when caught in this trilemma. The social democratic countries typically maximised equality and employment and had to put up with higher inflation; the Christian democratic countries chose fiscal discipline and equality at the expense of weak employment growth; the liberal countries took the route of maximising employment and price stability at the cost of rapidly rising inequality.

If anything, this predicament has become even more drastic since Iversen & Wren published their paper. In the international financial regime of the 2000s, it has become virtually impossible to choose the high inflation route for combining high employment and low inequality. Caught in this even starker dilemma, the European model has become stuck in a high unemployment mode, while the US has become characterised by a dramatic rise in inequality and risk exposure for broad sections of the working and middle classes.

Faced with this situation, it perhaps not surprising that increasing numbers of Americans find that public amelioration of inequality and risk exposure is now something to ask for, and that many of citizens of the European welfare states have become increasingly disenchanted by the effects of (un)employment policies. Add to this a public discourse that tends to increasingly blame unemployment on the behaviour of the unemployed themselves, and the result is an emerging delegitimisation of (un)employment policies throughout Europe.

As evident in these concluding and admittedly highly speculative interpretations, we tend still to believe that an institutional perspective has the most purchase on the issues at hand. It is not any amorphous “globalization”, wiping out social and cultural differences across the globe that is at work. It is rather the evolving institutional framework, combined with new patterns of social risk and public discourse that lies behind current trends in attitude towards redistribution. However, whereas in the past institutional specificities, their pathways and their

embeddedness in social structures and discourses, tended to produce large and resilient national differences in attitudes towards public policies, they now rather tend to produce attitudinal similarities and convergence. The predicaments in which Western populations find themselves produce increasingly similar attitudinal responses regarding the role and extension of public policies.

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Figure 1: Redistributive index by country, 1996-2006

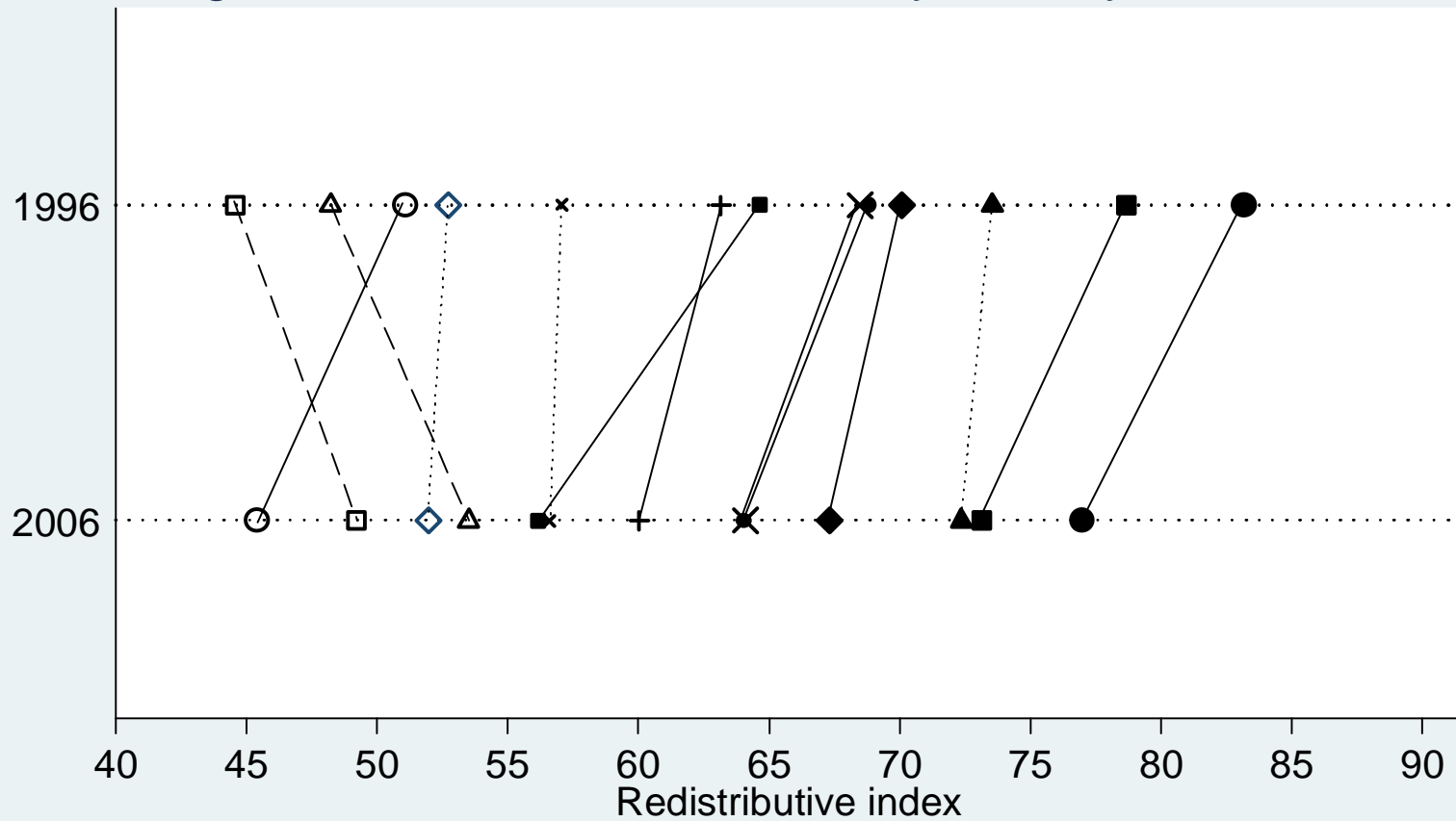


Figure 2: Income redistribution policy support by country, 1996-2006

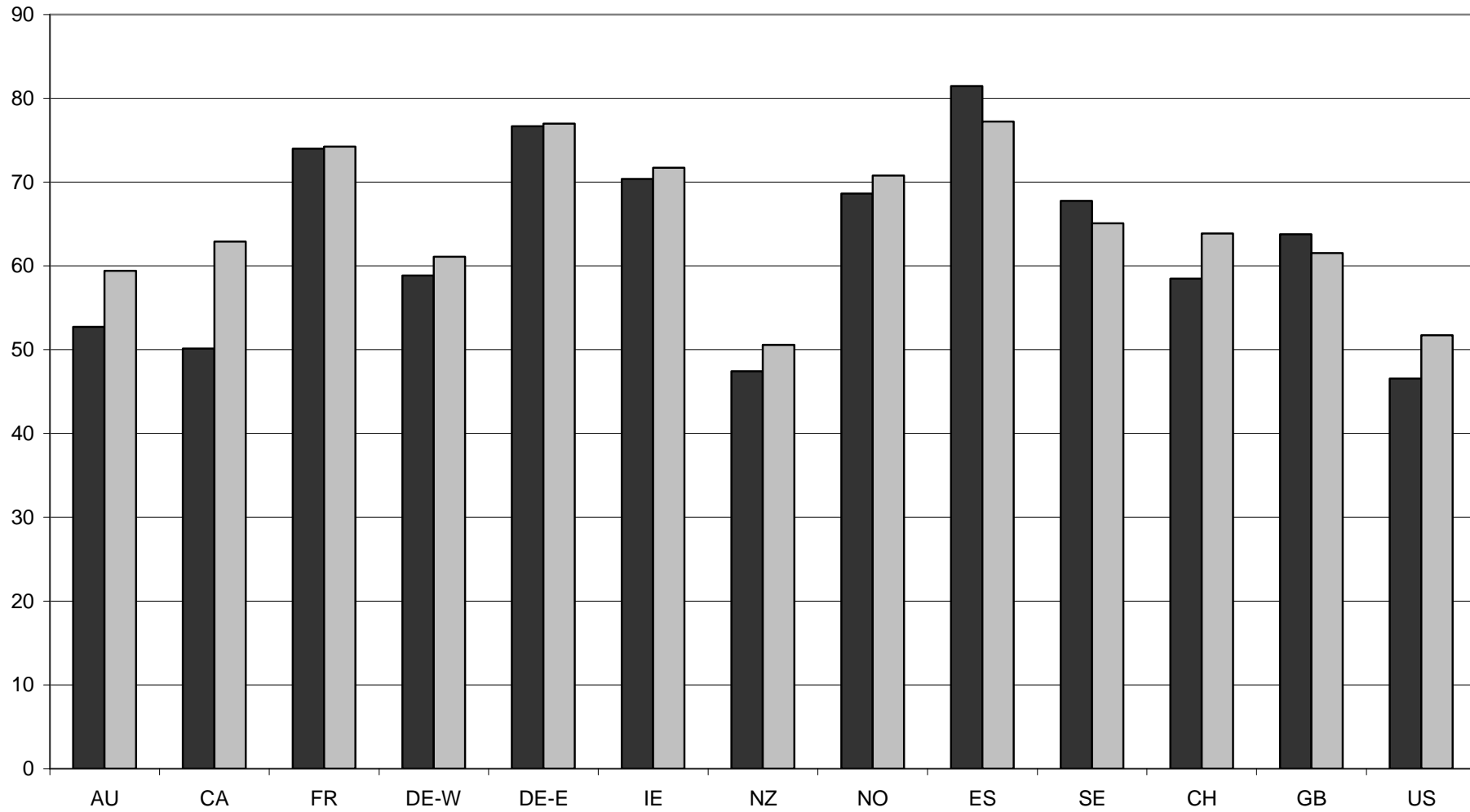
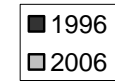


Figure 3: Unemployment policy support by country, 1996-2006

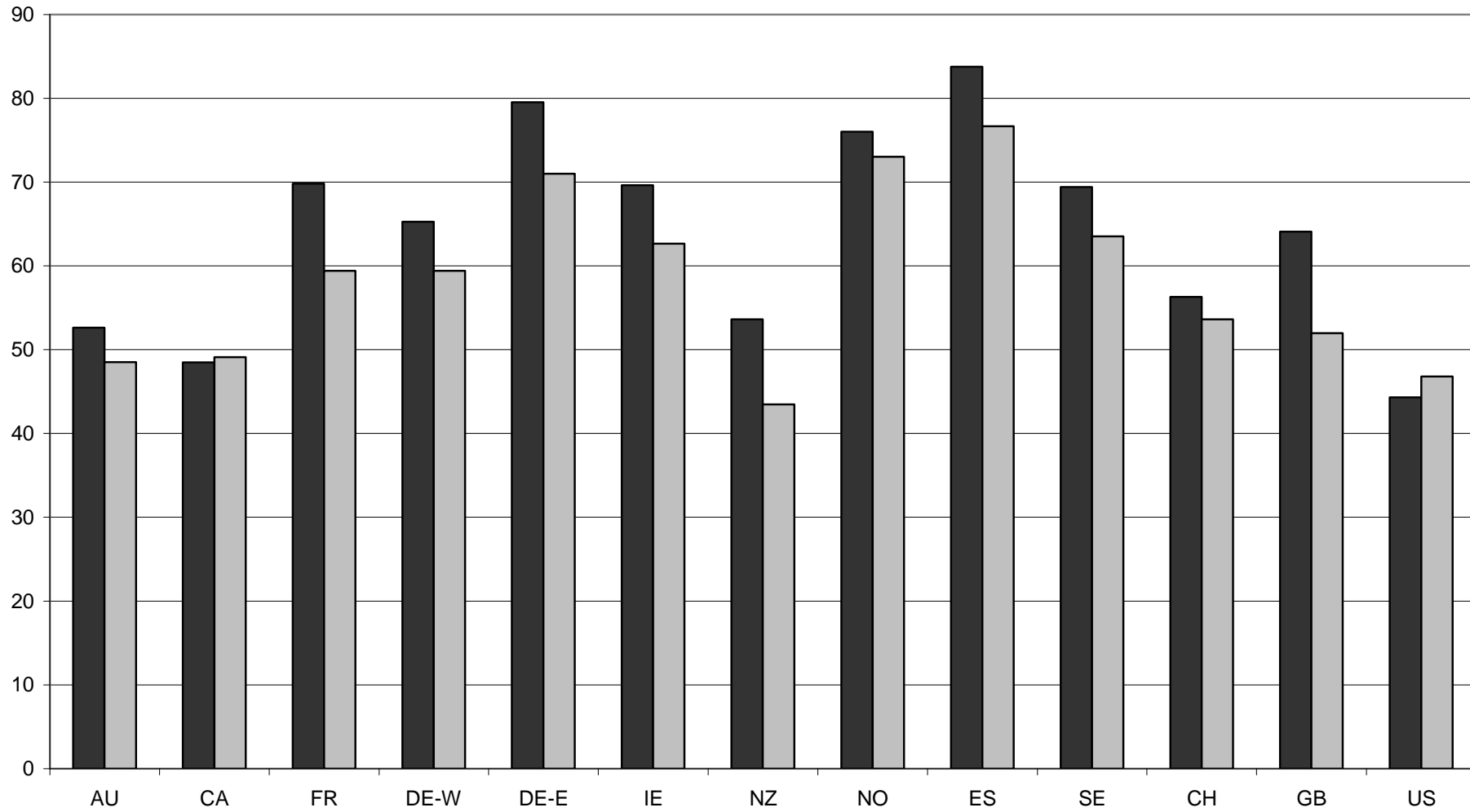
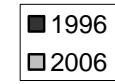


Figure 4: Income redistribution policy support by cohort, 1996-2006

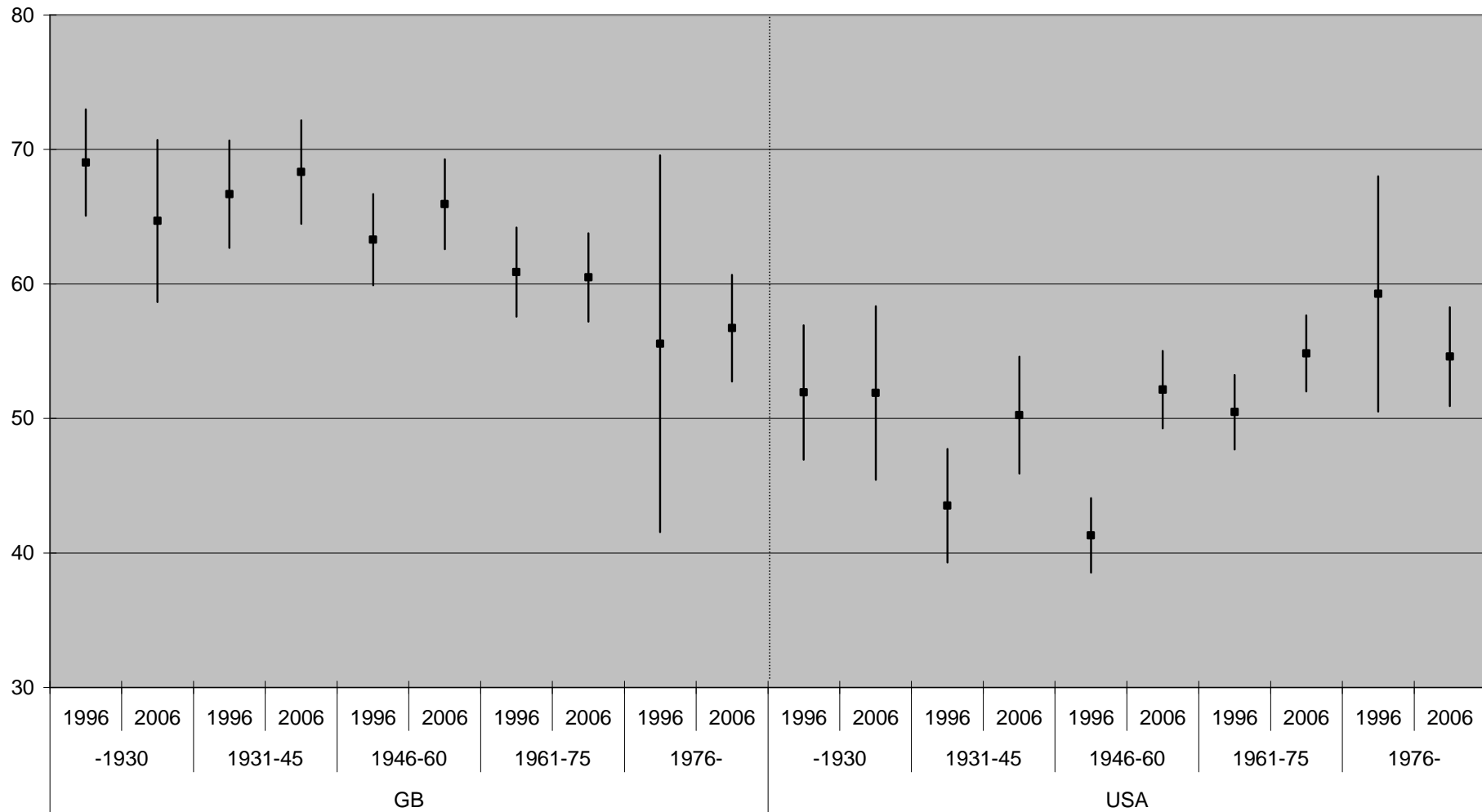


Figure 5: Unemployment policy support by cohort, 1996-2006

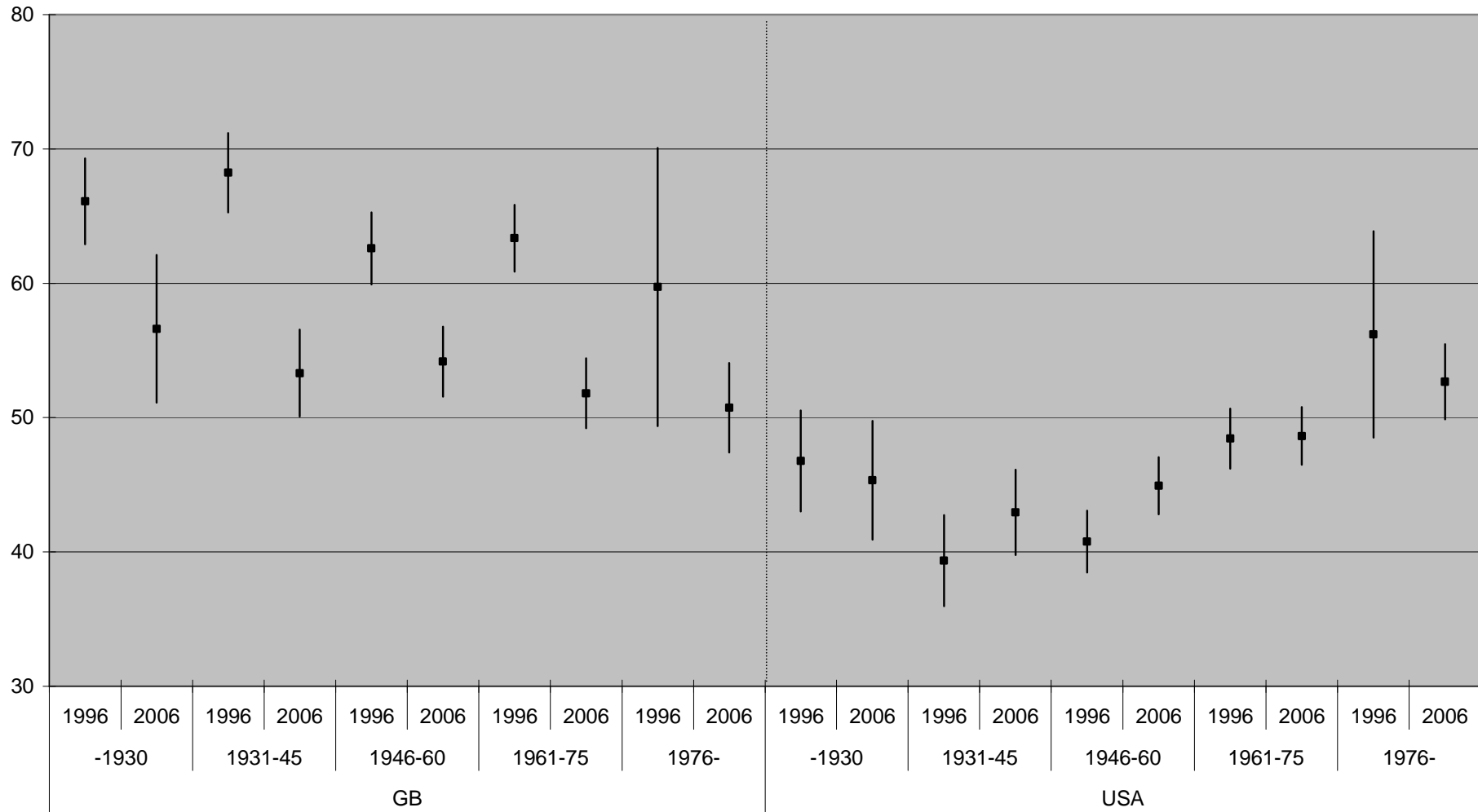


Figure 6: Income redistribution policy support by class, 1996-2006

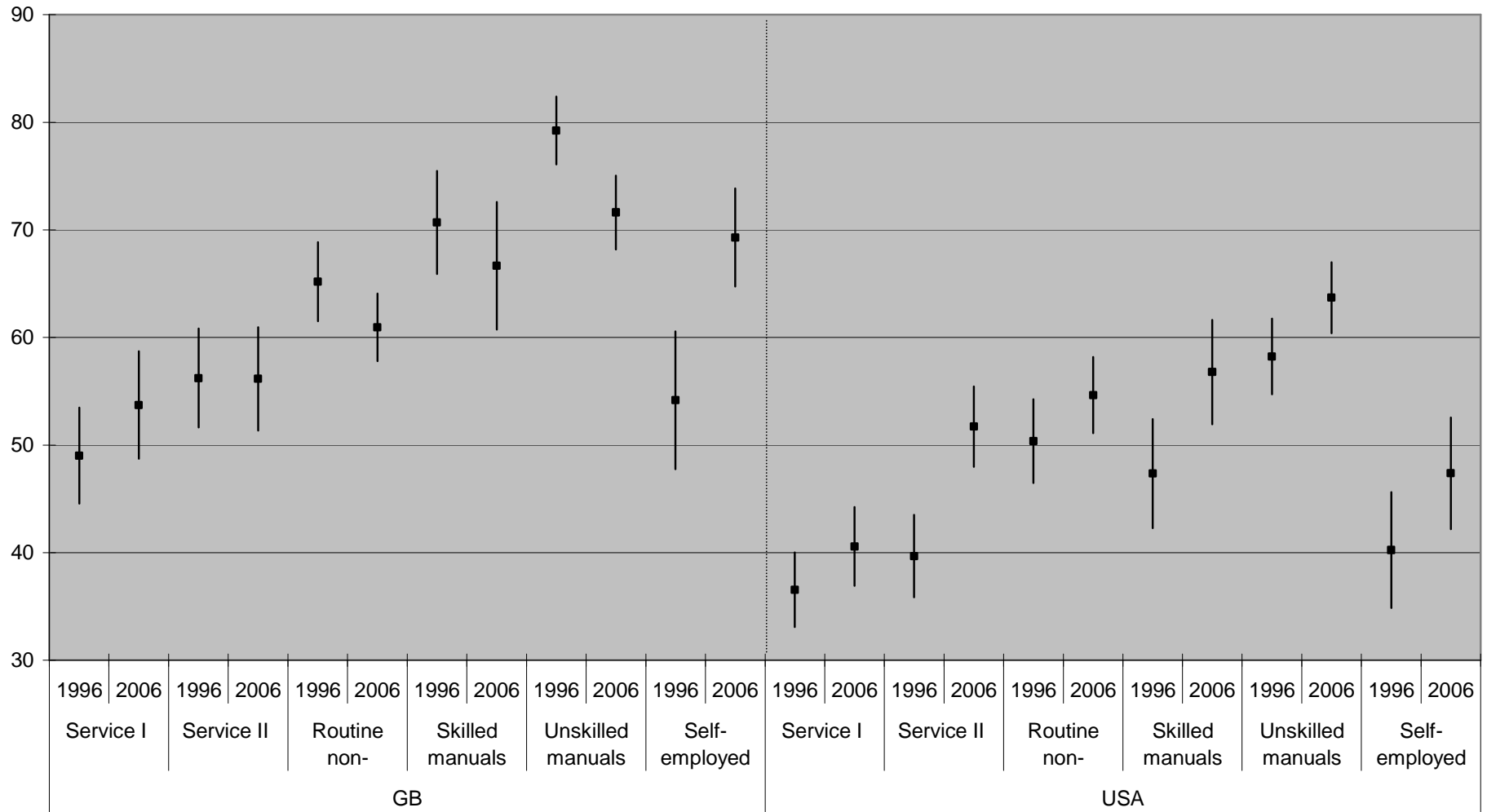


Figure 7: Unemployment policy support by class, 1996-2006

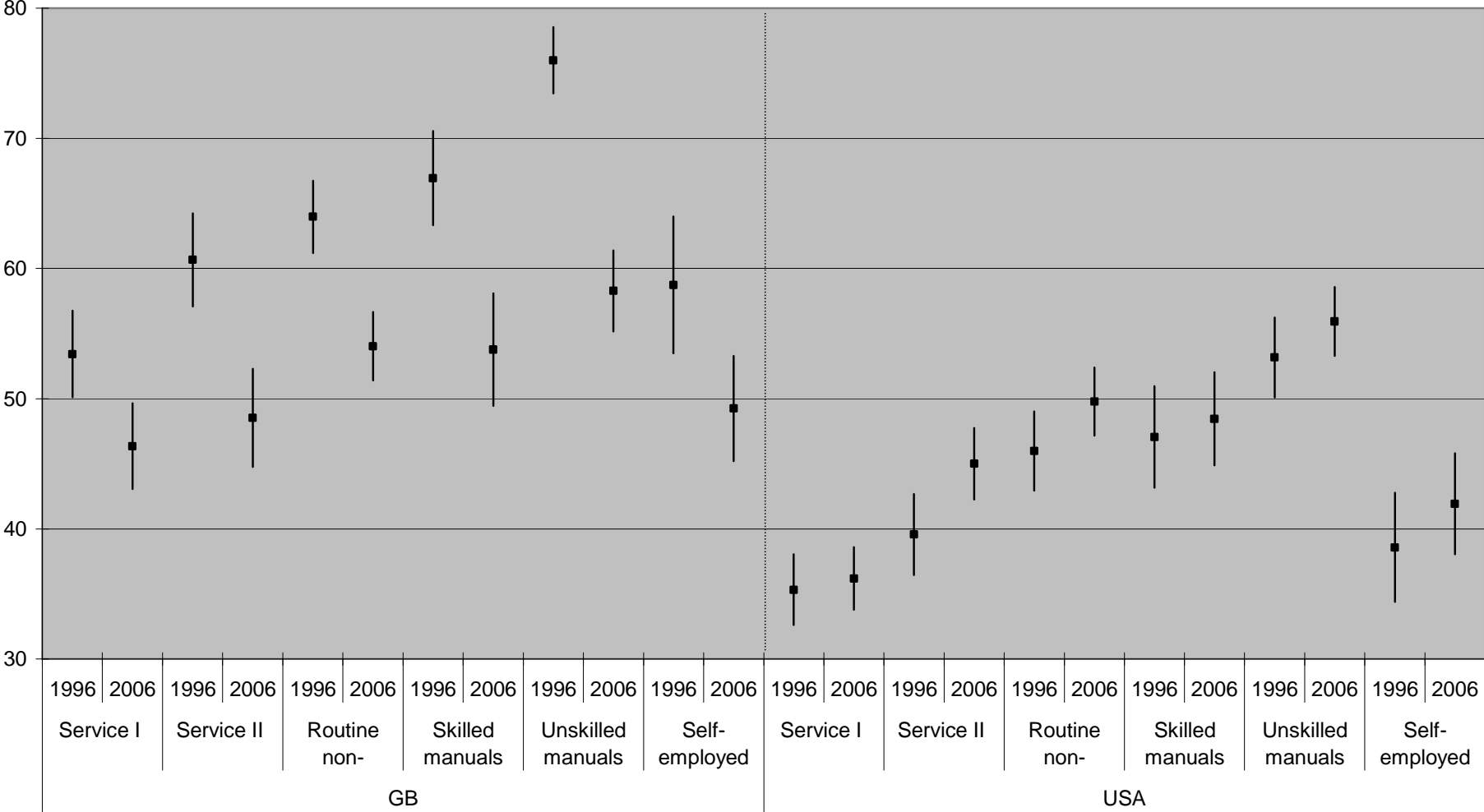


Table 1. Attitudes towards unemployment policy and income redistribution. Means and cohort and class dispersions (CoV_b(Escobar)).

	GB	GB	US	US
	1996	2006	1996	2006
<i>Income redistribution</i>				
Mean	64,3	62,9	46,6	53,3
Cohort CoV _b	10,9	9,6	14,3	3,9
Class CoV _b	23,4	15,1	16,3	16,1
<i>Unemployment policy</i>				
Mean	64,5	52,9	44,3	47,3
Cohort CoV _b	6,8	4,5	13,5	7,7
Class CoV _b	16,1	8,9	13,3	13,7

Table 2. Attitudes towards unemployment policy and income redistribution by cohort, year, and country. Great Britain and the USA, 1996-2006. Significance tests of interactions.

	Income redistribution		Unemployment policy	
	F	sig	F	sig
<i>Model 1</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	13,2	0,000 *	78,0	0,000 *
<i>Model 2</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	12,5	0,000 *	76,4	0,000 *
COHORT * YEAR	2,5	0,044 *	1,1	0,345
<i>Model 3</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	6,3	0,012 *	53,9	0,000 *
COHORT * COUNTRY	7,3	0,000 *	8,3	0,000 *
<i>Model 4</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	6,2	0,013 *	53,0	0,000 *
COHORT * YEAR	2,4	0,046 *	1,1	0,346
COHORT * COUNTRY	7,2	0,000 *	8,3	0,000 *
<i>Model 5</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	1,1	0,290	21,4	0,000 *
COHORT * YEAR	1,8	0,132	0,9	0,462
COHORT * COUNTRY	6,6	0,000 *	7,0	0,000 *
COHORT * YEAR * COUNTRY	0,4	0,837	0,9	0,457

Note: Models 1-5 include the main effects of COHORT, YEAR, COUNTRY (not shown).

Table 3. Attitudes towards unemployment policy and income redistribution by class, year, and country. Great Britain and the USA, 1996-2006. Significance tests of interactions.

	Income redistribution		Unemployment policy	
	F	Sig	F	Sig
<i>Model 1</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	14,0	0,000 *	82,6	0,000 *
<i>Model 2</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	13,1	0,000 *	82,7	0,000 *
CLASS * YEAR	2,2	0,051 *	0,8	0,568
<i>Model 3</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	13,2	0,000 *	80,9	0,000 *
CLASS * COUNTRY	1,4	0,240	0,3	0,915
<i>Model 4</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	12,3	0,000 *	81,0	0,000 *
CLASS * YEAR	2,2	0,053 *	0,8	0,578
CLASS * COUNTRY	1,3	0,250	0,3	0,923
<i>Model 5</i>				
YEAR * COUNTRY	8,2	0,004 *	68,3	0,000 *
CLASS * YEAR	2,5	0,026 *	1,0	0,429
CLASS * COUNTRY	1,2	0,308	0,3	0,908
CLASS * YEAR * COUNTRY	2,2	0,050 *	1,2	0,288

Note: Models 1-5 include the main effects of CLASS, YEAR, COUNTRY (not shown).