

It's worrying when politicians oppose academic research...

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As the [Guardian note this morning](#):

The UK economy has doubled in size since the early 1980s — yet the number of those suffering below-minimum living standards has grown by more than twice, a study claims.

The report refers to an Economic and Social Research Council funded study led by Bristol University into poverty in the UK that defines poverty as going without three or more "basic necessities of life", such as being able to adequately feed and clothe themselves and their children, and to heat and insure their homes. The report suggests that one in three households fail this test. In the early 1980s, the comparable figure was 14%.

I have not reviewed the work. What I can say is that the criteria appear inherently reasonable. It is also, and right-wingers usually like this, not a relative measure, but an absolute measure.

But what worried me was a response from Charlie Elphicke - a Conservative MP:

The Daily Mail article [is here, for the record](#). The main criticism from the government appears to be 'you did not use our methodology' and for this reason a Conservative MP issues what looks like a rather nasty veiled threat against a funding body suggesting it has acted politically in funding research that looks at the findings that alternative methodologies might offer.

This is worrying. It's a reaction in the same style as that which HMRC offered to my work on the size of the shadow economy when they suggested my methodology was seriously flawed, but have never said why. The suggestion is that there is just one way of thinking that is allowed. In democracies that is very worrying, especially when linked to threats to funders.

Plurality is the lifeblood of democracy - and academic and social thinking. If it is suppressed then we destroy democracy itself. I do not think that impossible. Remember, neoliberal thinking has destroyed almost all diversity in economic thinking - which is precisely why Thomas Piketty is so unusual. Now it would seem they want to achieve the same goal elsewhere.

I happen to think that the research to which the Guardian refers is credible. But in the eyes of the hegemonic thinker that is its precise fault. We need to worry.