

**Are Voter Decision Rules Endogenous to Parties' Policy Strategies?  
A Model with Applications to Elite Depolarization in Post-Thatcher Britain**

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# **Are Voter Decision Rules Endogenous to Parties' Policy Strategies? A Model with Applications to Elite Depolarization in Post-Thatcher Britain**

## **Abstract**

While spatial modelers assume that citizens evaluate parties on the basis of their policy positions, empirical research on American politics suggests that citizens' party attachments often drive their policy preferences, rather than vice-versa. Building on previous findings that partisanship is less salient to British citizens than to Americans we argue that British citizens will predominantly update their partisanship to match their policy beliefs. We further argue that because policy salience declines when parties converge, citizens' policy beliefs will exert diminishing effects on their party evaluations as parties depolarize on a focal policy dimension – i.e., that voter decision rules are an endogenous function of parties' policy strategies. Furthermore, we argue that due to the strong policy signals that British party elites provide, the reciprocal policy-partisan effects we document should extend to different subconstituencies of British citizens including the more and less educated and politically-engaged. We find support for these hypotheses via individual-level analyses of British election panel survey data between 1987 and 2001.

The reciprocal relationship between citizens' policy preferences and their party evaluations has motivated extensive scholarly research, in both Europe and the United States. Numerous studies assess whether citizens evaluate parties on the basis of policy considerations, a *policy-driven* process, or whether parties instead cue their pre-existing partisans to adopt the party's policy outlook, a *party persuasion* process (see, e.g., Carrubba 2001; Evans and Andersen 2004; Carsey and Layman 2006; Goren 2005; Gabel and Scheve 2007; Dancey and Goren 2010). These issues are critical for understanding elections, party strategies, and political representation. With respect to representation (e.g., Dalton 1985; Powell 2000; Erikson et al. 2002; McDonald and Budge 2005; Golder and Stramski 2010), if party elites shape citizens' policy beliefs then public opinion may simply mirror these elites' own viewpoints, and the correspondence between mass and elite opinion tells us little about whether parties provide faithful policy representation. With respect to parties' policy strategies, the spatial model of elections (e.g., Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1984; Kedar 2009; Meguid 2008) posits that citizens choose parties based on their policy positions rather than vice-versa, and proceeds to analyze how strategic political elites should position their policies to attract electoral support. However, if the real-world causal relationship actually runs from voters' party evaluations to their policy positions, then the spatial approach is problematic for illuminating parties' policy strategies.

We advance three arguments about the reciprocal relationships between British citizens' policy preferences and their party attachments. First, building on previous findings that partisanship is less salient to European and specifically British citizens than it is to Americans (e.g., Shiveley 1979; Westholm and Niemi 1992), we argue that the dominant causal relationship for British citizens will be from their policy beliefs to their party evaluations, rather than vice-versa (the *policy primacy hypothesis*). We further argue, however, that policy considerations are not always salient to voters. When party elites adopt less polarized positions on a focal policy dimension, the dimension becomes less salient and thereby exerts less influence on citizens' party attachments. Therefore citizens' decision rules are an *endogenous* function of parties' policy positions (the *elite depolarization hypothe-*

sis). Finally, we advance the *subconstituencies hypothesis*, which argues that because the unified party parliamentary delegations in Britain provide clear policy cues that virtually all citizens can understand, the causal processes delineated in the policy primacy and the elite depolarization hypotheses will extend roughly equally across different electoral subconstituencies, including the more and less educated, affluent, and politically-engaged.

We evaluate the policy primacy, elite depolarization, and subconstituencies hypotheses via individual-level analyses of British election survey panel data between 1987-2001 – a time period when Labour and Conservative party elites depolarized significantly on the left-right dimension<sup>1</sup> – and find support for each hypothesis. Specifically, we conclude that during the initial part of the 1987-2001 period, when the parties were polarized on policy issues relating to the Left-Right dimension, British citizens reacted to the parties’ positions by updating their party evaluations to match their left-right preferences, but not vice-versa – a pattern that supports the policy salience hypothesis. However, during the latter part of this period, when British voters perceived ideological depolarization between Conservative and Labour party elites, citizens were significantly less likely to update their party attachments to match their left-right preferences, a pattern that supports the elite depolarization hypothesis. We find no evidence that citizens’ party attachments exerted substantively significant effects on their policy preferences, at any point between 1987 and 2001. Finally, we find

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<sup>1</sup> We restrict our analysis to the 1987-2001 time period because the 2005 British Election Study (BES) survey omits the policy questions which are the basis of our analysis, while the pre-1987 BES policy questions have different end-points and (in some cases) different question wordings. And, we focus exclusively on the Left-Right dimension because, as discussed below, the four policy scale questions that were included in the same format across all three of the British Election Study panels that we analyze all pertain to Left-Right economic issues.

that these patterns extend to the subconstituencies of the more and less educated, affluent, and politically-knowledgeable and engaged, which supports the subconstituencies hypothesis.

We believe our findings are important for four reasons. First, our U.K.-based findings in support of the policy primacy hypothesis stand in sharp contrast to the findings reported by American politics scholars. The U.S.-based literature on the reciprocal linkages between partisanship and policy attitudes conclude that the predominant pattern is for citizens to update their policy preferences to match their party ID, not vice-versa (Carsey and Layman 2006; Goren 2005; Layman and Carsey 2002; Dancey and Goren 2010). By contrast, we conclude that during periods of elite polarization, the causal influence of British citizens' policy viewpoints on their partisanship is stronger – and the effect of British citizens' partisanship on their policy beliefs is weaker – than it is in the U.S.

Second, our findings have an important – and positive – implication for political representation: namely, that when British party elites take polarized positions on a salient policy or ideological dimension, voters will choose parties based on their policy viewpoints rather than vice versa. This pattern is reassuring since it is arguably most critical that citizens apply policy-based voting criteria to salient policy dimensions that sharply divide the parties (e.g. Powell, 2000; McDonald and Budge 2005; Golder and Stramski 2010). By contrast, our findings suggest that citizens' policy views exert far weaker effects on their party evaluations when the policy dimension is less salient, which is likely to occur when the parties are not polarized on the dimension. Yet in these latter scenarios, policy-based voting by citizens is arguably less critical for policy representation.

Third, and related, our findings suggest that British party elites have electoral incentives to provide more equal representation of different subconstituencies than do American politicians. American politics scholars conclude that elected officials respond disproportionately to the policy viewpoints of affluent and educated citizens (see, e.g., Bartels 2008; Gilens 2005; Griffin and Newman 2005), a pattern of *unequal representation* that plausibly stems in part from American politicians' perceptions that the members of these privileged subgroups respond disproportionately to el-

ites' policy behavior. By contrast, our finding that British subconstituencies of more and less educated, affluent, and politically-knowledgeable citizens display similar tendencies to update their party evaluations in response to their policy beliefs may motivate British party elites to provide *equal representation* of these different subgroups' collective policy preferences.

Fourth, our analyses document the shift away from the policy-based electoral politics of the Thatcher era to the current period of British politics, in which voters' left-right policy beliefs exert weaker effects on their party attachments. Clarke et al. (2004, 2009) document that the British general elections of 2001 and 2005 turned primarily on citizens' performance-based "valence" considerations relating to party elites' abilities to manage the economy, to address security issues such as crime and terrorism, and to efficiently deliver public services. Our analyses – which demonstrate that British citizens' policy beliefs drove their party attachments during the Thatcher era, but that British citizens post-Thatcher are less likely to update their partisanship in response to left-right policy considerations – help trace the evolution towards the current era of British politics that Clark et al. document, in which performance-based issues assume a more prominent role.

### **The Reciprocal Relationships between British Citizens' Policy Preferences and their Party Support: Hypotheses**

In the United States, the debate over the reciprocal influences of citizens' partisanship and policy beliefs has intensified in recent years. The conventional wisdom of the 1970s and 1980s – that mass partisanship was weakening and was largely driven by other political evaluations, including policy-based considerations (Jackson 1975; Page and Jones 1979; Markus and Converse 1979; Fiorina 1981; Wattenberg 1984) – has been challenged by research that documents strengthening partisan ties that exert increasing effects on vote choice, and which are largely exogenous to short-term political evaluations (e.g., Bartels 2000; Green et al. 2002; Hetherington 2001). Over the past decade scholars have extended this debate by analyzing the reciprocal partisan-policy influences across dif-

ferent issue domains including political values (Goren 2005), and racial, social welfare, and cultural issues (Layman and Carsey 2002; Carsey and Layman 2006; Highton and Kam 2011; Dancey and Goren 2010). Although these studies reach conflicting conclusions about whether (and to what extent) citizens' attitudes influence their partisanship, they uniformly conclude that partisanship influences citizens' policy attitudes and political values. This latter finding suggests that partisanship remains central to American citizens' identities, and that partisan loyalty, while perhaps not the "unmoved mover" posited by the authors of *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960), remains sufficiently salient that citizens experience pressure to bring their policy beliefs in line with their party affiliations.

Studies on European political behavior suggest several reasons why British citizens' partisanship may be less central to their self-images than are policy beliefs and political values. First, scholars question the meaning of party identification in Western Europe, and its correspondence with the concept in the U.S. Whereas party identification displays notable stability in the U.S., it corresponds much more closely with vote choice in Britain and in Europe (see Clements and Bartle 2009) – demonstrating greater volatility – rather than anchoring party support (see Butler and Stokes 1969). This suggests that the assumption that party identification represents a salient identity is problematic in a British context. European scholars also emphasize the political salience of other voter attributes such as social class and religion, which shape voters' social identities – and their policy attitudes – to a greater extent than party identification (Shiveley 1979; Westholm and Niemi 1992; Thomassen 2005). Indeed, some scholars argue that the concept of party identification as a social identity simply does not apply to British citizens (Clarke et al. 2004, 2009), or to European electorates more generally (e.g., Dalton 2008, chapter 9). Additionally, the American and European electorates display contrasting over-time trends in mass partisanship. Whereas the strength of party identification has increased in the United States over the past two decades (e.g., Bartels 2002; Hetherington 2001, 2009), a reverse process of *partisan dealignment* has occurred across much of Europe (see Berglund

et al. 2005), a pattern most clearly documented in Britain (Whiteley and Seyd 2002; Denver 2003; Clarke et al, 2009; Clarke and McCutcheon 2009). As British voters have become less attached to political parties since the 1970s, we expect partisanship to exert weaker effects on citizens' policy beliefs.

The considerations outlined above imply that, *contra* Americanists' findings that citizens take policy cues from party elites, the dominant causal relationship in Britain should run from citizens' policy preferences to their party attachments:

H1 (The Policy Primacy Hypothesis): For British citizens, the dominant causal relationship is from their policy preferences to their party attachments, rather than vice versa.

*Policy-based influences on partisanship: The importance of party positioning*

In their empirical analyses of the reciprocal relationships between Americans' policy beliefs and their partisanship, Carsey and Layman (2006) conclude that citizens update their partisanship in response to policy-based considerations if – and only if – they perceive policy differences between the parties and consider the issue to be salient. In all other scenarios, i.e., those where citizens fail to perceive party policy differences and/or where citizens do not find the issue to be salient, the authors find no effects of citizens' policy considerations on their party attachments. In important and related research, Highton and Kam (2011) demonstrate that debates relating to economic, racial, and cultural policies were more salient to American citizens during the 1980s and the 1990s – a period when Democratic and Republican party elites polarized over these issues – than was the case during the 1970s, when the parties offered less polarized positions.

The Carsey-Layman and Kam-Highton findings suggest that voters' tendencies to update their partisanship to match their policy preferences are endogenous to party elites' policy positioning: specifically, the less polarized the parties' positions on the focal policy or ideological dimension, the



less we should expect citizens' positions on this dimension to drive their partisanship. This is true for two reasons. First, when the policy distance that separates rival parties declines then citizens are less likely to perceive policy differences between the parties, which Carsey and Layman (2006) identify as a necessary condition for citizens' policy beliefs to move their partisanship. Second, party elites have fewer incentives to campaign on issues that do not distinguish the party from its opponent(s), so that such dimensions may be less relevant even to those voters who perceive party differences. This argument meshes with the Highton-Kam finding that policy debates were more salient to Americans during the 1980s and 1990s – a time of increasing elite polarization – than during the 1970s when elites were less polarized. These considerations motivate our second hypothesis:

H2 (The Elite Depolarization Hypothesis). As parties depolarize on a focal policy or ideological dimension, voters' preferences on this dimension will exert less influence on their partisanship.

*Do partisan- and policy-based updating processes differ across British subconstituencies?*

The literature on American political behavior highlights theoretical and empirical reasons to expect educated and politically-aware citizens to experience disproportionate pressure to align their party evaluations and their policy beliefs. Theoretically, insofar as high levels of education and political engagement motivate citizens to monitor elite political discourse (and help them make sense of this discourse), we might expect the educated and politically-engaged to display enhanced awareness of parties' policy positions, and that this will motivate them to reciprocally update their partisanship and their policy beliefs (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992). Empirically, as discussed above, Carsey and Layman (2006) find that only those citizens who perceived policy differences between the Democratic and Republican parties engaged in policy-based updating of their party attachments, while Baldassari and Gelman (2009) and Claassen and Highton (2008) find that the subgroups of educated and politically-engaged citizens disproportionately updated their policy beliefs and/or their partisanship

in response to American elites' growing polarization.<sup>2</sup> This raises the question: should we expect to observe similar subconstituency-based differences in Britain between more and less educated and politically-engaged citizens?

We believe the answer to the above question is *no*. This is because British parties' parliamentary delegations – in common with the party delegations in most Western European parliamentary democracies – are highly unified, and thereby convey clear policy cues to citizens, compared to the weaker policy cues delivered by the more ideologically-diverse, decentralized, American parties.<sup>3</sup> Thus the challenges of perceiving and reacting to British party elites' policy cues plausibly place lesser cognitive demands on citizens than do the more ambiguous and diffuse policy messages that American party elites convey to the public. British elites' policy promises (and behavior in parliament) should thereby register even with citizens who possess limited information about politics and who come from modest educational backgrounds. Indeed previous research documents that citizens in Western European democracies hold quite accurate perceptions of parties' policy positions (see, e.g., Pierce 1988 pages 70-71; Stevenson and Vonnahme 2009), and, furthermore, that these percep-

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<sup>2</sup> By contrast Dancey and Goren (2010, page 696) do not identify significant differences in the reciprocal partisan- and policy-based updating processes of citizens with different degrees of political awareness and media exposure, although the authors emphasize that the small sample sizes in their analyses leave this issue unsettled.

<sup>3</sup> The high levels of cohesion of parliamentary delegations in western European parliamentary democracies, compared to the United States, occur in part because such unity is crucial for maintaining a working majority for the party(ies) in government, and also because the selection of parliamentary candidates is a more centralized process in western Europe than in the U.S, which enhances European party leaders' abilities to punish MPs that do not vote in favor of the party's policy positions (see, e.g., Sartori 1968; Tavits 2009).

tions are similar among the subgroups of the more and less educated, affluent, and politically-engaged (Adams, Green, and Milazzo 2009). These considerations motivate our third hypothesis:

H3 (The Subconstituencies Hypothesis). British citizens' tendencies to reciprocally update their policy beliefs and their party evaluations are similar across different subgroups in the electorate.

### **Empirical Analyses**

Great Britain is an ideal testing ground for our hypotheses because the two dominant political parties, Labour and the Conservatives, were polarized on economic and social welfare policy during the 1980s (the Margaret Thatcher era) which allows to us to evaluate the policy primacy hypothesis, but the parties depolarized on these issues post-1990 (see, e.g., Budge 1999; Norris 1999; Webb and Farrell 1999) so that we can evaluate the elite depolarization hypothesis.<sup>4</sup> (In the next section we evaluate the subconstituencies hypothesis.) The Conservatives' selection of Margaret Thatcher as party leader in 1975 contributed to ending the 'Postwar Settlement,' a long period of relative policy consensus between Labour and Conservative party elites. Thatcher, who became Prime Minister following the Conservative victory in the May 1979 General Election, shifted her party rightward over time by advocating reduced state intervention in the economy, an expanded role for the free market, a diminished role for trade unions, and the virtues of personal responsibility, hard work, and entrepre-

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<sup>4</sup> Although the Liberal Democrats have at times played an important role in British postwar politics, we restrict our analysis to the Labour and Conservative parties. Between 1987 and 2001 (the period of our study), the Conservatives (from 1987-97) and then Labour (from 1997-2001) governed in single-party governments and thereby exercised a virtually monopoly on policy-making influence. Furthermore, the Liberal Democrats were more likely to conduct locally-based, candidate-centered campaigns similar to those in U.S. Congressional elections (Katz and King 1999), and identification with this party is far lower than towards the two main parties (Russell and Fieldhouse 2004).

neurship. This right-wing policy emphasis sharply differentiated the Conservatives from the left-leaning Labour Party which strenuously opposed Thatcher's policy initiatives (Norton 2001).

The party policy depolarization that has characterized British politics in the period following Thatcher's resignation as Prime Minister (and Conservative Party leader) in 1990 stems primarily from three factors. First, Thatcher was succeeded by a series of leaders (notably John Major from 1990-1997 and William Hague from 1997-2001) who adopted more moderate policy approaches, particularly on public services. Second, the Conservatives' well-publicized internal divisions during the 1990s hindered their ability to convey a clear policy message to the public, thereby blurring the party's image as a strongly right-wing party (see Denver 1998). Third, Tony Blair, who was the Labour Party leader from 1994-2007 and Prime Minister from 1997-2007, dramatically moderated Labour's policy platform by advocating lower taxes and reduced welfare dependency, and by emphasizing law and order, fiscal prudence, and personal responsibility.<sup>5</sup>

Trends in British Election Study (BES) respondents' party placements on the policy scales included in the BES confirm that the British electorate perceived the Labour-Conservative policy polarization during the Thatcher era, along with the striking depolarization post-Thatcher. Table 1 reports the mean positions that BES respondents ascribed to the Labour and Conservative parties along the four policy scales included in each BES between 1987 and 2001, that relate to preferences for providing social services versus cutting taxes; support for income redistribution; preferences for fighting inflation versus lowering unemployment; and, support for nationalization of industry. (We

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<sup>5</sup> A range of analyses support this interpretation of the policy-based depolarization of the two major British parties post-Thatcher, including estimates derived from experts' party placements (Laver 1998; Benoit and Laver 2006), Labour and Conservative party elites' Left-Right self-placements (Green forthcoming), and manifesto content analysis of party left-right positions (Bara and Budge 2001).

restrict our analysis to the 1987-2001 time period because the 2005 and 2010 BES studies did not include these policy scale questions, while the pre-1987 BES policy questions had different endpoints and (in some cases) dramatically different question wordings.) These mean party placements are along a series of 1-11 scales for which higher numbers denote a more right-wing position. The computations reported in the rows labeled “Lab-Con gap” represent the difference between respondents’ mean placement of the Conservative Party and their mean placement of Labour along the focal policy dimension. (The texts of the policy scale questions are presented in the appendix.) The computations show that in 1987, during the Thatcher era, BES respondents placed Labour roughly five units to the left of the Conservatives (on average), an immense distance along the 1-11 policy scales (see the bottom row of Table 1). However voters’ perceptions of Labour-Conservative policy differences declined dramatically during the post-Thatcher period, as respondents’ placements of Labour shifted sharply towards the center as did their placements of the Conservatives: between 1987-2001 the magnitude of the perceived Labour-Conservative policy gap across the four policy scales declined from 4.97 policy units in 1987, to 4.33 units in 1992, to 3.61 units in 1997, and to 2.27 units in 2001, less than half the magnitude of the perceived policy gap in 1987, although respondents continued to perceive meaningful party policy differences in 2001.<sup>6</sup> In the analyses presented below, we use time as a proxy for elite policy convergence.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

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<sup>6</sup> We estimate statistically significant differences in respondents’ mean placements of the Labour and Conservatives parties in each cross-section ( $p < .01$ ), along with a statistically-significant decline in the magnitude of this perceived Labour-Conservative policy gap across each successive observation (i.e., 1987-1992, 1992-1997, 1997-2001).

The American literature on mass partisan polarization emphasizes the changing relationship between citizens' party loyalties and their policy beliefs. According to this *partisan sorting* perspective, the widening policy gap between Democratic and Republican party elites has prompted a sorting of Democratic and Republican partisans' policy preferences in the electorate, i.e., the difference between the mean policy preferences of rank-and-file Democratic partisans versus those of rank-and-file Republicans has increased over time (see, e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989; Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Levendusky 2009; Hetherington 2009). Table 2, which reports BES respondents' mean self-placements on the policy scales, displays patterns of mass-level partisan sorting in Britain. For each policy scale in each election year, the table reports the mean self-placement computed for all respondents, for all Conservative partisans, and for all Labour partisans.<sup>7</sup> We also report the policy distance between the mean self-placements of Conservative and Labour identifiers (the 'Labour-Conservative partisan gap' variable), which provides an index of the degree of partisan sorting on the policy scales. The computations show that in 1987 Conservative partisans placed themselves roughly 2.8 units to the right of Labour partisans (on average) along the 1-11 policy scales (see the bottom row of Table 2), but that the gap between the mean self-placements of the rival parties' supporters narrowed over time, to 2.4 units in 1992, to 1.8 units in 1997, and to 1.7 units in 2001.<sup>8</sup> To the extent that this mass-level partisan sorting was a response to

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<sup>7</sup> Party identification categories were computed using the question, 'Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as... [Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat...] or what?'. We note that we recomputed the means reported in Table 2 while controlling for the strength of party identification and the patterns of partisan-based depolarization were identical to those we discuss below.

<sup>8</sup> These differences between the mean self-placements of Conservative and Labour partisans are statistically significant in each cross-section ( $p < .01$ ), and the decline in the magnitude of the computed Labour-Conservative partisan gap between 1987 and 2001 is statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ).

elite depolarization, this raises the question of whether citizens switched their party support to match their policy beliefs or, alternatively, their policy beliefs to match their preferred party's policy positions.

Finally, we highlight an interesting contrast between the policy depolarization patterns of British party elites and their supporters. The computations in Table 1 show that BES respondents perceived that Labour and Conservative party elites converged continuously on policy over the entire 1987-2001 period, and that this perceived elite convergence actually accelerated between 1997 and 2001, when the mean perceived Labour-Conservative policy gap declined from 3.61 units in 1997 to 2.27 units in 2001, along the 1-11 policy scales. By contrast, the figures reported in Table 2 show that while the British parties-in-the-electorate depolarized significantly between 1987 and 1997 – with the Labour-Conservative partisan gap declining from 2.8 policy units to 1.8 units across this period – this partisan sorting process slowed considerably between 1997 and 2001, with the gap between the rival supporters' positions measured at 1.8 units in 1997 and 1.7 units in 2001. We will argue below that our elite depolarization hypothesis, which posits that the electoral salience of a focal policy or ideological dimension declines when party elites depolarize on this dimension, explains why mass-level depolarization in Britain slowed dramatically after 1997, even as the mass public perceived increased elite-level policy convergence between 1997 and 2001.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

*Methodology: Structural equation models applied to British panel data*

The dramatic changes in British voters' perceptions of elite policy differences between 1987 and 2001 allow us to evaluate the policy primacy and the elite depolarization hypotheses. The policy primacy hypothesis posits that for British citizens the dominant causal relationship is from their left-right policy orientations to their party attachments, not vice versa. The elite depolarization hypothesis implies that as British party elites depolarized during the middle and later parts of the 1987-2001

period, voters' economic and social welfare policy positions exerted diminishing influences on their partisanship. To evaluate these hypotheses we analyze data from BES panel studies from 1987-1992, 1992-1997, and 1997-2001.<sup>9</sup> Consistent with the approaches of Goren (2005), Carsey and Layman (2006), Highton and Kam (2011), and Dancey and Goren (2010), we evaluate our hypotheses using cross-lagged structural equation models, where we estimate latent constructs for citizens' party attachments and their left-right policy preferences using survey responses across multiple waves of each panel study, and we then estimate the lagged effects of latent constructs upon each other.<sup>10</sup>

When measuring constructs such as partisanship and issue preferences via survey data, survey characteristics such as question wording or the features of the response categories may introduce measurement error, which can lead the researcher to underestimate the stability of individuals' preferences (Achen 1975; Green and Palmquist 1990; Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008). Structural equation modeling attenuates the bias associated with measurement error, which facilitates estimates of the reciprocal relationships between citizens' left-right preferences and their partisanship.

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<sup>9</sup> As discussed above (see footnote 1), we cannot measure British citizens' policy beliefs post-2001 because the 2005 BES did not include policy scale questions, and we cannot compare citizens' policy beliefs pre-1987 with their beliefs during the 1987-2001 period because of changes in the BES policy scale question wordings and endpoints beginning in 1987.

<sup>10</sup> The structural equation modeling approach uses the observed variables to estimate the latent constructs, and then estimates the correspondence between the observed variables and their respective latent constructs by determining the amount of variance in the observed variable that is explained by the latent construct. We estimate "stacked" models – i.e. we pool the data from the three panel surveys – which allows us to evaluate whether the effects of the latent constructs vary over time.



Measuring citizens' partisan attachments and left-right preferences. American politics scholars typically conceptualize partisanship using a unidimensional scale ranging from strong Republican to strong Democrat, with independents located in the middle. Britain, however, features a major third party, the Liberal Democrats, along with several smaller parties that consistently gain parliamentary representation.<sup>11</sup> Use of a unidimensional partisan scale (anchored by strong attachment to Labour at one end and by strong attachment to the Conservatives at the other) would force us to make questionable coding decisions about how to classify partisans of the Liberal Democrats (and of other, smaller, parties) along a scale where we must also place independents (see Clarke et al. 1979; van der Eijk and Niemöller, 1983). We therefore create two latent partisan constructs, *Labour Attachment* and *Conservative Attachment*. By emphasizing the respondent's *degree* of support for each party, we are able to analyze how the relationship between respondents' policy preferences and their attachment to each party changes as the parties depolarize – i.e. we are not forced to assume that the relationship between a respondent's policy preferences and their party attachment is the same for both parties. Both constructs are modeled using two indicators, where each indicator has five categories: the first indicator is a question that elicits respondents' degrees of support for (or opposition to) the focal party, and the second is a combination of two BES questions regarding party identification and the

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<sup>11</sup> These smaller parties include the Democratic Unionist Party, the Ulster Unionist Party, the Scottish National Party (BNP), Plaid Cymru, the Green Party, the UK Independence Party, and the British National Party (although the BNP and the UK Independence Party have not won seats in parliament). The combined vote shares of the Liberal Democrats and these smaller British parties exceeded 23% in each general election held between 1983 and 2010.

strength of partisan identification.<sup>12</sup> (The texts of the questions that were used to create the *Labour Attachment* and *Conservative Attachment* constructs are given in the appendix).

We estimate the latent construct for respondents' left-right orientations using the four policy scales introduced earlier, which relate to income redistribution, support for social services, nationalization of industry, and, tradeoffs between unemployment and inflation. Each issue pertains to long-standing debates in British politics relating to the Left-Right economic dimension.<sup>13</sup> All issue scales are rescaled to fall between 0 and 1, with higher numbers denoting a more right-wing position.

Modeling the reciprocal relationship between Left-Right preferences and party attachments. The models estimating the reciprocal effects of an individual  $i$ 's party attachments and left-right orientations are given below:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Left-Right preference}_i(t) = & \alpha_1 + \lambda_1[\text{Left-Right preference}_i(t-1)] + \beta_1[\text{Labour Attachment}_i(t-1)] \\ & + \beta_2[\text{Conservative Attachment}_i(t-1)] + \varepsilon_{1i}(t) \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Conservative Attachment}_i(t) = & \alpha_2 + \lambda_2[\text{Conservative Attachment}_i(t-1)] \\ & + \beta_3[\text{Left-Right preference}_i(t-1)] + \varepsilon_{2i}(t) \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

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<sup>12</sup> Using multiple indicators for each latent construct allows us to correct for measurement error (see, e.g., Ansolabehere et al. 2008; Layman et al. 2010). In addition, we further correct for measurement error by allowing the measurement errors associated with each indicator to be correlated over time. This assumption is less restrictive than that used in the traditional Wiley-Wiley model which specifies that the error variances are uncorrelated over time (Wiley and Wiley 1970).

<sup>13</sup> While principle factors factor analyses indicate that, in all panels, the four issue scales load on to a single dominant dimension, which we refer to as the left-right dimension, we also estimated separate models for each issue scale to address the possibility that different scales tap different dimensions (Goren 2005), and our substantive conclusions were unchanged.

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Labour Attachment}_i(t) &= \alpha_3 + \lambda_3[\text{Labour Attachment}_i(t-1)] \\
&+ \beta_4[\text{Left-Right preference}_i(t-1)] + \varepsilon_{3i}(t)
\end{aligned}
\tag{3}$$

The parameters denoted by  $\lambda$  represent the effects of the latent construct during the first time period ( $t-1$ ) on the same construct in the second time period  $t$ . For example, in equation 1,  $\lambda_1$  denotes the effect of the respondent  $i$ 's left-right preferences at time ( $t-1$ ) on her left-right orientations at time  $t$ , while in equation 2 the parameter  $\lambda_2$  denotes the effect of the respondent's attachment to the Conservative Party at time ( $t-1$ ) on Conservative attachment at time  $t$ , and so on. These  $\lambda$  parameters capture the *stability* of the constructs over time, with higher values denoting greater stability. The cross-lagged effects, represented by the  $\beta$  parameters, denote the effect of one latent construct on another latent construct. Thus, in equation 1,  $\beta_1$  represents the impact of the respondent  $i$ 's Labour attachment in the first period ( $t-1$ ) on her left-right preferences in the second period  $t$ , while in equation 2,  $\beta_3$  denotes the effect of  $i$ 's Left-Right preferences in period ( $t-1$ ) on her attachment to the Conservatives in period  $t$ .

## Results

Our primary models are two-wave analyses of the first and last waves of each panel.<sup>14</sup> Table 3 reports the unstandardized estimates of the stability coefficients (the coefficients  $\lambda_1$ ,  $\lambda_2$ , and  $\lambda_3$  in equations 1-3) for each of the latent constructs in each panel, as well as the unstandardized estimates

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<sup>14</sup> While each BES panel study contained at least three waves, the 'middle' waves in each study omitted some (and in one case, all) of the policy scale questions. However in supplementary analyses we estimated parameters for three-wave models based on a reduced set of survey questions, and these estimates supported similar substantive conclusions to the two-wave estimates we report below.

of the cross-lagged effects of party attachments and left-right preferences (the coefficients  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$ ,  $\beta_3$ , and  $\beta_4$  in equations 1-3).<sup>15</sup>

The estimates reported in Table 3 show that for the initial panel (1987-1992) the stability coefficient estimate on left-right orientations (1.00) greatly exceeds the stability estimate on attachment to Labour (0.74) and attachment to the Conservatives (0.71), but that for the second and third panels the stability coefficient estimates on left-right preferences decline sharply – to 0.73 for the 1992-97 panel and to 0.61 for the 1997-2001 panel – while the stability estimates on party attachments increase, from the 0.70-0.75 range for the 1987-1992 panel to around 0.90 for the 1997-2001 panel. These estimates imply that British citizens' left-right policy preferences were stable during 1987-1992, when the parties were polarized on left-right policy issues, but that citizens' left-right preferences destabilized during the post-Thatcher period as the parties converged. The estimates also indi-

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<sup>15</sup> We estimated two models to determine whether the differences between the coefficient estimates on the latent constructs were statistically significant across the three panels. In the first we allowed the structural parameters to vary across the panels, while in the second we constrained these parameters to be equal across each of the panels (i.e., in the latter model the coefficients  $\lambda_1$ ,  $\lambda_2$ ,  $\lambda_3$ ,  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$ ,  $\beta_3$ ,  $\beta_4$  in equations 1-3 were each specified as being equal across the three panels). If the difference between the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistics for the unconstrained and constrained estimations is statistically significant (with degrees of freedom equal to the number of constraints imposed), then we may conclude that there are meaningful differences in the structural parameters across time. In the case of our models, the difference between the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistics was equal to 85.5. Twenty-one constraints were imposed, and therefore the difference between the constrained and unconstrained models was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Hence we report estimates for the unconstrained model in Table 3.

cate a statistically-significant increase in the stability of citizens' party evaluations – and a significant decrease in the stability of their left-right orientations – between 1987 and 2001.<sup>16</sup>

The estimated cross-lagged effects of party attachments and left-right preferences, also presented in Table 3, pertain to our evaluations of the policy primacy and the elite depolarization hypotheses. The policy primacy hypothesis states that for British citizens the dominant causal relationship is from their policy beliefs to their party attachments, rather than vice versa – i.e., that our lagged estimates of the effects of citizens' left-right preferences on their party attachments (represented by the coefficients  $\beta_3$ - $\beta_4$  in equations 2-3) should significantly exceed the coefficient estimates on the lagged effects of party attachments on left-right preferences (represented by the coefficients  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  in equation 1). The elite depolarization hypothesis implies that as British party elites converged on policy during the post-Thatcher period, the estimated effects of citizens' left-right preferences on their party attachments should decline, i.e., these estimates should be significantly smaller for the 1997-2001 BES panel than for the 1987-1992 panel.

The parameter estimates reported in Table 3 support both hypotheses. For the 1987-1992 panel, which covers a period when Labour and Conservative party elites were polarized on the left-right dimension, citizens significantly updated their party attachments to conform to their left-right preferences, but not vice versa – a pattern that supports the policy salience hypothesis. Specifically, the coefficient estimate -0.62 ( $p < .01$ ) of the lagged effect of BES respondents' left-right preferences

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<sup>16</sup> To evaluate whether there were statistically-significant differences in the stability coefficient estimates across the panels, we analyzed the z-scores associated with these differences. The z-score associated with the difference between our estimate of the left-right stability coefficient for the 1987-1992 panel and that for the 1997-2001 panel exceeded  $\pm 1.96$  which is statistically-significant, as did the z-scores associated with the differences in the party attachment coefficient estimates between these two panels.

on their Labour attachments, and the coefficient estimate +0.49 ( $p < .01$ ) of the lagged effect of left-right preferences on Conservative attachments, imply that citizens who held right-wing policy positions in 1987 displayed significant tendencies to negatively update their Labour evaluations and to positively update their Conservative Party evaluations in 1992, compared to citizens who held more left-wing policy preferences in 1987. By contrast, we find no evidence that citizens took policy cues from party elites between 1987 and 1992, i.e., the coefficient estimates of the lagged effects of party attachments on citizens' left-right preferences across this period are near zero and statistically insignificant. These patterns support the policy primacy hypothesis, that for British citizens the dominant causal relationship is from their left-right preferences to their party evaluations, not vice versa.

A comparison of the estimated effects of citizens' left-right preferences on their party attachments across the three panels also supports the elite depolarization hypothesis, that as party elites depolarize on a focal policy or ideological dimension, voters' positions on this dimension exert less influence on their partisanship. As discussed above, we conclude that BES panel respondents' left-right orientations exerted large, substantively significant effects on their party attachments between 1987 and 1992, a period when party elites were polarized on left-right issues. However the estimated impact of left-right preferences on party attachments declines across the later time periods, as party elites converge on policy: for the 1997-2001 panel the coefficient estimates of the lagged effects of respondents' left-right preferences on their attachments to the Labour and Conservative parties are only -0.16 and +0.16, respectively. These estimates are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) but they are much smaller than the corresponding estimates for the 1987-1992 panel (-0.62 and +0.49), and the differences between the parameter estimates across these two panels are statistically significant ( $p <$

.01).<sup>17</sup> Thus we conclude that as Labour and Conservative party elites depolarized on left-right policy issues during the post-Thatcher era, citizens' left-right preferences exerted declining influences on their party attachments. This pattern supports the elite depolarization hypothesis.

Finally, we note that we do not estimate substantively significant influences of citizens' party attachments on their left-right preferences across any of the panels, a finding that continues to support the policy primacy hypothesis. For all three panels the coefficient estimates of the lagged effects of respondents' Conservative attachments on their left-right preferences are near zero and they are not statistically significant (in fact they are in the wrong direction), while the coefficient estimates of the effects of Labour attachments on left-right preferences – which fall below -.08 for all three panels – are much smaller than the reciprocal estimates of the effects of left-right preferences on Labour attachments. At no point during the 1987-2001 period do we estimate that citizens' party attachments exerted substantively-significant effects on their left-right preferences.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

### **Are there Individual Differences? Evaluating the Subconstituencies Hypothesis**

We next evaluated the subconstituencies hypothesis, that British citizens' tendencies to reciprocally update their policy beliefs and their party evaluations are similar across different subgroups in the electorate. As we discussed in the introduction this hypothesis is critical for the desiratum of equal representation because if educated, affluent, and politically-engaged citizens are disproportionately responsive to parties' policy positions, then party elites may be motivated to appeal to these subgroups on policy grounds at the expense of less educated, affluent, and politically-engaged citi-

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<sup>17</sup> We evaluated the statistical significance of the differences in these cross-lagged parameter estimates between the 1987-1992 and the 1997-2001 panels using the approach outlined in footnote 16 above.

zens. To evaluate the subconstituencies hypothesis we re-estimated our structural models on subgroups of BES panel respondents subdivided by education, income, newspaper readership, and political knowledge.<sup>18</sup> In these analyses, which we report in supplementary materials, we found no evidence that educated, affluent, newspaper-reading, or politically-knowledgeable citizens displayed different reciprocal patterns of policy- and partisan-based updating in comparison to less educated, affluent, and knowledgeable citizens (along with those who did not read newspapers): for each subgroup our parameter estimates on the cross-lagged effects of left-right preferences and party attachments continued to support the policy primacy hypothesis and the elite depolarization hypothesis, and, furthermore, the magnitudes of these parameter estimates were similar across different subgroups, a pattern that supports the subconstituencies hypothesis.

In order to further substantiate the subconstituencies hypothesis we also estimated our structural models on subgroups of BES respondents who scored significantly above and below the median on a composite political engagement index. With respect to the subconstituency-based analyses summarized above, one might object that while no single citizen characteristic – i.e., education, in-

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<sup>18</sup> For the education-based analyses we subdivided respondents according to whether they were above or below the median in the level of schooling they had completed; for the income-based analyses according to whether respondents were above or below the median in reported income; for newspaper readership according to whether respondents reported reading a daily newspaper. For political knowledge we subdivided respondents according to whether they scored above or below the median on a political knowledge quiz, which was comprised of seven true-false questions about British politics (sample question from 1992: ‘True or false: Neil Kinnock is the Labour leader’). We note that this political knowledge quiz was not included in the 1987-1992 BES panel, so that our knowledge-based analyses were confined to the 1992-1997 and 1997-2001 panels. Our income-, education- and newspaper-based analyses encompassed all three BES panels.



come, or newspaper readership – is sufficient to identify a subset of voters who display substantively different reciprocal patterns of policy- and partisan-based updating, citizens who possess combinations of these attributes might be especially likely to update their party attachments in response to their policy preferences (or vice versa). To explore this possibility we re-estimated our structural models on two groups of BES panel respondents. The first was a *high-engagement* group consisting of BES respondents who possessed all three of the following attributes: they were above the median in income; they were above the median in education; and, they read a daily newspaper.<sup>19</sup> This high-engagement subgroup comprised 25-30% of the BES respondents in each panel. The second subgroup consisted of *low-engagement* respondents who possessed at most one of the attributes listed above, a grouping that comprised 30-35% of the respondents in each panel. Table 4 displays our parameter estimates for these two subgroups. Note first that for both subgroups the estimated effects of left-right preferences on party attachments are large and statistically significant for the 1987-1992 and 1992-1997 panels, while the reciprocal estimated effects of party attachments on left-right preferences are small and (mostly) insignificant for each panel – a pattern which supports the policy primacy hypothesis – and that for both subgroups the estimated impact of left-right preferences on party attachments declines sharply across time, which supports the elite depolarization hypothesis.

With respect to comparisons between subgroups, we find no evidence that politically-engaged citizens disproportionately update their party attachments to match their left-right preferences (or vice-versa), compared to the less-engaged. First, as noted above neither subgroup displayed substantively-significant tendencies to update their left-right preferences in response to their party attachments. Second, a test of the differences between groups indicates that the differences be-

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<sup>19</sup> We were unable to incorporate political knowledge into our political engagement index because, as discussed in footnote 18 above, the political knowledge quiz was not administered in the 1987-1992 BES panel.

tween the estimates of the stability and the cross-lagged coefficient estimates across these two subgroups are not statistically significant.<sup>20</sup> Third, we note that to the extent that our coefficient estimates differ across subgroups it is in fact the less politically-engaged respondents who display (modestly) stronger tendencies to update their party attachments to match their left-right orientations! We certainly do not conclude from this that less engaged British citizens are actually the most strongly motivated by left-right policy considerations, since this difference is not statistically significant and moreover there is no theoretical rationale for this pattern. However this comparison drives home the point that our analyses provide no support whatsoever for the proposition that politically-engaged British citizens disproportionately update their party evaluations in response to their left-right preferences (or vice-versa), compared to less-engaged citizens. In toto, we believe these analyses on political engagement, in conjunction with the subconstituency-based analyses on education, income, newspaper readership, and political knowledge summarized above, support the subconstituencies hypothesis.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

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<sup>20</sup> We estimated two models to determine whether the differences between the coefficient estimates on the latent constructs of the two groups were statistically significant, one where the coefficient estimates  $\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \lambda_3, \beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$  in equations 1-3 were constrained to be equal across the two subgroups, and a second where these coefficient estimates were allowed to vary between the subgroups. The difference between the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistics for the unconstrained and constrained estimations was not statistically significant (with degrees of freedom equal to the number of constraints imposed), so that we conclude that there are no meaningful differences in the structural parameters between the high- and low-engagement groups.

## Conclusion

While spatial modelers posit that citizens evaluate political parties based on their policy positions, empirical research on American politics suggests that citizens' party support often drives their policy preferences. Building on previous findings that partisanship is less influential for European citizens than for Americans, we argue in this paper that British citizens will typically update their partisanship to match their policy preferences, rather than vice-versa (the policy primacy hypothesis). We further argue, however, that because policy salience declines when party elites converge on a given policy, British voters' left-right policy preferences will exert diminishing influence on their party attachments as parties depolarize (the elite depolarization hypothesis). We report individual-level structural equation analyses of British election panel survey data between 1987-2001, which support both hypotheses. In addition, we argue that because the unified British parties' parliamentary delegations convey policy cues that are clear even to less politically-engaged and knowledgeable citizens, British citizens' tendencies to reciprocally update their policy beliefs and their party evaluations will be similar across subconstituencies in the electorate that are subdivided based on education, income, political knowledge and political engagement. Our empirical analyses support this 'subconstituencies hypothesis'.

As we noted in the introduction, we believe that the empirical support we provide for the elite depolarization hypothesis illuminates the findings of Clarke et al. (2004, 2009), who document that the British general elections of 2001 and 2005 did not turn on debates relating to the Labour and Conservatives parties' social and economic policies, but instead revolved around voters' "valence" evaluations of the parties' abilities to efficiently deliver public services and to address security issues such as crime and terrorism. Our findings, that British citizens' policy beliefs drove their party attachments during the Thatcher era, but that voters in post-Thatcher Britain were less likely to update their partisanship in response to policy considerations, thereby traces the evolution of electoral poli-

tics away from “spatially-based” party competition towards the current era of valence politics (Green and Hobolt 2008). The value of the elite depolarization hypothesis is that it illuminates why voters’ party attachments were only weakly moved by economic and social welfare policy considerations after 1997, despite the fact that voters continued to perceive meaningful elite policy differences during this period: namely, these policy debates were no longer salient to rank-and-file voters, and so they experienced little pressure to bring their policy beliefs into line with their party attachments. This hypothesis also implies that should the political parties ever polarize on a focal policy dimension, British voters’ policy beliefs on this dimension might again drive their party attachments.

We believe our findings have several important implications for parties’ election strategies, for spatial models of elections, and for political representation. First, the policy primacy hypothesis implies that British citizens will update their party support to match their policy beliefs, not vice versa – exactly as spatial modelers posit, and in line with the British electorate’s behavior between 1987 and 1997. This policy primacy in Britain contrasts with the conclusions of American politics scholars, that American voters predominantly update their policy beliefs to match their partisanship. Second, and related, our findings have an important – and positive – implication for political representation: namely, that when British party elites take polarized positions on a policy or ideological dimension, voters will choose parties based on their policy viewpoints rather than vice versa. This pattern is reassuring since it is arguably most critical that citizens apply policy-based voting criteria to salient dimensions that sharply divide the parties – and, again, British voters’ behavior in this regard contrasts with the findings reported by students of American political behavior. Third, however, the empirical support we provide for the elite depolarization hypothesis implies that when rival British parties are not polarized on a policy domain – so that the domain is not highly salient to voters – then voters engage in little reciprocal updating of their policy beliefs and party attachments. This finding illuminates the British public’s lack of partisan sorting in response to the Labour Party’s perceived policy convergence on left-right issues towards the Conservatives after 1997. Between 1997

and 2001 the public perceived that Labour and Conservative parties-in-parliament continued to depolarize on left-right policy – indeed, we find that the British public perceived that elite depolarization actually accelerated during this period, compared to 1987-1997 (see Table 1 above) – but the policy positions of the British parties-in-the-electorate were static. Fourth, our empirical support for the subconstituencies hypothesis implies that British party elites have electoral incentives to provide equal representation of the collective policy preferences of different subconstituencies in the electorate, including the more and less educated, affluent, and politically-knowledgeable – a finding that again contrasts with the conclusions of American politics scholars, that American politicians respond disproportionately to the viewpoints of affluent and politically-engaged citizens (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2005; Griffin and Newman 2005).

In future research we plan to extend our analyses to other European electorates, and also to additional dimensions of political conflict besides left-right issues.<sup>21</sup> We also plan to explore the implications of our findings for spatial models of elections. In particular, our findings imply that party elites face a complex strategic calculation when they attempt to project the electoral consequences of shifting their policies, because they must account not simply for how such policy shifts affect the party's spatial *proximity* to the voters in the electorate, but also for how these shifts alter the *salience* that voters attach to different issue dimensions (see, e.g., Meguid 2009). Our findings suggest that accounting for these effects can create a more realistic model of real world electoral competition, and thereby enhance our understanding of parties' election strategies and of political representation.

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<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately we cannot perform analyses of other dimensions in British politics that parallel our analyses of British citizens' left-right orientations, because the four policy scale questions that we used to construct our latent measure of left-right orientations are the only policy scales that were included in the same format across all three of the British Election Study panels that we analyzed.

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**Table 1. British Election Study Respondents' Mean Placements of the Labour and Conservative Parties, 1987-2001**

		<b>1987</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2001</b>
Social Services	Labour	3.03	2.83	3.59	4.17
	Conservatives	7.16	7.06	6.94	6.21
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>4.23</b>	<b>3.35</b>	<b>2.04</b>
Nationalization	Labour	2.92	3.59	4.66	5.45
	Conservatives	9.14	8.38	8.00	7.50
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>6.22</b>	<b>4.79</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>2.05</b>
Inflation/unempl	Labour	2.33	2.98	3.14	3.73
	Conservatives	6.38	6.44	6.16	5.88
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>4.05</b>	<b>3.46</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>2.15</b>
Redistribution	Labour	2.95	3.08	3.49	4.65
	Conservatives	8.43	7.90	8.21	7.47
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>5.48</b>	<b>4.82</b>	<b>4.72</b>	<b>2.82</b>
<b>Average Lab-Con gap (4 scales)</b>		<b>4.97</b>	<b>4.33</b>	<b>3.61</b>	<b>2.27</b>

Notes. The numbers reported in the table are the mean positions that British Election Study respondents ascribed to the Labour and Conservative parties along the issue scales, computed, for each scale in each year, over all respondents who gave a valid party placement on the scale. The rows labeled “Lab-Con gap” report the difference between the mean placements of the Conservative Party and the mean placement of the Labour Party. All four scales are from 1 to 11, with higher numbers denoting more right-wing responses. The texts of the policy scale questions are reported in the appendix.

**Table 2. Changes in British Election Study Respondents' Mean Self-placements on the Policy Scales, 1987-2001**

		<b>1987</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2001</b>
Social Services	All	4.5	4.1	3.7	3.9
	Lab partisans	3.6	3.1	3.2	3.4
	Con partisans	5.2	5.0	4.4	4.6
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.2</b>
Nationalization	All	6.4	5.6	5.3	5.1
	Lab partisans	4.4	4.1	4.6	4.5
	Con partisans	7.9	7.0	6.4	6.1
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.6</b>
Inflation/unemp	All	3.5	3.5	3.6	4.0
	Lab partisans	2.3	2.8	3.0	3.5
	Con partisans	4.5	4.1	4.4	4.7
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.2</b>
Redistribution	All	5.0	4.5	4.1	4.8
	Lab partisans	3.1	2.8	3.0	3.8
	Con partisans	6.7	6.1	5.9	6.6
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Average Lab-Con gap (4 scales)</b>		<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.7</b>

Notes. The numbers reported above represent the British Election Study respondents' mean self-placements on the policy scales relating to social services, nationalization of industry, tradeoffs between unemployment and inflation, and income redistribution. Mean self-placements are given for all respondents ('All'); for all respondents who reported that they identified with the Labour Party ('Lab partisans'); and for all respondents who reported that they identified with the Conservative Party ('Con partisans'). The figures given in the rows labeled "Lab-Con gap" report the differences between the mean self-placements of Conservative and Labour partisans on the policy scale. All four scales are from 1 to 11, with higher numbers denoting more right-wing responses. The texts of the policy scale questions and of the party identification questions are reported in the appendix.

**Table 3. Party Attachment-Ideology Cross-Lagged Structural Models**

	1987-1992	1992-1997	1997-2001
	Coefficient (S.E)	Coefficient (S.E)	Coefficient (S.E)
<b>Stability Coefficients</b>			
Labour Attachment → Labour Attachment	.74** (.04)	.76** (.03)	.93** (.03)
Conservative Attachment → Conservative Attachment	.71** (.05)	.57** (.03)	.94** (.06)
Left-right preferences → Left-right preferences	1.00** (.10)	.73** (.08)	.61** (.05)
<b>Structural Coefficients</b>			
Left-right preferences → Labour Attachment	-.62** (.08)	-.38** (.07)	-.16** (.06)
Labour Attachment → Left-right preferences	-.05 (.03)	-.05* (.02)	-.07** (.02)
Left-right preferences → Conservative Attachment	.49** (.09)	.52** (.08)	.16* (.06)
Conservative Attachment → Left-right preferences	-.03 (.04)	-.06 (.03)	-.01 (.02)
<i>N</i>	1608	1924	2445
<b>Model Fit</b>			
$\chi^2$ (df = 26)		1441.5	
$\Delta_1/\Delta_2$		.97/.97	
$\rho_1/\rho_2$		.95/.96	

\*  $p < 0.05$  ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Notes. The coefficients reported in the table were estimated for the specifications given by equations 1-3 in the paper. See the text of the paper for the descriptions and codings of the variables. Sources: 1987-1992, 1992-1997 and 1997-2001 British Election Study panels. Entries are unstandardized, maximum-likelihood estimates (the standard errors for these estimates are reported in parentheses). Factor variances, error variances, error covariances, and disturbances omitted for clarity.



**Table 4: Subconstituency-based Analyses: Political Engagement**

	1987-1992	1992-1997	1997-2001
	Coefficient (S.E)	Coefficient (S.E)	Coefficient (S.E)
<b><u>High Engagement</u></b>			
<b>Stability Coefficients</b>			
Labour Attachment → Labour Attachment	.85** (.07)	.99** (.07)	.87** (.06)
Conservative Attachment → Conservative Attachment	.70** (.09)	.62** (.05)	.90** (.05)
Left-right preferences → Left-right preferences	.81** (.18)	.71** (.12)	.63** (.08)
<b>Structural Coefficients</b>			
Left-right preferences → Labour Attachment	-.47** (.12)	-.36** (.12)	-.03 (.10)
Labour Attachment → Left-right preferences	-.01 (.05)	.01 (.06)	-.08* (.04)
Left-right preferences → Conservative Attachment	.56* (.22)	.42** (.12)	.07 (.09)
Conservative Attachment → Left-right preferences	.04 (.06)	.02 (.05)	-.01 (.05)
<i>N</i>	516	471	604
<b><u>Low Engagement</u></b>			
<b>Stability Coefficients</b>			
Labour Attachment → Labour Attachment	.75** (.08)	.78** (.06)	.87** (.05)
Conservative Attachment → Conservative Attachment	.65** (.10)	.43** (.08)	.94** (.06)
Left-right preferences → Left-right preferences	1.25** (.38)	.87** (.22)	.43** (.13)
<b>Structural Coefficients</b>			
Left-right preferences → Labour Attachment	-.74* (.31)	-.68** (.18)	.01 (.17)
Labour Attachment → Left-right preferences	.07 (.06)	-.04 (.04)	-.10** (.03)
Left-right preferences → Conservative Attachment	.85** (.28)	.87** (.22)	-.11 (.14)
Conservative Attachment → Left-right preferences	.03 (.08)	-.13* (.09)	-.00 (.06)
<i>N</i>	461	698	776
<b>Model Fit</b>			
$\chi^2$ (df = 172)	390.4	314.3	380.7
$\Delta_1/\Delta_2$	.96/.98	.97/.98	.96/98
$\rho_1/\rho_2$	.93/.96	.94/.97	.94/.97

\*  $p < 0.05$  ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Notes. For these analyses we subdivided the BES respondents according to whether they scored above or below the median on a political engagement index we developed that was based on respondents' reported level of education, income, and newspaper readership. The coefficients reported in the table were estimated for the specifications given by equations 1-3 in the paper. See the text of the paper for our description of the political engagement index and for the descriptions and codings of the variables. Sources: 1987-1992, 1992-1997 and 1997-2001 British Election Study panels. Entries are unstandardized, maximum-likelihood estimates (the standard errors for these estimates are reported in parentheses). Factor variances, error variances, error covariances, and disturbances omitted for clarity.

## Appendix. BES Question Wording

Favor-oppose party: “Please choose a phrase from this card to say how you feel about the Labour/Conservative Party? 1 = strongly against, 2 = against, 3 = neither in favour nor against, 4 = favour, 5 = strongly favour.”

Party identification: ‘Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as... [Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat...] or what?’.

Strength of Party Identification: “Would you call yourself very strong [Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat...], fairly strong, or not very strong?”

Equalization of Incomes (Redistribution): Some people feel that government should make much greater efforts to make people’s incomes more equal. Other people feel that government should be much less concerned about how equal people’s incomes are. And other people have views somewhere in-between. Please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about redistributing income.

- I = ‘Make much greater efforts to make people’s incomes more equal’*
- II = ‘Be much less concerned about how equal people’s incomes are’*

Inflation/Unemployment: Some people feel that getting people back to work should be the government's top priority. Other people feel that keeping prices down should be the government's top priority. And other people have views somewhere in-between. Please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about unemployment and inflation.

- I = ‘Getting people back to work should be the government’s top priority’*
- II = ‘Keeping prices down should be the government’s top priority’*

Nationalization/Privatization: Some people feel that government should nationalise many more private companies. Other people feel that government should sell off many more nationalised industries. And other people have views somewhere in-between. Please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about nationalisation and privatisation.

- I = ‘Nationalize many more private companies’*
- II = ‘Sell off many more nationalized industries’*

Tax/Spend (Social Services): Some people feel that government should put up taxes a lot and spend much more on health and social services. Other people feel that government should cut taxes a lot and spend much less on health and social services. And other people have views somewhere in-between. Please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about taxes and government spending.

- I = ‘Government should increase taxes a lot and spend much more on health and social services’*
- II = ‘Government should cut taxes and spend much less on health and social services’*