

# **STRATHCLYDE**

**DISCUSSION PAPERS IN ECONOMICS**



**AN ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTORAL USE OF POLICY ON  
LAW AND ORDER BY NEW LABOUR**

**BY**

**STEPHEN DRINKWATER AND COLIN JENNINGS**

**No. 12-08**

**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS  
UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE  
GLASGOW**

# **An Analysis of the Electoral Use of Policy on Law and Order by New Labour**

Stephen Drinkwater<sup>1</sup> & Colin Jennings<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Wales Institute of Social and Economic, Research, Data and Methods, Swansea University.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Economics, University of Strathclyde.

## **Abstract**

There has been much debate regarding the electoral strategy adopted by New Labour in the lead-up to and then during their time in government. This paper addresses the issue from the perspective of left/right and libertarian/authoritarian considerations by examining data on individual attitudes from the *British Social Attitudes* survey between 1986 and 2009. The analysis indicates that New Labour's move towards the right on economic and public policy was the main driver towards attracting new centrist voters and could thus be labelled 'broadly' populist. The move towards a tougher stance on law and order was more 'narrowly' populist in that it was used more to minimise the reduction in support from Labour's traditional base on the left than to attract new votes.

.

**Key Words:** New Labour, electoral strategy, law and order.

**JEL Classification:** D72; K00; Z18

**Acknowledgements:** The *British Social Attitudes* survey has been provided through the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS). This research has been partly supported by the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD). WISERD is a collaborative venture between the Universities of Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Glamorgan and Swansea, funded by the ESRC (grant number: RES-576-25-0021) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

## Introduction

A distinctive feature of the Labour governments that held power between 1997 and 2010 was the focus on a tougher approach to law and order. They signalled their intent five years before coming to power with the famous slogan ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’.

Once in power their taste for tougher policies could be seen across a range of policy measures; sentencing, anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), increased surveillance and notably after 9/11 anti-terror legislation. In this paper, we do not aim to discuss the merits of this approach in terms of its efficacy or any normative judgement regarding the trade-off between freedom and security. Rather, we wish to explore the extent to which this approach was part of Labour’s electoral strategy.

The common accusation made by liberal-minded authors was that the Labour approach to law and order was nakedly populist.<sup>1</sup> Law and order could be viewed as being bundled with the party’s shift from the left in terms of economic and public policy as a general package of policies aimed at appealing to the middle ground of British public opinion. However, the Labour approach to law and order is more complex than for economic and public policy. It is not immediately clear that the approach taken by Labour was actually in the centre ground. For example, while very few Conservatives would find themselves arguing that the Labour approach to economics and public policy was too right-wing, a strand of Conservatives (most notably David Davis and Kenneth Clarke) argued that the Labour approach to law and order was too authoritarian.<sup>2</sup> The criminologist Ian Loader in a Guardian article in 2008 also questioned the view that tough attitudes to law and order dominated the centre ground, ‘there is also evidence that the majority of people have little experience of crime, rarely think about it and, when prompted to do so, express ambivalent feelings about the proper response to it’.<sup>3</sup> In response it could be argued that there is a difference between the actuality of a policy and its perception. For Labour to be perceived in the centre ground of law and order they may actually have to be tougher than the Conservatives to draw attention to how they have changed. This seems somewhat borne out by the fact that according to MORI polls, as late as

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Grayling (2009), Pantazis and Pemberton (2009) and Timothy Garton Ash, ‘Liberty in Britain is facing death by a thousand cuts. We can fight back’, *The Guardian*, 19 February, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> David Davis, the then shadow home secretary, resigned his seat in 2008 and fought for re-election to draw attention to what he perceived as the erosion in civil liberties in Britain. On the election of the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition in May 2010 Kenneth Clarke became Secretary of State for Justice and has argued for a reduction in prison numbers. The relatively softer approach taken by the Coalition has, however, been put under some pressure by the riots across England in August 2011.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Straw’s embrace of penal excess ignores public will’, *The Guardian*, 28 October, 2008.

the 2005 election the Conservatives had an issue advantage over Labour on crime even though Labour were dominant in most other areas.

While it may be accepted that a tough approach to law and order may be more broadly popular than a soft approach, there may be an alternative explanation for Labour's approach which focuses more narrowly on popularity within their traditional base rather than appealing to the public at large, which was clearly the target when moving to the centre ground on the dominant issue of economic and public policy. This will rest on the claim that law and order could be used as a tool to retain core support in the event that they lose the battle on the core centre of politics which is concerned primarily with economics and public policy.

The idea here is that traditional Labour support is left-wing but that this support may hold highly differing views along an authoritarian/libertarian axis. As Labour necessarily moved to the centre ground on the left-right dimension in order to be electorally competitive they risked alienating their traditional supporters. From a purely electoral perspective, this would not matter if the sacrifice of the base led to victory in the elections due to the weight of newly acquired floating voters motivated primarily by Labour's shift to the centre on left-right issues. The risk long-term is that as political battle loses its ideological edge, it is always possible that Labour would lose the newly acquired centrist voter to the Conservatives and at the same time lose their traditional support by moving too far from their left-wing preferences.

Therefore, an electoral strategy for Labour was to move to the centre-ground on the key left-right dimension, but ask whether there was something they could do on the liberal-authoritarian dimension that would keep them close enough to their traditional base so that it keeps voting for them. The proof of populism in this case would then be that there would be more votes to be retained in taking a tough rather than a more liberal stance on law and order. That is, there would be more votes to be retained by appealing to authoritarian left-wingers than libertarian left-wingers. Indeed, it is claimed that law and order only became an electoral issue because Labour under Tony Blair made it into one.<sup>4</sup> We would like to consider the idea that the tough approach was not developed so much to appeal to the general public, but to what they considered a key constituency within their traditional core support who in other respects may have felt abandoned by the other policies pursued by the Labour party. This

---

<sup>4</sup> 'Anti-Social Behaviour: It's Back', *The Economist*, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009.

might also explain why the accusation of cynical populism is often applied more to this policy approach than the attempt to appeal to the middle ground on economic and public policy. In the latter case, while clearly it would be hoped that the move would generate a larger share of votes the issue was essentially distributional in nature (with the move allowing the middle class to feel Labour were less threatening with regard to their material position). While the moderate approach to economic policy proved popular it would be hard to dismiss the approach as wrong on the basis that it was based on making appeals to the uninformed, less educated voter. Arguments could be made regarding the approach as appealing to the materialistic, selfish middle classes, but not that they did not fully understand what was at stake. Law and order is not essentially a distributional issue and the use of the rather derogatory term populism in this context is often implicitly based on the idea that the approach to law and order was bad policy based on a cynical appeal to the base instincts of the uneducated. Implicit here is the idea that if Labour felt they needed to appeal more to left-authoritarian voters than left-libertarian voters they could use law and order initiatives as a blunt instrument because this constituency were not as nuanced in their understanding of the issues surrounding law and order.

In the study we presented here, we analyse data from the *British Social Attitudes* survey to test our hypothesis that if the new Labour approach to law and order was populist, it was populist in a different sense to their economic and public policies in that it was not a policy primarily aimed at winning new voters in the centre ground of politics, but rather retaining as many votes as possible on the left. We label the former ‘broad’ populism and the latter ‘narrow’ populism.

Even if the data does bear out this argument, we cannot rule out the possibility that the policy on law and order was conducted for reasons unrelated to popularity. First, an alternative explanation is that they succumbed to the eternal temptation to strengthen the power of government regardless of the electoral consequences. A second explanation is that they were statesmanlike and took a tougher stance on law and order because they thought it was the right thing to do regardless of its electoral consequences.<sup>5</sup> This would fit with the common retort to the left-libertarian constituency that it is easy to hold liberal views on law and order (and to dismiss those who hold tough views as ill informed) because they come in the main

---

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean though that the policy would necessarily be the correct one. See, for example, Millie (2007) who argues that anti-social behaviour has been both misidentified and over identified.

from a largely privileged background and are thus unaffected by crime. This point is made repeatedly by Tony Blair in his autobiography (Blair, 2010). The evidence may support the 'narrow' populist thesis but this was only an electoral side-benefit for what was good policy. Thus it was not 'cynical' populism where bad policy is knowingly implemented simply because it is popular. Populism and good policy are not by definition in conflict, although much of the commentary on the Labour approach suggests that the alleged populism was in serious conflict with good policy on law and order. After discussing related literature, we discuss the theoretical background. We then introduce the data to be analysed and consider some empirical evidence before making some concluding comments.

### **Related Literature**

There are a small number of surveys of new Labour's approach to law and order. Saward (2006) provides a discussion of civil liberties in the post 9/11 world and covers in detail anti-terror legislation and ASBOs. Beloff (2007) discusses the relationship between Tony Blair and the law and judiciary and provides another example of the accusation of populism when he writes, 'he displayed no particular appetite for engaging with legal issues, apart from using populist philosophy' (p.292). In the same book Newburn and Reiner (2007) discuss crime and penal policy and with reference to the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act argue that 'Blatcherism was Butskellism in reverse' (p. 324). They catalogue the sheer quantity and speed of legislation and increases in incarceration and conclude that 'Majoritarian electoral systems do require centre-left parties to capture a substantial section of the middle-class vote. Arguably they must allay middle-earners' fears about redistribution at their expense by tough leadership espousing middle-class values against the left of the party. *Sun*-worshipping law and order policies and tight central control follow from this logic.' (p. 339-340). This quotation is at odds with the one by Ian Loader used earlier which suggests that the majority view on the issue is not so clear, so it would be unclear why a tough stance on law and order would compensate for fears about a future lurch to the left by Labour on economic and public policy. Also, and an even stronger point, given the effort by new Labour in the years before coming to power and the policies they initiated on taking power, how realistic is the idea that the middle-class would fear a lurch to the left? It seems more likely that the tougher stance is to allay the sense of alienation felt by those with left-authoritarian preferences due to Labour's shift towards the middle ground on economic and public policy.

The idea of a voter feeling alienated and not voting, or 'wasting' a vote on a minor party is commonplace, but the logic does not follow easily from standard models of voting. Probably the most famous model of voting stems from Downs (1957) depiction of political competition. Voters are considered as having heterogeneous preferences along issue dimensions, they vote instrumentally (as an indirect means to achieve favourable outcomes) and parties compete to win power by choosing a political position in the issue space. When there is only one dimension, usually thought of as left-right, the prediction is that if there are two parties and they are purely concerned with winning they will converge at the preference of the median voter. Even if we relax this extreme prediction, convergence towards the middle ground is likely. But in this model as Brennan and Hamlin (1998) point out the voters with greatest incentive to vote are those on the extremes because the stakes for them are higher than for those with preferences close to where the parties have set their policies. In the Downs environment, alienation does not play a role. If some do not vote it must be because their preferences lie somewhere between the largely converged positions of the parties and they are indifferent to the outcome.

An alternative instrumental theory of voting originates with Stokes (1963) and removes the idea of heterogeneity of preferences over policy in the issue space. Instead, this theory considers voting to be determined by valence issues. Voters agree on the policy, such as a well-managed economy, and they will vote for whichever party they believe will do best at delivering that. There is a literature that argues that UK elections have shifted from being Downsian to being valence dominated (see Sanders and Brynkin (1999), Whiteley et al (2005), Green (2007) and Green and Hobolt (2008)). An interesting finding in these studies is that voter preferences do not appear to be exogenous with regard to party policy. As Labour moved to the right, public preferences also shifted to the right which compressed public opinion.

To a large extent, the Downsian and valence models are not competing models of voting, but rather that if the Downsian prediction of policy convergence is borne out we would expect valence to play a large role in determining votes because there is less disagreement on the content of policy between the main parties. The public will then vote for which party they believe will be best in delivering the agreed policy. Again, there would appear to be no role for alienation. If valence issues are dominant then political competition is dominated by

issues on which voters agree, so voters who are more extreme should have no less incentive to vote than for more centrist voters.

The third model of voting (expressive voting) makes sense of the idea of alienated voters. There is no single agreed theory of expressive voting, but the logic of expressive voting is well understood (see Hamlin and Jennings (2011) for a definition and a survey of the literature). As the number of voters becomes large, the probability of an individual being decisive in determining the outcome of elections becomes small. As a result, the indirect instrumental benefit of choosing one party over another becomes very small. This means that if there is a direct expressive benefit associated with voting, then this benefit must weigh more heavily in voting calculus than other domains of decision-making where the individual is more likely to be decisive, for example in market choice.

Brennan and Hamlin (1998) use this insight to provide an explanation for alienation. They agree largely with a purely instrumental Downsian model of voting that there will be a centripetal force pulling political positions towards the centre. However, this will lead them to occupy political positions that lie some distance from voters towards the extremes. These voters will receive lower expressive benefits from voting for centrist parties and given the very small instrumental benefit of voting may decide not to vote at all, or vote for a party located close to them although it may have no realistic chance of gaining power.<sup>6</sup> If this model of expressive voting is accepted, it would follow that as Labour moved to the right they risked alienating traditional left-wing voters. The choice of policy on the libertarian-authoritarian axis could then be selected to retain the greatest amount of this potentially alienated support and it could be for this, more narrowly populist, reason that they choose to become more authoritarian.

Interestingly, Brennan (2008) has written on crime and punishment from an expressive perspective. He argues that the very high levels of incarceration that has been witnessed in the US and Australia bear witness to an expressive explanation for electoral behaviour. Calculations of whether the cost of incarceration is justified by the benefits it provides are not important for voters because they are so unlikely to determine the outcome of elections. As a

---

<sup>6</sup> The paper received some empirical attention. Greene and Nelson (2002) did not find empirical support, but in later studies Drinkwater and Jennings (2007) and Calcagno and Westley (2008) find that there is evidence to support the Brennan and Hamlin hypothesis.

result, they choose a policy that expressively appeals to them. Brennan argues that increased incarceration is expressively appealing for many voters.

Our paper also links to a recent study by Ford and Goodwin (2010). In a detailed study of the British National Party, they argue that the BNP have mainly collected ex-Labour voters. An interesting question is whether Labour were leaking more voters to parties like the BNP where voters are more likely to be left-authoritarian than they were leaking left-libertarian voters to a party like the Liberal Democrats which was increasingly viewed as just as (or even more) left-wing than Labour, but certainly more liberal. If it was the case that they were losing more voters overall by the loss of left-libertarian voters than left-authoritarian voters, then rather than arguing that Labour's shift to a more authoritarian stance was populist it was actually statesmanlike. They were allowing what could be perceived as a responsible party (and potential partner) in the Liberal Democrats to build up political support, while Labour focussed on combatting what they perceived as an irresponsible and dangerous party in the form of the BNP.

Throughout this paper, we take the position that the most critical issue determining the voting decision is economic policy and its execution broadly defined. This links to the finding of Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) who find that while class predicts left-right attitudes and Conservative versus Labour voting, the category of status determines libertarian-authoritarian attitudes but does not predict voting. However, an eyebrow might be raised when one considers how an issue such as crime seems to consistently rank so highly in polls as to 'the most important issue'. Johns (2010) demonstrates that we should not leap to conclude from these polls that issues considered most important are the issues that actually determine voting. He found that 'there was little evidence of issue voting among those naming asylum and crime' (p. 156). Therefore, if the approach of Labour was purely electorally motivated we argue that it was two-pronged; to move to the right to attract floating voters and move towards authoritarianism to hang on to a specific constituency of their traditional left-wing base.

### **Theoretical Background**

We depict a 2-dimensional diagram with the horizontal axis being left-right and the vertical axis libertarian-authoritarian with increasing authoritarianism we as move up the vertical axis

as shown in Figure 1. An individual  $x$  has preferences in two dimensions given by  $(x_1, x_2)$  where  $x_1$  depicts left-right and  $x_2$  depicts libertarian-authoritarian preferences. Their voting choice will be determined, first, by which party is closest to them and second (capturing the possibility of expressive alienation) that the closest party is still within a distance  $c$  of  $(x_1, x_2)$ . If both parties are further than  $c$ ,  $x$  will prefer to abstain or vote for a minor party. The distance from  $x$ 's preference to a policy profile  $(y_1, y_2)$  could be depicted as the simple Euclidean distance  $\sqrt{(y_1 - x_1)^2 + (y_2 - x_2)^2}$ . This would mean that the indifference curves are circles. However, we are assuming that left-right is the dominant policy dimension. As such we should consider weighted Euclidean distance given by  $\sqrt{(y_1 - x_1)^2 + A(y_2 - x_2)^2}$  where  $0 \leq A \leq 1$ . This means that the indifference curves are ellipses, which given that the left/right dimension is on the horizontal axis the ellipses are crunched in from the sides, as shown in Figure 1. This figure indicates a small movement away from the preferences on the left-right would require a bigger movement on libertarian-authoritarian to compensate.

So in order to win a vote, two conditions need to be met. First, the distance must be less than the rival party. Second, the distance must be within distance  $c$ . These are given by

$$\sqrt{(y_1 - x_1)^2 + A(y_2 - x_2)^2} < \sqrt{(z_1 - x_1)^2 + A(z_2 - x_2)^2} \quad (1)$$

$$\sqrt{(y_1 - x_1)^2 + A(y_2 - x_2)^2} < c \quad (2)$$

In a model where there is no expressive voting and all voters vote in two dimensions where political competition is dominated by two strategic parties then there would not be an equilibrium, but we would expect parties to roughly offer similar policies somewhere in the region of the median of the two axis. If the dominant policy dimension is very dominant reflected in a low value of  $A$  then we might expect the location of policy on the libertarian-authoritarian axis to be largely irrelevant so politics would be dominated by the left-right axis. The reason is that left wing voters will keep voting for the more left-wing party even if it is not very left wing at all. This fits with the Brennan and Hamlin analysis – in a purely instrumental model those with the strongest preferences on left and right have the most incentive to vote even if the left and right parties are moderate. In an expressive model, this changes because these voters will drop out/vote elsewhere due to alienation. In a purely

instrumental approach, the conclusion may be that policy on a minor dimension is only marginally significant. In an expressive approach, policy on the minor dimension could become much more important because it may be a means by which voters can be retained.

In terms of conditions (1) and (2), in a purely instrumental model dominated by two main parties condition (2) is largely irrelevant. So long as Labour is to the left of the Conservatives (which can easily be understood as rooted in the need to satisfy to, at least to some extent, the traditional core support within the two parties) left-wing voters will vote Labour. In an expressive model, the distance from the party position should not be too great in terms of (2) to justify voting Labour. So although the left-wing voter would prefer Labour to the Conservatives they will either not vote or vote for a minor party. It is within the structure of this model that it may make sense to manipulate policy on law and order to ensure that policy distance is kept below  $c$ . If the charge of narrow populism is correct, then we should find evidence that shows this approach retained a larger proportion of left-wing support than was lost in the further alienation of left-wing voters who were also libertarian.

## Data

The data used in this paper are taken from the *British Social Attitudes (BSA)* survey. This is a representative survey of adults aged 18 and over living in private households in Great Britain, which contains information on a wide range of attitudes.<sup>7</sup> Areas north of the Caledonian Canal are excluded because of their dispersed population, whilst a separate survey is carried out in Northern Ireland. The survey has been carried out annually since 1983, apart from in 1988 and 1992, although the sample size has varied over time. We analyse information from surveys that have taken place since 1986 since these contain information on the left-right and libertarian-authoritarian variables, as well as on party identification.

In order to classify different political views, we create a categorical variable that combines information from both the left-right and libertarian-authoritarian variables that have been included in the *BSA* survey. These variables have been constructed using two sets of questions that have been asked in each survey since 1986.<sup>8</sup> The items used to construct the left-right variable are the following:

---

<sup>7</sup> Detailed information on the survey and sample design can be found in Exley *et al.* (2002).

<sup>8</sup> However, despite the components of each variable being available in earlier years, the *BSA* files made available through the ESDS only contain the composite variables from 1994 onwards. Therefore, for the years

- Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off.
- Big business benefits owners at the expense of workers.
- Ordinary people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth.
- There is one law for the rich and one for the poor.
- Management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance.

Respondents are asked to choose how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements using a 5-point Likert scale. The left-right variable was then created by grouping (by taking an average of) the responses to the items. Therefore, if a person strongly agreed with each of the above statements then they were assigned a value of 1 (left) and if they strongly disagreed with each of the statements they were assigned a value of 5 (right) on the left-right scale. Further details on the construction of this measure can be found in Heath *et al.* (1994) and Evans *et al.* (1996). Similarly, the items used to construct the libertarian-authoritarian scale are the following:

- Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values.
- For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence.
- Schools should teach children to obey authority.
- The law should always be obeyed even if a particular law is wrong.
- Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards.
- People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences.

Therefore a value of 1 on this scale would indicate an extreme liberal and a value of 5 an extreme authoritarian. Again see Heath *et al.* (1994) and Evans *et al.* (1996) for a detailed discussion of this measure.

The political attitudes categories that we use in the empirical analysis have been created by combining information from both the left-right and libertarian-authoritarian variables. In particular, the categories are a combination of three groups of left-right indicators (left, centre and right) and three groups of libertarian-authoritarian indicators (liberal, moderate and authoritarian). These two sets of groups have been defined in the following way:

Left:  $1 \leq LR_i < 2$

Centre:  $2 \leq LR_i \leq 3$

---

between 1986 and 1993, the left-right and libertarian-authoritarian variables have been constructed by the authors using the individual components.

Right:  $3 < LR_i \leq 5$

where  $LR_i$  is the value on the left-right scale for respondent  $i$ .

Libertarian:  $1 \leq LA_i < 3.5$

Moderate:  $3.5 \leq LA_i \leq 4$

Authoritarian:  $4 < LA_i \leq 5$

where  $LA_i$  is the value on the libertarian-authoritarian variable for respondent  $i$ .

The upper and lower boundaries for each group were selected to ensure an adequate distribution across the three groups over time, especially since neither the left-right or the libertarian-authoritarian variable is truly continuous since they have been constructed using either five or six integers and as a result there is some clustering around particular values.<sup>9</sup> A single variable containing nine categories was then created using both sets of groups to summarise a person's political outlook. These categories are shown in the first column of Table 1.

The analysis that follows uses information from annual *BSA* surveys that have been pooled together from 1986 until 2009, with five time periods identified during this interval. These are 1986-91, 1993-7, 1998-2001, 2002-5 and 2006-9. These have been chosen to achieve reasonable sample sizes in each period but also to reflect recent periods in Labour party history: opposition, lead-up to government, first, second and third administrations. The number of observations in these time periods varies according to the total number of respondents and on whether the attitudinal questions were asked to all of the individuals that were interviewed or just a proportion of them who were interviewed in each year. In total, the full sample includes over 57,000 observations, with the highest number appearing in the final time period and the lowest number in the first.

Table 1 presents the distribution of political attitudes across the nine categories over the five time periods. It shows that there has been a shift to the right since the late-1980s. As a result,

---

<sup>9</sup> There is some variation in the percentage in the left-right groups over time, with a shift to the right being evident. For the whole sample, the distribution across the three groups is left (19%), centre (60%) and right (21%). There is less variation in the libertarian-authoritarian groups, which is distributed over the whole sample as follows: libertarian (28%), moderate (31%) and authoritarian (41%). Further details are provided in Table 1, which like the other tables is based on unweighted data. However, applying the weights from each *BSA* survey makes very little difference to the distribution across the political categories.

there is now a greater concentration of attitudes in the middle, with the percentage accounted for by the centre-moderate category increasing from 25% in 1986-91 to 28% in 2006-9. Furthermore, the percentage in the left-liberal category has halved and also fell by 2-3 percentage points in the left-moderate and left-authoritarian categories. In contrast, the percentage in the centre-authoritarian category has increased by over 4 points. Although the percentage accounted for by the right-liberal and right-centre categories has also risen, it fell within the right-authoritarian category, which may indicate a reduction in more extreme political attitudes amongst the adult population. Thus, as indicated in footnote 9, political attitudes have tended to move to the right, whereas attitudes do not appear to have become more authoritarian over this period.

### **Analysis of Changing Political Attitudes**

In this section, the distribution of political categories that were presented in Table 1 are examined with respect to the political party that the individual identifies themselves with. Party identification occurs at three different levels: individuals reporting that they support a certain party; those stating that they are sympathetic to a party and finally people who say that they are closest to a party. In the initial analysis, the three groups identifying themselves with a particular party are analysed together, with separate analysis of the three groups of Labour party identifiers appearing at the end of the section.

Table 2 reports the percentage within each political category that are Labour party identifiers. It shows that support amongst what might be considered to be traditional core Labour voters (i.e. those with left-leaning attitudes) has declined since the late 1980s. In particular, the percentage of Labour party identifiers in the left-liberal category fell from 71% in 1986-91 to 48% in 2006-9. There have also been reductions in percentage of Labour party identifiers in the other two categories on the left, although the declines have not been as large - falling by around 17 percentage for each category. Furthermore, as shown in Table 1, the percentage of respondents appearing within these three categories has also fallen over time but the fall in the percentage accounted for people in the left-authoritarian category is smaller than it is in the other two categories. Therefore, although Labour has a lower percentage of support in the left-authoritarian category, which may not be that surprising considering how liberal Labour were before Blair, the number of potential voters in this category is still larger than it is for either of the other two left-leaning categories. In fact, Table 1 indicates that the left-

authoritarian category accounted for 7% of respondents in the most recent period, which was the same as the other two left categories combined, whereas the respective percentages in the first period had been 9% and 14%. The slower decline in support in the left-authoritarian category relative to the left-liberal left-moderate categories could be treated as evidence that the tougher law and order stance was, at least, slowing down the decline in support in the more populated category. However, it is still the case that support declined throughout the periods for all left-wing voters, demonstrating the effect of moving policy along the left-right axis.

The percentage of Labour party identifiers in each of the three centre categories peaks in the middle period (1998-2001). The largest increase was seen in the centre-authoritarian category since around 42% of this category were Labour party identifiers in 1998-2001, compared to less than 27% in 1986-91. This 15 percentage point change compared to increases of 6 and 12 percentage points in the other two centre categories, whereas similar percentage point declines were observed in all three centre categories between the third and fifth periods. This would appear to provide confirmation of the importance of moving economic/public policy to the centre ground in the early years of new Labour. The incidence of Labour party supporters showed a similar pattern within the three right categories. For example, the percentage of Labour party identifiers in the right-authoritarian category increased from around 3% in 1986-91 to over 20% in 1998-2001 and still remained at an appreciable 17% in 2006-9.

This would appear to provide evidence in support of the primacy of economic and public policy over law and order. Labour support amongst centre and right liberals increased up to 1998-2001 at a time when it was declining for left-liberals. It would seem to suggest that the move to the centre in economic and public policy was of greater consequence than a more authoritarian approach towards law and order. The evidence indicates strong support for our hypothesis regarding two types of populism. It suggests that economic and public policy was the main electoral issue and the move to the right was used by Labour to attract new votes and was thus broadly populist. A more authoritarian law and order approach could not prevent a loss of support on the left, but it stemmed the flow from the most populated left-wing category.

By further way of comparison, the percentage of Conservative party identifiers is shown across the political categories in Table 3. Unsurprisingly, the information in this table mirrors

that provided in Table 2 to a large extent, including showing a trough in the percentage of Conservative party identifiers in the centre categories in the 1998-2001 period.<sup>10</sup> However, in contrast to the increased identification with the Labour party seen in the right-authoritarian category, the proportion in the left-liberal category identifying themselves with the Conservative party remains very low in each period. Within the centre categories, the decline in Conservative party identifiers is greatest amongst the centre-authoritarian category, falling by 19 percentage points between the first and third periods and only recovering slightly by the final period.

Finally, Table 4 contains a more detailed analysis of the change in the percentage of Labour party identifiers across the political categories. It shows that the decline in the percentage of Labour party identifiers amongst the left categories was greatest amongst those respondents who stated that they were Labour party supporters. For example, the percentage of Labour party supporters in the left-liberal category fell from 52% in 1986-91 to 29% in 2006-9, whereas the percentage of sympathisers and those who felt closest to the Labour party remained fairly similar. The percentage of Labour party supporters in the other two left-leaning categories has also declined over time, especially in the final two periods. In contrast, the percentage of Labour party sympathisers rose until the middle period before falling back, whilst the percentage reporting that they are closest to the Labour party has remained fairly constant in these two categories.<sup>11</sup> The table also shows that the rise in the incidence of Labour party identifiers amongst the centre categories observed up to 2001 was the result of an increase across each of the three groups of identifiers. This was followed by a fall in the percentage of Labour party identifiers amongst all three groups in the fourth and fifth periods. Furthermore, the increase in the percentage of Labour party identifiers within the right-authoritarian category was also fairly evenly spread across the three groups. Therefore, apart from the three left categories, the patterns shown in Table 2 for the combined groups of Labour party identifiers tend to hold regardless of the strength of identification. However, if we make the realistic assumption that Labour party would have more knowledge about supporters and were thus focussed on them as opposed to ‘sympathisers’ or people who considered themselves to be ‘closest’, we can see that a more authoritarian approach, while not preventing a leakage of votes may have helped to stem the flow.

---

<sup>10</sup> Although a slightly lower percentage was observed in the 2002-5 period for the Centre-Liberal category.

<sup>11</sup> There was a fall in the percentage who considered themselves to be closest to the Labour party in the Left-Moderate category in the final period.

## Conclusions

This paper considers some of the large changes that have occurred in the recent UK political landscape by examining how the support base for the Labour party has evolved along both left-right and libertarian-authoritarian dimensions since the mid-1980s. This has been achieved through analysing consecutive annual data from the *BSA* survey. The analysis reveals that there has been a shift in Labour party identifiers from the traditional base amongst left-leaning voters towards a more centrist political stance but there is also evidence that voters with more authoritarian attitudes were targeted. This is consistent with the harder stance that was taken on law and order. Our thesis is that the tough approach to law and order was not intended as a broadly populist vote-winner. This role was played (extremely well) by economic and public policy shifts to the centre. Rather, it was a narrowly populist policy to retain as large a share of the reduced support on the left as possible. The evidence suggests that this objective was fulfilled. We set to the side the question as to whether the tough approach to law and order was also ‘cynical’ populism where policy is simply implemented for its popularity regardless of whether it is good policy or not. We believe that those commentators who view the new Labour approach to law and order as a broadly populist policy in the same mould as their economic and public policy are missing a subtle distinction between the two approaches.

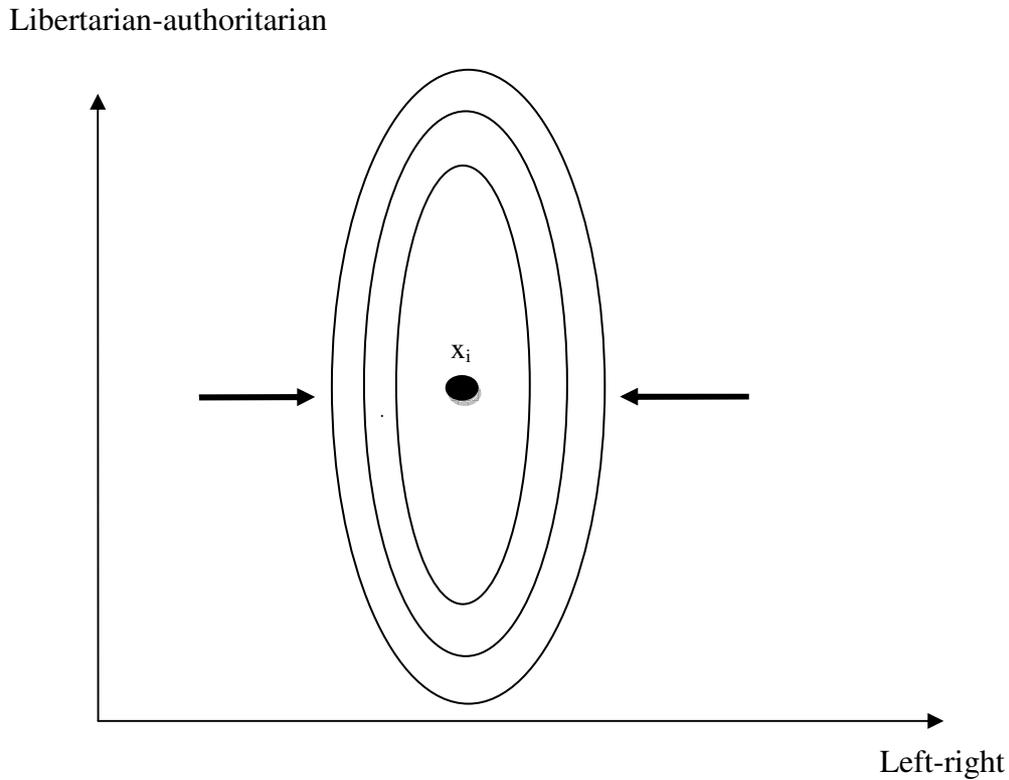
## References

- Beloff, M. (2007). Law and the Judiciary. In A. Seldon, *Blair's Britain 1997-2007* (pp. 291-317). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brennan, G. (2008). Crime and Punishment: An Expressive Voting View. *European Journal of Law and Economics*, 26: 237-252.
- Brennan, G., & Hamlin, A. (1998). Expressive Voting and Electoral Equilibrium. *Public Choice*, 95: 149-175.
- Blair, A. (2010). *A Journey*. London: Random House.
- Calcagno, P. T., & Westley, C. (2008). An Institutional Analysis of Voter Turnout: The Role of Primary Type and the Expressive and Instrumental Voting Hypothesis. *Constitutional Political Economy*, 19: 94-110.
- Chan, T. W., & Goldthorpe, J. H. (2007). Class and Status: The Conceptual Distinction and its Empirical Relevance. *American Sociological Review*, 512-532.
- Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Drinkwater, S., & Jennings, C. (2007). Who are the Expressive Voters? *Public Choice*, 132: 179-189.
- Evans, G. Heath, A. & Lalljee, M. (1996). Measuring left-right and libertarian-authoritarian values in the British electorate. *British Journal of Sociology*, 47, 93-112.
- Exley, S. *et al.* (2002). *British Social Attitudes 2000, Technical Report*. London: National Centre for Social Research.
- Ford, R., & Goodwin, M. J. (2010). Angry White Men: Individual and Contextual Predictors of Support for the British National Party. *Political Studies*, 58: 1-25.
- Grayling, A. C. (2009). *Liberty in the Age of Terror*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Green, J. (2007). When Voters and Parties Agree: Valence Issues and Party Competition. *Political Studies*, 55: 629-655.
- Green, J., & Hobolt, S. B. (2008). Owing the Issue Agenda: Party Strategies and Vote Choices in British Elections. *Electoral Studies*, 27: 460-476.
- Greene, K. V., & Nelson, P. J. (2002). If extremists vote how do they express themselves? An empirical test of an expressive theory of voting. *Public Choice*, 113: 425-436.
- Hamlin, A., & Jennings, C. (2011). Expressive Political Behaviour: Foundations, Scope and Implications. *British Journal of Political Science*, 41: 645-670.
- Heath, A., Evans, G. & Martin, J. (1994). The measurement of core beliefs and values: The development of balanced socialist/laissez faire and libertarian/authoritarian scales. *British Journal of Political Science*, 24, 115-158.
- Johns, R. (2010). Measuring Issue Salience in British Elections: Competing Interpretations of "Most Important Issue". *Political Research Quarterly*, 63: 143-158.
- Millie, A. (2007). Looking for anti-social behaviour. *Policy and Politics*, 35: 611-627.
- Newburn, T., & Reiner, R. (2007). Crime and penal policy. In A. Seldon, *Blair's Britain 1997-2007* (pp. 318-340). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pantazis, C., & Pemberton, S. (2009). Policy transfer and the UK's 'war on terror': a political economy approach. *Policy and Politics*, 37: 363-387.
- Sanders, D., & Brynjin, M. (1999). The Dynamics of Party Preference Change in Britain, 1991-1996. *Political Studies*, 47: 219-239.

- Saward, M. (2006). The State and Civil Liberties in the post 9/11 World. In P. Dunleavy, R. Heffernan, P. Cowley, & C. Hay, *Developments in British Politics* 8 (pp. 212-230). Basingstoke: Plagrave MacMillan.
- Stokes, D. (1963). Spatial Models of Party Competition. *American Political Science Review*, 57: 368-377.
- Whiteley, P., Stewart, M. C., Sanders, D., & Clarke, H. C. (2005). The Issue Agenda and Voting in 2005. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 58: 802-817.

**Figure 1**  
**Preferences given that Left-Right is the Dominant Policy Dimension**



**Table 1**  
**Percentage Distribution of Attitudes by Political Category**

	<b>1986-91</b>	<b>1993-7</b>	<b>1998-2001</b>	<b>2002-5</b>	<b>2006-9</b>	<b>1986-2009</b>
Left-liberal	6.06	6.30	4.34	3.86	3.02	4.57
Left-moderate	7.77	7.63	4.72	4.47	3.97	5.53
Left-authoritarian	9.12	10.10	9.10	8.03	6.99	8.55
Centre-liberal	16.22	16.80	18.07	17.07	16.87	17.02
Centre-moderate	25.62	28.64	27.63	28.70	29.54	28.22
Centre-authoritarian	12.15	14.09	16.25	15.50	16.44	15.07
Right-liberal	5.80	4.07	6.12	7.36	7.37	6.24
Right-moderate	9.71	7.57	8.69	9.79	10.56	9.32
Right-authoritarian	7.56	4.80	5.09	5.21	5.24	5.48
Number of observations	8817	11374	10594	12475	14034	57294

**Table 2****Percentage of Labour Party Identifiers in Each Political Category**

	<b>1986-91</b>	<b>1993-97</b>	<b>1998-2001</b>	<b>2002-5</b>	<b>2006-9</b>	<b>1986-2009</b>
Left-liberal	70.63	71.20	61.74	56.06	47.85	62.98
Left-moderate	58.90	63.20	60.12	48.49	42.20	55.58
Left-authoritarian	58.41	58.32	55.21	49.64	41.40	52.59
Centre-liberal	46.10	51.61	52.05	46.11	38.30	46.57
Centre-moderate	34.92	43.39	45.77	41.70	34.55	40.04
Centre-authoritarian	26.78	35.49	42.28	37.75	30.99	35.11
Right-liberal	14.70	23.95	33.60	32.49	27.90	27.72
Right-moderate	5.86	13.60	27.13	24.61	20.54	19.11
Right-authoritarian	2.96	9.07	20.27	19.39	16.60	13.58

**Table 3****Percentage of Conservative Party Identifiers in Each Political Category**

	<b>1986-91</b>	<b>1993-7</b>	<b>1998-2001</b>	<b>2002-5</b>	<b>2006-9</b>	<b>1986-2009</b>
Left-liberal	5.18	4.87	5.37	4.11	6.58	5.15
Left-moderate	15.07	9.32	10.22	13.77	16.57	12.74
Left-authoritarian	16.82	15.37	16.00	17.21	21.29	17.28
Centre-liberal	21.03	16.31	15.29	13.03	17.38	16.33
Centre-moderate	35.67	28.09	24.27	25.04	28.93	27.99
Centre-authoritarian	50.59	39.64	31.80	32.73	33.36	36.21
Right-liberal	62.53	51.16	38.31	34.68	39.32	42.79
Right-moderate	79.73	71.08	53.46	51.22	56.83	60.98
Right-authoritarian	89.55	76.56	65.06	62.34	61.80	70.97

**Table 4****Percentage of Labour Party Identifiers by Type in Each Political Category**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Supporter</b>					<b>Sympathiser</b>					<b>Closest</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Left-liberal	51.99	48.60	38.16	35.01	29.29	12.33	15.17	17.11	13.63	10.95	5.12	6.04	5.26	5.66	4.76
Left-moderate	35.70	36.24	34.41	25.29	21.23	11.41	14.75	16.10	12.52	11.80	10.07	9.64	8.65	8.35	6.72
Left-authoritarian	35.78	33.83	30.48	28.00	20.66	13.15	13.48	15.66	12.19	10.89	7.71	9.43	7.52	7.65	8.02
Centre-liberal	24.98	27.27	27.83	22.07	17.80	13.24	14.59	14.36	14.32	11.72	6.19	7.93	7.79	7.56	5.52
Centre-moderate	17.46	21.00	21.21	17.58	13.68	10.24	11.91	13.64	13.72	10.95	5.55	8.50	8.99	8.23	7.38
Centre-authoritarian	14.33	15.87	20.75	16.97	14.88	6.55	10.48	11.96	11.61	8.08	4.74	7.81	8.03	7.44	6.02
Right-liberal	6.60	9.05	11.78	12.28	12.34	5.40	9.05	12.09	13.05	9.60	2.00	4.64	8.22	5.64	4.41
Right-moderate	2.61	5.57	9.54	9.26	6.40	2.02	4.50	7.35	8.77	7.90	1.07	3.08	9.32	5.38	5.04
Right-authoritarian	0.77	2.58	6.75	6.82	5.52	1.24	3.50	5.82	6.82	5.52	0.93	2.76	7.13	5.12	4.56