

## The end of the small state?

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There are, as they say in the BBC, other economics blogs available. I should add, some of them are also rather good. Flip Chart Fairy Tales, written by [Flip Chart Rick](#) is one of them. In the context of [John Rapley's argument](#) on how economics became a religion [the following extract from a post there in the potential demise of small state thinking is of interest:](#)

*The important thing to understand about right-wing libertarianism is that it is a very eccentric viewpoint. It looks mainstream because it has a number of well-funded think-tanks pushing its agenda and its adherents are over-represented in politics and the media. The public, though, have never swallowed it. Countless think-tank papers, opinion pieces and editorials, telling us that shrinking the state is just common sense and that re-nationalisation is a loony left pipe-dream, have had remarkably little effect. The majority of people still want the railways and utilities taken back into public ownership and the proportion who want significant cuts to public spending has never even reached 10 percent. After three decades of haranguing by well-placed and well-funded small-staters, public opinion hasn't budged.*

Chart from [British Social Attitudes 34](#), June 2017

Over the last few decades, public opinion has swung between spending more and spending the same, support for the latter peaking during the period when David Cameron and George Osborne persuaded lots of voters that Labour has crashed the economy by borrowing too much. Yet even at this point, there was no support for cutting the size of the state. As Chris Dillow [never tires](#) of [pointing out](#), Cameron and Osborne [never really](#) made a coherent case for state shrinkage. The Big Society came and went and the moment passed.

I would like to think Rick is right. I sense a very strong change in public opinion right now: among parents facing education cuts it seems to be especially strong. It seems that lines are really being drawn in sand. The myth that we cannot afford what has so obviously been achieved in the past is simply not believed. If that is widespread then

the trend revealed in the British Social Attitudes survey looks to be what I am sensing.

But, and this takes me back John Rapley and my comments on his theme, thinking we need more spending is one thing. The reality is that a very powerful elite control the state religion that cutting the size of the state is required. Such elites are overthrown, and state backed hegemonies are rejected, but only when there is a better narrative to take their place. I would like to think that is in the course of development. I have to live in hope.