British Party Manifestos, 2015: Was it still only 'The Economy, Stupid'?

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Abstract

The 2015 British general election was fought against the backdrop of five years of austerity and a slowly recovering economy. It was also a distinctly multi-party affair. Different parties mattered in different places, to be sure, yet the campaign as a whole was contested by an unusually large number of electorally significant parties representing a range of distinctive programmes. This paper reports the results of a content analysis of the 2015 party manifestos using manually-derived Manifesto Project estimates and computer assisted text analysis in order to identify major policy emphases. It investigates party positioning and movement in left-right terms; and it examines the most important Manifesto Project policy estimates in terms of their salience and whether or not manifestos reflected voters' concerns in terms of most important issues. In particular, it examines the extent to which the economy dominated the content. The paper goes further than previous studies by extending the analysis to the UKIP, Green, SNP and Plaid Cymru manifestos, as well as the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestos. The paper provides some inter-party comparisons for 2015 and general comparisons of salient policy areas between 2010 and 2015.

Introduction

Many civil servants, journalists and public-affairs executives must have spent the morning of Friday 8 May hurriedly re-reading the Conservative manifesto. To widespread surprise, the 2015 general election resulted in a wafer-thin parliamentary majority for David Cameron's party. Many politicians and pundits had expected another hung parliament and a round of coalition negotiations, just as had occurred in May 2010 (see, for example, Orchard 2015). The ritual publication of the party manifestos during the campaign had been greeted accordingly. Thus for the commentator Andrew Rawnsley (2015), the manifestos were best regarded 'as opening positions for post-election bargaining.' For the former Cabinet Secretary Gus O'Donnell, who had brokered the 2010 negotiations, the manifestos' publication was akin to 'public foreplay' between the parties (cited in Watt and Wintour 2015). Yet there were to be no negotiations. Thanks to the vagaries of the voting system, the Conservatives found themselves with a mandate to govern. Their manifesto now mattered in a way that most people had not quite expected.

This paper analyses the content of the party manifestos published ahead of the 2015 general election. Manifestos are authoritative statements of parties' medium-term policy priorities. They contain pledges for action, or inaction, and are usually presented as embryonic programmes for government. Contrary to media hype, they are also often largely implemented (Hofferbert and Budge 1992; Bara 2005). Since they are published ahead of every election, they are ideal subjects for mapping parties' shifting ideological positions and policy agendas. This paper draws on Manifesto Project data and computer assisted text analysis (CATA) data to produce reliable and valid measures of the parties' policy emphases in 2015 and their relative positions in left-right terms. It provides some inter-party comparisons for 2015 and

general comparisons of salient policy areas between 2010 and 2015. It also investigates whether or not manifestos reflected voters' concerns in terms of the most important issues.

The paper contributes to our understanding of both the 2015 general election and the evolving British party system. The election was fought against the backdrop of five years of austerity politics, coalition government and a weak economic recovery. It was also fought against the backdrop of a fracturing United Kingdom that had barely survived Scotland's independence referendum. All of these factors could be expected to affect the parties' priorities and policy commitments. Moreover, the election was a distinctly multi-party affair, contested by an unusually large number of electorally significant parties. Again, the nature of competition could be expected to exert a pull on the major parties' positions. More broadly, the paper updates our knowledge of programmatic competition in the British party system and the relative ideological positions of the major parties. In this respect, the paper goes further than earlier studies by examining the UKIP, Green, SNP and Plaid Cymru manifestos, as well as the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestos.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the place of manifestos in British elections, while the third section sets out our main research questions. The fourth section then describes Manifesto Project content-analytic framework and our own CATA methodology. The next three sections then report our findings in respect of long-term changes in party competition, medium-term changes in the parties' policy agendas, and the correspondence between the manifestos and public opinion. A final section discusses the findings and concludes that while the economy was a key theme in the manifestos, other issues mattered too.

Manifestos in British politics

Manifestos are staple features of British general elections. Parties use them to present their policies to a mass audience and to differentiate themselves from their rivals. This differentiation may take the form of parties taking explicit 'for' or 'against' stances on 'positional issues'; but more commonly it takes the form of parties varying their emphases on 'valence issues', outcomes that are almost universally desired and where the main question is which party is best able to deliver them (Stokes 1963; Robertson 1976; Budge and Farlie 1977; 1983). By devoting more attention to some topics over others, parties can cultivate a reputation for competence (or play down a reputation for incompetence) and even their 'ownership' of an issue (Petrocik 1996). Manifestos are also vital elements of parties' attempts to influence media coverage and the agenda of election campaigns. Even while most voters never look at them, manifestos are read by journalists and reported extensively across different forms of media. Their potential effect on public opinion means that parties invest considerable time and effort on both what is included and how it is presented (Bara 2006).

Manifestos are bound up with ideas about party representation and mandates. While they are often traced back to Robert Peel's 1834 Tamworth Manifesto, manifestos became especially important in British democracy after 1945 with the ascendance of a 'Collectivist' type of politics (Beer 1965), centred around mass-membership parties. Single-party government was the norm because of the single-member plurality voting system, and since the government had put its programme and policies before the electorate in its manifesto, it could (and did) claim a right to implement them. Perhaps even more importantly, an expectation developed that governments would implement their pledges: voters could then judge the governing party at the next election on the basis of how successfully it had done so.

There are, of course, problems with the notion of mandates in British politics. Voters elect MPs, not governments, while a mandate is antithetical to other ideas about representation, notably those embodied in the Whig tradition (Judge 1999). As Edmund Burke informed the electors of Bristol, 'Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.' More prosaically, many manifesto pledges are vague, few voters are aware of them, and governments often enact policies that are not in their manifestos. For example, the 1997 Labour government's immediate decision to grant operational independence to the Bank of England was entirely unheralded. Perhaps even more importantly, claims of mandates are usually tied to parliamentary majorities, not popular vote shares. No government since 1945 has enjoyed the support of more than half the electorate; and once turnout is taken into account, the electoral mandate of governments can be much lower. In 2005, Labour secured its third successive 'mandate' with the support of just 21.6% of registered voters.

The formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition in 2010 brought into sharp relief the problems of manifesto-based mandates in British democracy. Neither the Conservatives nor the Liberal Democrats separately had an electoral mandate to implement their policies, nor did they collectively since no one had voted directly for the Coalition (or indeed any coalition). In the circumstances, the two parties' manifestos became starting points in discussions that would lead to the publication of a *Programme for Government* (HM Government 2010). It was not immediately clear who had won. Analysis undertaken by UCL's Constitution Unit suggested that three-quarters of the programme reflected the Conservative manifesto and a mere 40 per cent the Liberal Democrat manifesto (Hazell and Yong 2012, pp. 37-38). Meanwhile, a content analysis of the programme using the Manifesto Project

methodology (see below) found that the document was, on balance, closest in left-right spatial terms to the Liberal Democrat manifesto (Quinn et al. 2011). In practice, both sides secured some policy victories, although most accusations of betrayal focused on the Liberal Democrats. Their reputation never covered from the decision to accept an increase in university tuition fees, a policy directly at odds with their 2010 manifesto pledge to scrap such fees.

One of the factors that led to a hung parliament and coalition government in 2010 was the long-term fragmentation of the British party system (Allen 2006; Quinn 2013). The surprise return of single-party majority government in 2015 was not because of a reversal in this process but because of the voting-system and the way it structured and translated myriad local contests. Indeed, the 'effective number of electoral parties' (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) on polling day was 3.8, the largest number ever in a British general election held under universal suffrage. No fewer than seven parties arguably mattered in 2015, in the sense of receiving substantial media attention (all were invited to participate in ITV's televised seven-way leaders' debate) and defending (and retaining) parliamentary representation: the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats, Labour, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the Greens, the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru.

This paper analyses the same seven parties' manifestos. As Table 1 shows, the documents varied considerably in length, from the Green Party's *For the Common Good*, which came in at over 40,000 words (only available to download), to Labour's *Britain Can Be Better*, the *Scottish National Party Manifesto 2015* and Plaid Cymru's Working for Wales, all of which weighed in at around 18,000 words. The same seven parties also published a number of supplementary manifestos targeted at specific audiences. In virtually all cases, these supplementary manifestos consisted of

relevant pledges and commitments from the main manifestos, together with some prosaic embellishment. Such manifestos were not unprecedented, but there was a large number of them in 2015. The Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and UKIP all issued separate Scottish and Welsh manifestos, while the Conservatives and UKIP also produced Northern Irish manifestos. (Labour and the Liberal Democrats do not contest seats in Northern Ireland.) The Scottish and Northern Irish Green parties also produced their own manifestos. Other supplementary manifestos were even narrower in focus. Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats published manifestos aimed at disabled voters, the environment and young people, while the Green Party's publications included manifestos for animals, that is, for animal welfare, and for Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The systemic and electoral context

Our questions about the content of the 2015 party manifestos can be loosely categorised depending on whether they pertain to long-term, medium-term or short-term aspects of party policy and competition.

The first question belongs in the 'long-term' category and reflects the well-established notion that parties compete on the basis of ideologically distinctive programmes (Downs 1957). Political competition in Britain, as in many other advanced industrial democracies, is often associated with a 'left-right' policy continuum (Hakhverdian 2010; Bartle et al. 2011). The 'left' is usually linked to the goal of achieving greater political, social and economic equality, and a corresponding acceptance of the need for a large state to improve the welfare and lives of ordinary

people. The 'right' is usually associated with the goal of promoting greater individual responsibility and economic freedoms, and a corresponding wish to reduce state activity. The favoured policy instruments of the major parties have changed over the decades, but those advocated by Labour—such as nationalisation, higher levels of government spending on welfare, progressive and higher levels of taxation—have generally been consistent with a more left-wing position, while those advocated by the Conservatives—such as privatisation, lower levels of government spending, and a reduction taxation—have generally been consistent with a more right-wing position. The first question we ask about the 2015 manifestos is thus:

Q1. Do the manifestos reveal any great ideological movement in the party system since the 2010 general election and how does such movement compare with broader ideological changes since 1945?

While focusing on a single policy continuum makes for simplified models of party competition, it can conceal a great deal of how parties distinguish themselves and appeal to voters. In this vein it is often suggested that talk of 'left' and 'right' conceals two dimensions, a dominant dimension that is principally concerned with economic activity (socialism versus capitalism), and a second dimension concerned with social factors (libertarianism versus authoritarianism) (Kitschelt 1993; Evans et al. 1996; Webb 2000, pp. 115-127). Evidence from Britain and elsewhere suggests that while positions on these two dimensions are connected in practice, parties' make independent movements along each of them. Accordingly, our second question is:

Q2.Do the manifestos in 2015 reveal any distinctive ideological movements in respect
of economic or social issues?

A final set of long-term questions is prompted directly by the fragmentation of
the party system and the emergence of parties with distinct positions on certain issues.
The growth in electoral support for fringe 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' parties, such as
the Greens and UKIP, might be expected to affect the general ideological positioning
of the established major parties. At the same time, such fringe parties arguably 'own'
positions on certain issues, for example the Greens and environmentalism, UKIP and
Euroscepticism, and the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru further devolution
(or independence) in Scotland and Wales respectively. The success of these parties
may well have affected the long-term policy agenda by forcing other parties to
campaign on and pay more attention to such issues. Accordingly, our third question is:

Q3.Did the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats pay more attention to
European integration, environment and devolution in their 2015 manifestos?

Our medium-term questions relate to changes in the parties' policy agendas
between 2010 and 2015. On the one hand, the economy was always likely to loom
large in the parties' manifestos. After securing power in 2010, the Coalition
Government and its Conservative chancellor of the exchequer, George Osborne, had
pressed on with a programme of 'austerity', which some argue had had a recessionary
effect (Keegan 2014). Concerns about proposed cuts to public services, in particular
to education, health and welfare, had also brought hundreds of thousands of protestors
to the streets in various anti-austerity marches. In the event, the Coalition failed to

deliver on its goal of eliminating the deficit by the end of the Parliament. Thanks in part to the faltering economic recovery, tax receipts were far lower than anticipated, while government revenue was also hit by what Labour leader Ed Miliband described as the 'cost of living crisis': more jobs were being created, but workers were experiencing a relative decline in the value of their wages.

On the other hand, the sheer prominence of the general economic context meant that parties could be expected to use other issues in 2015 to differentiate themselves. The passage of time had certainly created a number of likely candidates. On the domestic front, the Coalition had pursued a series of contentious and radical policies, including welfare reform, a further reorganisation of the National Health Service and changes to student finance. Meanwhile, the issue of immigration had been a near-constant irritant for the government, not least because of Cameron's optimistic pledge to reduce net annual migration to below 100,000. At the same time, Britain's membership of the European Union became a renewed source of contention, partly because of immigration, partly because of the unfolding Eurozone crisis, and partly because of the perceived threat posed by the avowedly Eurosceptic UKIP. Closer to home, the future of the United Kingdom itself had been in question thanks to the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. Although the unionist 'no' vote won with 55% of the votes case, the question of Scotland's place in the Union was far from settled as politicians rushed to promise further devolution—which in turn raised all sorts of uncomfortable questions about the rights and status of England. In the light of the political and economic context, our fourth question is:

Q4. What policy agendas did the parties concentrate on in their 2015 manifestos and how do they compare with parties' policy agendas in 2010?

Finally, our short-term question addresses the relationship between the 2015 manifestos and public opinion at the time of the general election. From a normative perspective, public concerns ought to be reflected in the content of manifestos, since, as John May (1978, p. 1) notes, democracy involves 'necessary correspondence between acts of government and the wishes with respect to those acts of the persons who are affected'. At the same time, and in line with rational-choice based models of electoral competition, parties can be expected to emphasise the policies and issues that they think will most resonate with voters.

Measuring the policy concerns of voters is not straightforward, but it is conventionally done by asking survey respondents what they believe to be the most important issues (MII) or problems facing the country (Wlezien 2005; Jennings and Wlezien 2009; Bartle and Laycock 2012). For example, the polling organisation YouGov regularly asks respondents to identify the *three* most important issues facing the country at this time. On the basis of their answers, three issues tended to dominate between 2010 and 2015: the economy, health and immigration. As Figure 1 shows, the economy was very much the most important issue for the majority of the period, with nearly 80% of respondents consistently picking this issue. Immigration was generally picked by around half of respondents, while health was highlighted by between 20 and 30% of respondents. As the election approached, however, the perceived importance of the economy declined, while the issue of health gradually increased in importance. By the time of the 2015 election, the perceived importance of these issues had converged. To return to our interest in the relationship between the 2015 manifestos and public opinion, our final question is simply:

Q5. Were the most important issues for voters reflected in the content of the 2015

manifestos?

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Data and methods

To answer our five questions, we engage directly with content of the seven main

manifestos listed in Table 1. Our methods are well rehearsed and fall into two types:

(a) those developed by the Manifesto Project, which involve the manual coding of

texts according to a well-established scheme; and (b) those resulting from our own

computer assisted text analysis (CATA).

Manifesto Project estimates already exist for all British elections since 1945,

covering the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat (formerly Liberal) parties.

The 2015 estimates we report and analyse are thus the latest entries in an ever-

growing dataset. The origins of the Manifesto Project coding scheme can be dated to

1980, when the European Consortium for Political Research's Manifesto Research

Group (later the Comparative Manifestos Project) developed a framework for the

comparative analysis of manifesto texts (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006;

Volkens et al. 2013). The coding scheme comprises fifty-six distinct categories

representing major themes and policy areas (see the Technical Appendix, Table A1).

Analysing manifestos according to the scheme is a straightforward process. First, the

whole text is broken down into 'quasi sentences', portions of text normally delimited

by one of the common punctuation marks. Every 'quasi sentence' is then counted

under one, and only one, of the fifty-six categories. Finally, the resulting distributions

are standardised in percentage form to control for the varying lengths of documents.

By following a consistent coding scheme, researchers can compare manifestos across space and time, either in respect of single categories or in respect of broader groupings of (theoretically-related) categories (see, for example, Budge 1999). The underlying assumption for any comparison is that the salience of an issue or a policy in a text provides an indication of its importance to the party (Robertson 1976; Budge and Farlie 1983; Budge et al. 1987). So long as parties wish to prioritise a given issue or policy, they will continue to make references to it in their manifestos.

In addition to the Manifesto Project data for 2015 (and for prior elections), we also report and analyse our own CATA-derived data. The need to engage with a second content-analytic approach stems from the fact that the Manifesto Project coding categories do not lend themselves easily to direct comparison with answers to MII survey questions. The clearest example of this problem is with relation to the issue of immigration, which does not have a separate category in the Manifesto Project scheme. CATA enables us to construct categories that are more relevant and directly comparable to the response categories used by academic and commercial pollsters. In this paper we use the HAMLET II software, which enables users to identify the occurrence of words in text and to establish the presence of dedicated vocabularies (Brier and Hopp n.d.). We use HAMLET II for three reasons: it can cope with standard text files as inputs; users can designate the coding unit (such as a sentence or a paragraph); and there is minimal human intervention in building the coding categories and establishing the estimates.

For the purposes of exploring the relationship between the manifestos and public opinion, we first identified twenty-two categories that reflected responses to the MII questions posed by the British Election Study (BES) and by two commercial polling organisations, YouGov and Ipsos MORI in the spring of 2015MORI (see

Technical Appendix Table A3). We then developed a dictionary to measure the salience of these categories. Each category had its own exclusive set of entries in the form of appropriate synonyms, abbreviations and relevant word-strings derived from the manifesto documents. The combined dictionary contained some 740 entries. Following the same protocol as the Manifesto Project, our coding units were 'quasi sentences': we used HAMLET II to identify the number of quasi sentences in each manifesto associated with each category (i.e. contained at least one relevant entry). Having obtained the estimates, we refined our list of categories, reducing the number to sixteen for analytical purposes. Three of the original set were aggregated with other categories, and three others were omitted because of their very low salience.

Long-term ideological movement

Our first question about the 2015 manifestos was what they revealed about ideological change in the party system since 2010, as well as how this compared with broader historical trends. We answer this question by drawing on Manifesto Project data and constructing the standard summative 'left-right score' based on twenty-six of the fifty-six categories. Reflecting the logic of saliency theory, by which you can infer parties' positions from the attention they devote to certain topics, the total percentage scores of thirteen 'left emphases' variables are subtracted from the total percentage scores of thirteen 'right emphases' variables (see the Technical Appendix, Table A.2). A higher score on the resulting scale indicates a more right-wing position, while a lower score indicates a more left-wing position (Budge et al. 2001, p. 22).

The resulting 2015 left-right scores for the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats are presented in Figure 2, as well as their scores in every election since 1945. The long-term trends are already well known. The Conservatives have

always been to the right (above) Labour, while the Liberal Democrats (the Liberals before 1992) have generally been somewhere in between. The data also show the relative convergence between the two main parties in the immediate post-war period, during the period of 'consensus', and the divergence that occurred from the late 1970s, as Labour moved to the left and the Conservatives moved to the right.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

In terms of the parties' scores in 2015, it is clear that all three parties moved leftwards compared to their scores in 2010, with the Liberal Democrats moving closer to Labour and away from their erstwhile coalition partners. Labour's leftwards movement was widely anticipated by much of the right-wing press. The Conservatives' movement, by contrast, seems more odds with many commentators' perceptions, not to mention the programme of austerity that the party pursued under chancellor George Osborne. Nevertheless, prime minister David Cameron was quick to promise a 'One Nation' government in the wake of his re-election, and the Manifesto Project data suggest there may be some substance to his rhetoric. It is also worth pointing out that the Conservatives, like their rivals, have also been somewhat further to the left in previous elections, most notably in 1955, 1959 and 1964.

Because there are no comparable data for other parties, we report separately the left-right sores for the seven manifestos in 2015. On the basis of the Manifesto Project estimates, as Figure 3 shows, the Conservatives were the most right-wing party, even more so than UKIP, followed by the Liberal Democrats, Labour, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Greens. The gap between the two 'extremes', the Conservatives and the Greens, was 28 points; by contrast, the gap between the Conservatives and

Labour in 1983 had been 68 points. Despite the recent proliferation of parties, the ideological space they cover is relatively constrained. The scores for the Scots and Welsh nationalist parties were in line with their centre-left reputations. UKIP's apparent moderation was almost certainly a reflection of the parties' eclectic mix of policies targeted at both Eurosceptic Tories and 'left behind' working-class voters (Ford and Goodwin 2014).

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

While commentators and politicians still use the single left-right dimension as a convenient tool for simplifying political analysis, it is often helpful to distinguish between left and right in terms of economic and social criteria, which leads us to our second question about the 2015 manifestos. Building on the groupings of Manifesto Project categories developed by Laver and Budge (1992) we construct separate scales measuring parties' commitments to a neo-liberal economic agenda, and also the extent of their social conservatism (see Technical Appendix Table A.2). These measures do not undermine the validity of the left-right scores; they simply enable us to explore independently the economic and social aspect of programmatic competition.

Figure 4 shows the changes in the three main parties' stances towards economics, where a higher-score represents a more neo-liberal approach. The long-term trends broadly mirror those of the left-right scores, albeit in a slightly more constrained space. What stands out is the obvious convergence in economic policy after 1992. Apart from the 2005 election, the gap between the Conservatives and Labour has never exceeded 2 points, and in 2015, a mere 1.4 points covered all three parties. There was no serious partisan challenge to the neo-liberal consensus in 2015.

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

Figure 5 maps the long-term changes in respect of social conservatism, where a higher score means the manifesto was more socially conservative. The main parties' scores have generally been more volatile than their economic scores, and they have also been confined to an even narrower range. As with the parties' commitment to neo-liberal economics, recent general elections have been marked by a degree of relative consensus. In marked contrast to the neo-liberal economics score, the 2015 election saw a notable divergence between the three parties. The gap between the Conservatives and Labour on this measure grew to 13 points, while that between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats virtually tripled to 24 points.

FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

Figure 6 charts the positions of all seven parties on both the economic and social scales in just 2015. The Conservatives were the most socially conservative, even more so than UKIP, which was surprising given both David Cameron's efforts to 'modernise' his party's image and the reputation of Nigel Farage's party. The Greens, in line with their reputation, emerged as the most socially liberal. The Liberal Democrats and the Scots and Welsh nationalist parties were also on the more socially liberal end of the scale, while Labour occupied the half-way point between the two most extreme. The chart also reaffirms the broad consensus around general economic policy: with UKIP and the SNP broadly in line with the three main parties, only the Greens and Plaid Cymru adopted notably different positions. The 5-point gap between

Plaid and the Conservatives was more than twice as great as that between the SNP and the Conservatives, while the Greens were nearly 8 points distant from the Tories.

FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE

We also use Manifesto Project data can to answer our third question, which relates to the parties' positions in respect of European integration, the environment, and devolution. These three issues are associated with particular minor parties and have at times been difficult to classify in straightforward left-right terms. For the first of these issues, support for European integration, there are two relevant categories in the Manifesto Project data that can be used to assess parties' positions: 'European Community: Positive' and 'European Community: Negative'. Subtracting the latter from the former (see Technical Appendix Table A.2) gives a simple indicator, where a higher score means the party is more supportive of EU membership.

Figure 7 shows the 'support for the EU' scores for the three main parties at every election since 1945. It also includes the programmatically Eurosceptic UKIP's position in 2015. The chart shows that the Conservatives and Labour began to adopt markedly different positions parties only from the mid-1960s, when successive governments began seriously to pursue membership. It also shows clearly Labour's initially anti-European position that lasted until the mid-1980s, and the Liberal Democrats' generally consistent pro-Europeanism. Moreover, the chart shows the general Eurosceptic drift by the Conservative party. Indeed, with a score of -4, the 2015 manifesto was the Conservatives' least supportive for European integration in any post-war election. Dynamics within the party may help to explain some of the drift, but so too the dynamics within the party system. The upsurge in support for

UKIP during the 2010 Parliament affected all the parties' positions towards Europe, but it was the Conservatives who felt most threatened, and Cameron responded with the promise of an in-out referendum. With a score of -16, UKIP was a huge outlier on this topic: the mean score for the other six parties was 0.7!

FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE

The second distinctive issue we look at is the environment, which has been growing in importance in Britain, as in many other European countries, since the 1970s. To explore this issue, we use a simple additive score that combines three Manifesto Project categories, 'Agriculture', 'Environmental Protection' and 'Anti-Growth Policies' (see Technical Appendix Table A.2). The long-term trends are reported in Figure 8, which clearly shows the increasing salience of environmental issues. Figure 8 also makes clear that, among the three main parties, the Liberal Democrats have been the most consistently 'green' party, with environmental scores that have been two- or three-times greater than those of the Conservatives and Labour. Meanwhile, the Conservatives have also scored consistently higher than Labour in elections since 2001. David Cameron famously made much of his environmental credentials, and the Conservatives even appealed to voters in 2006 with the slogan 'vote blue, go green'. Although the Tories were slightly less environmental in 2015 than in 2010, their gap over Labour increased to nearly 1.5 points. Finally, Figure 8 also shows the Green Party's 2015 environmental score, which dwarfs (and at 27 points) is nearly double that of the Liberal Democrats' score.

FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE

The last distinctive issue we explore is that of devolution. The rapid rise in support for the SNP and Plaid Cymru in the 1970s helped push onto the political agenda the possibility of elected Scottish and Welsh assemblies. The Conservatives' hostility towards the idea in the 1980s and 1990s meant that it took until 1998 before a Scottish Parliament and a National Assembly for Wales were created. That move, intended to quench nationalism, has seemingly done the opposite in Scotland, where voters in 2014 came close to choosing independence.

Figure 9 shows changes in the main parties' positions towards devolution since 1945. The score we use draws on two Manifesto Project categories, 'Decentralization' and 'Centralization', with the latter simply subtracted from the former (much like the pro-EU score). For much of the post-war period, the Liberals were consistently the most pro-devolution of the three main parties, while the Conservatives were notably hostile under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and under John Major in the early 1990s. After 1997, the Conservatives belatedly embraced devolution and scored more highly than Labour or the Liberal Democrats in 2001, 2005 and 2010. However, in the wake of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, David Cameron set himself up as the champion of England's interests, and the nearly 4-point decline in the Conservatives' score between 2010 and 2015 is perhaps indicative of this stance. Finally, for comparison's sake, Figure 9 also shows the 'pro-devolution' scores for the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru in 2015. Not surprisingly given the two parties' respective objectives, their scores are markedly greater than those of the other main Westminster parties. The SNP, which has always campaigned more vociferously for outright independence than its Welsh counterpart, also outscored Plaid Cymru (by a score of 11 to 7).

FIGURE 9 ABOUT HERE

Issue salience in 2015 and 2010

We now turn to our fourth question and what the 2015 manifestos reveal about the parties' policy agendas. We begin by focusing on the three parties for which there are Manifesto Project estimates for both 2015 and 2010. Table 2 reports the ten most salient categories for the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat 2015 manifestos, whereas Table 3 does the same for the parties' 2010 manifestos. The first point that stands out is the slight increase in the overall range of main issues of salience across the three parties: more categories featured in the 2015 top ten (17) than in the 2010 list (14), although nine of the categories in 2015 were present in 2010 ('Decentralisation', 'Economic Orthodoxy', 'Education', 'Environment', 'Health and Welfare', 'Internationalism', 'Labour Groups', 'Law and Order' and 'Technology'). In both election years, six categories were common to all three parties' policy priorities, with 'Health and Welfare' and 'Technology' repeating this feat in both lists.

TABLES 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE

The second point that stands out from Tables 2 and 3 concerns the changing overlaps between different pairs of parties. In 2015, the Conservatives and Labour had seven top-ten categories in common, compared with six in 2010, whereas Labour and the Liberal Democrats had seven categories in common in both elections. Most interesting, however, is the reduction in the overlap between the Conservatives' and Liberal Democrats' priorities. In 2010, the soon-to-be coalition partners had nine

issues in common; in 2015, the soon-to-be former coalition partners had only six issues in common. The divergence in priorities, especially the Liberal Democrats' new commitment to 'Democracy', 'Environment', 'Freedom' and 'Internationalism', may well have been a reflection of the party's need to differentiate itself more clearly from its coalition partner.

Table 4 reports the most salient Manifesto Project categories for UKIP, the Greens, the SNP and Plaid Cymru in 2015. If we collate the issue priorities of these four parties with those reported in Table 2, no fewer than 24 issues featured across all seven manifestos, a reflection of the clear range of interests represented by the parties. In terms of the overlaps between pairs of parties shown in Table 4, the three parties of the centre-left had six top-ten categories in common ('Environment', 'Labour Groups', 'Social Justice', 'Health and Welfare' and 'Market Regulation), with the Greens and the SNP sharing six categories, the Greens and Plaid Cymru sharing five, and the SNP and Plaid sharing seven. The more right-wing party, UKIP, had three categories in common with its centre-left rivals, 'Health and Welfare', 'Market Regulation' and 'Social Justice'. However, UKIP also had three categories in its top-ten list that did not overlap with the others, 'Europe', 'National Way of Life' and 'Military'. The prominence of these issues was an obvious reflection of its distinctive ideological position.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

What Table 4 does not show is the overlaps between all the parties analysed in 2015. Three issues featured in all seven parties' most salient categories ('Health and Welfare', 'Market Regulation' and 'Social Justice'), a reflection, perhaps, of the

consequences of, and public concerns about the consequences of, the Coalition government's austerity programme. Table 4 also does not show the overlaps across arguably the two bitterest inter-party relationships in contemporary British politics, that between the Conservatives and UKIP, and that between Labour and the SNP. The Conservatives and UKIP had eight most salient issues in common, while Labour and the SNP also had eight in common. By way of contrast, Labour had fewer priorities in common with its other centre-left rivals, the Greens (five) and Plaid Cymru (six). The apparent similarities in the Conservative-UKIP and Labour-SNP agendas give credence to the adage that the most rancorous contests are often between parties that are ideologically closest.

The manifestos and the 'Most Important Issue' in 2015

We now turn to our final question and the correspondence between the manifestos and what pre-elections surveys suggested were the 'most important issue' (MII) for voters. As shown in Figure 1, three issues tended to dominate the opinions polls between the 2010 and 2015 general elections: the economy, immigration and the NHS or health. These issues also dominated the three surveys that we drew on to define the most important issues immediately prior to polling day. The British Election Study (BES), YouGov and Ipsos MORI all employed slightly different questions and methods but all consistently found that the economy, immigration, and health—and in that order—were perceived to be the most important issues facing the country.

Table 5 reports the ten most important issues from all three surveys in rank order (see Technical Appendix Table A3 for the original percentages). It also reports in rank order the ten most salient issue categories, derived from HAMLET II and the CATA procedure, across all seven party manifestos (see Technical Appendix Table

A4 for the original scores). What is immediately apparent from the rankings is that the economy was generally the most prominent issue in the manifestos, just as it was generally perceived by survey respondents to be the most important issue. In those manifestos where it was not ranked first—in the SNP and Plaid Cymru manifestos—it was ranked second. On the basis of these results, it is tempting to infer that the 2015 general election was about 'the economy, stupid.' It was not, of course, as other issues greatly mattered; nevertheless, there was no escaping the economic context, which was a recurring theme throughout the manifestos. On this point, at least, voters' and parties' priorities were in accordance.

What is also immediately apparent from the rankings reported in Table 5 is the divergence between the manifestos and voters' other priorities, especially immigration and the NHS. While these two issues consistently ranked second and third on the basis the MII responses, they were generally much less salient in the manifestos. The highest ranking for immigration was in the UKIP manifesto, where it was ranked twelfth (not shown). Other parties made relatively fewer explicit references to the issue. However, the measure potentially understates the prominence of immigration since the issue was often linked to other subjects. In this respect, it was clear from the manifestos that mentions of immigration were often framed as an EU or even a global issue. Reflecting this tendency, the 'European' and 'foreign and international' categories were ranked joint third in the UKIP manifesto, for example, while the Conservatives also gave third billing to foreign and international affairs.

When it came to voters' concerns about the NHS, only the Liberal Democrats came close to reflecting public opinion, with health being the third most prominent issue in its manifestos. None of the other party manifestos ranked this issue higher than fourth (the Greens). A similar story could be told for both 'welfare', which

figured prominently in responses to the YouGov and the Ipsos MORI MII questions, and 'poverty and inequality', which came out as one of the more important issues in the Ipsos MORI and BES results. These two categories featured far less prominently in the CATA analysis, however: welfare, which included pensions, was ranked joint third in the SNP manifesto but otherwise usually outside the top ten; and poverty's highest ranking, seventh, came courtesy of the Liberal Democrats.

If the party manifestos placed less emphasis on some issues that seemed important to respondents, they also discussed at length some topics that were far-removed from voters' concerns. All seven manifestos devoted considerable space to constitutional issues, a subject that is often to close to politicians' hearts but which was especially close after the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. The relevant CATA category 'constitution' included references to a range of matters, such as devolution, decentralisation and local government, as well as topics such as 'English votes for English laws'. Perhaps not surprisingly, the constitution was the most prominent issue in the Scottish and Welsh nationalists' manifestos, ranking ahead even of the economy, but it was also the second-ranked issue in all but one of the other manifestos (it was the third-ranked issue in the Green manifesto).

Of the others issues that featured prominently, education ranked at least fifth in all but the SNP's manifesto (where it was sixth). For Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru, it ranked third. Jobs (including unemployment) also generally figured prominently across the manifestos, with this issue ranking third in the Labour and SNP manifestos and fourth in the Green party and Plaid Cymru manifestos. The attention devoted to this issue may well be a reflection of the four parties' left-of-centre ideological positioning; it was also in accordance with the importance attached to unemployment in the pre-election opinion polls. Finally, both

the Greens and the Liberal Democrats placed considerable emphasis on environmental matters in their manifestos, which is in keeping with their past reputations on the subject. The environment was the second-ranking issue in the Green party's manifesto and joint third in the Liberal Democrats'. Just as UKIP devoted notable attention to global and especially European issues, so the relative priority of this issue was arguably a reflection of the two parties choosing to prioritise their core ideas.

In summary, the various comparisons show that the issue agenda for the political parties, as measured by our CATA categories, was far broader than the reported concerns of most voters. Manifestos of course have to address such a range of policies; they are, after all, potential programmes for government. At the same time, the comparisons also show that, with the exception of the economy and constitutional matters, the parties tended to vary their issue priorities (which is also in accordance with the 2015 Manifesto Project data). To a large extent, the priorities were reflective of the parties' long-term commitments—and perhaps what their core voters might have been looking for.

Discussion and conclusion

The 2015 general election was one of the most fascinating elections in recent times. It was fought against a backdrop of significant economic, social and political change, and it resulted, to widespread surprise, in the return of single-party majority rule. The complexity of party competition, which partly explains the outcome, only adds to the fascination. Seven parties played a significant role in the election, albeit in different ways and in different places. The Scottish National Party contested just 59 seats, all in Scotland, and won 56 of them; UKIP fielded 624 candidates across the UK yet won just one seat. Similarly, Plaid Cymru fought only in Wales, winning three seats,

whereas the Greens fought nation-wide, yet only managed to retain the single seat it had won in 2010. Meanwhile, the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats did their best to win as many seats as possible (and avoid annihilation in the case of the latter).

Our analysis of the seven parties' manifestos provides further insights into both the character of the 2015 general election and long-term changes in party competition. The latest Manifesto Project estimates suggest that, despite or perhaps because of the Coalition government's programme of austerity, all three of the main parties moved slightly to the left. The Conservatives' manifesto was the most right-wing among the seven parties, and the Greens' was the most left-wing. The Manifesto Project estimates also confirmed the ongoing consensus around neo-liberal economics: in 2015, only the Green Party and Plaid Cymru stood out in their opposition. Meanwhile, the fragmentation of the party system was reflected in both the increasing salience of European, environmental and decentralisation, and the breadth of issues that received attention across all the manifestos. Only three of the most salient Manifesto Project categories were common to all the documents: welfare, justice social and market regulation. That all the parties focused attention on these issues helps partly to explain the general leftwards drift among the main parties. Finally, the CATA-derived data we report confirms both the general salience of economic considerations and the reluctance of most parties to talk about immigration. On this issue, and some others, there was a notable gap between voters' apparent preoccupations and the parties' words.

The sub-title of our paper asks the question: was it still only 'the economy' stupid'? The obvious answer is: 'no'. The economy was undoubtedly a major theme across all the manifestos, just as it was an important issue for voters, and it was *the*

most salient issue in some of the manifestos. Yet other issues and policies were also important, as the Manifesto Project and our own CATA estimates make clear. And for some parties, and certainly for some voters in some parts of the UK, there were other issues that trumped the economy. The state of the economy will always exert a major effect on party competition and electoral outcomes, but in keeping with changes in Britain's party system, James Carville's message to Bill Clinton needs to be adjusted. In some places, 'it's the economy *and public services*, stupid' (Crewe 2001). In other places 'it's the economy *and public services and immigration*, stupid'. Elsewhere, it may even be 'the economy *and public services and national independence*, stupid' or 'the economy *and public services and environment*, stupid'.

George Osborne must hope that a strong economic recovery will ease the way for another Conservative victory in 2020. It remains to be seen, of course, whether the general leftwards shift observed since 2010 continues between 2015 and the next election. Deficit-reduction is still central to the Conservatives' governing narrative, yet David Cameron has also emphasised his wish to lead a One Nation government. Party strategists are doubtless aware of the need to secure the centre-ground. Labour, meanwhile, is facing the possibility of being led by its most left-wing leader in decades, Jeremy Corbyn. Should he win, the 2020 Labour manifesto could look very different to those of recent years. British politics might just be about to experience the sudden death of the prevailing neo-liberal consensus. If so, and if the party system continues to fragment, the next election could be even more fascinating than the last.

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FIGURE 1: *The three most important issues facing the country, YouGov, 2010- 2015*
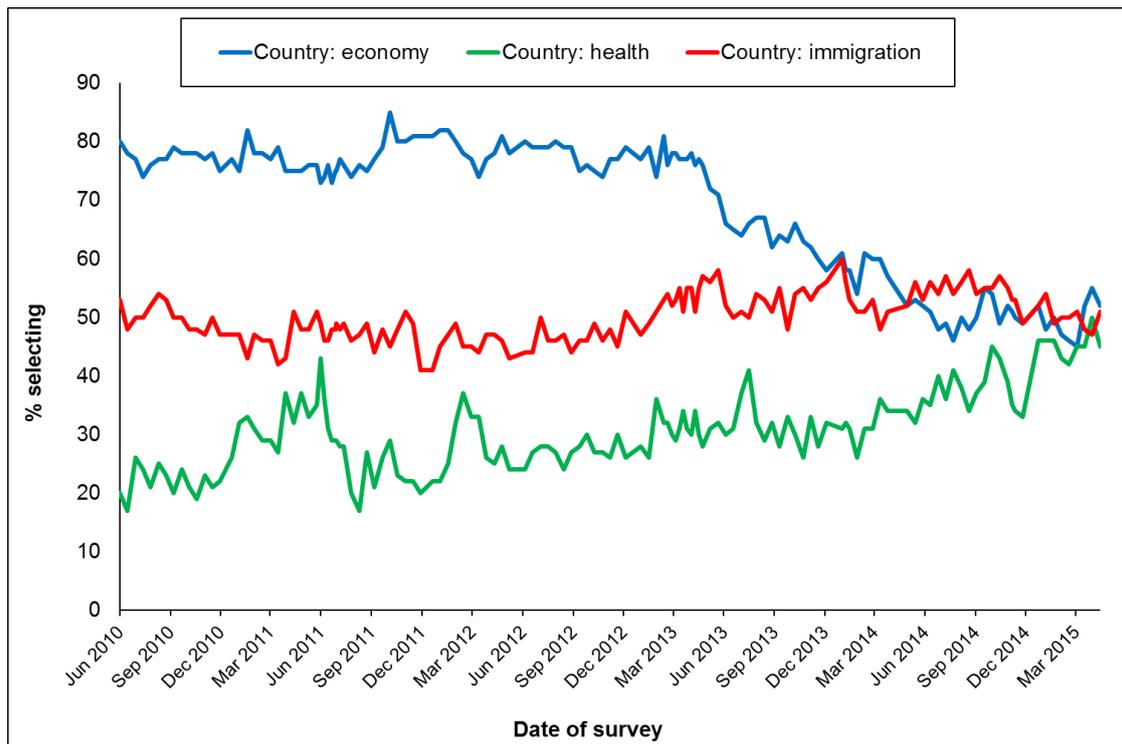
Note: Questions wording: 'Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three'. Data from YouGov Political Tracker Issues (2).

FIGURE 2: *Left-right party movement, 1945-2015*
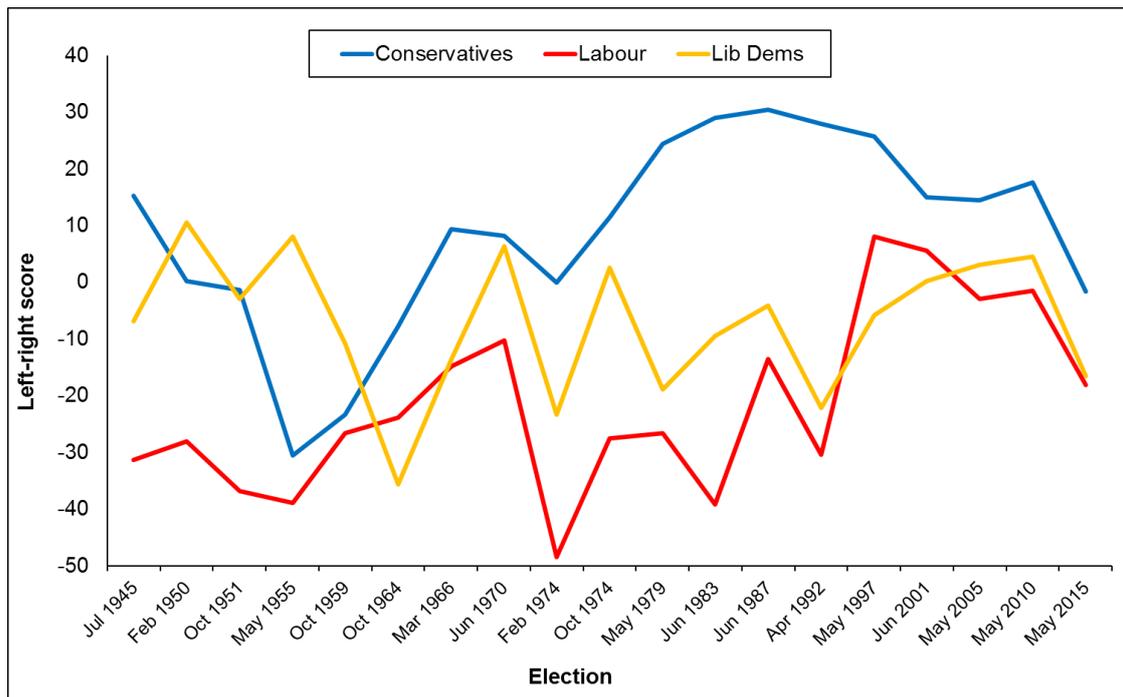
Source: Volkens et al. 2015

FIGURE 3: *Party scores on the left-right scale, 2015*
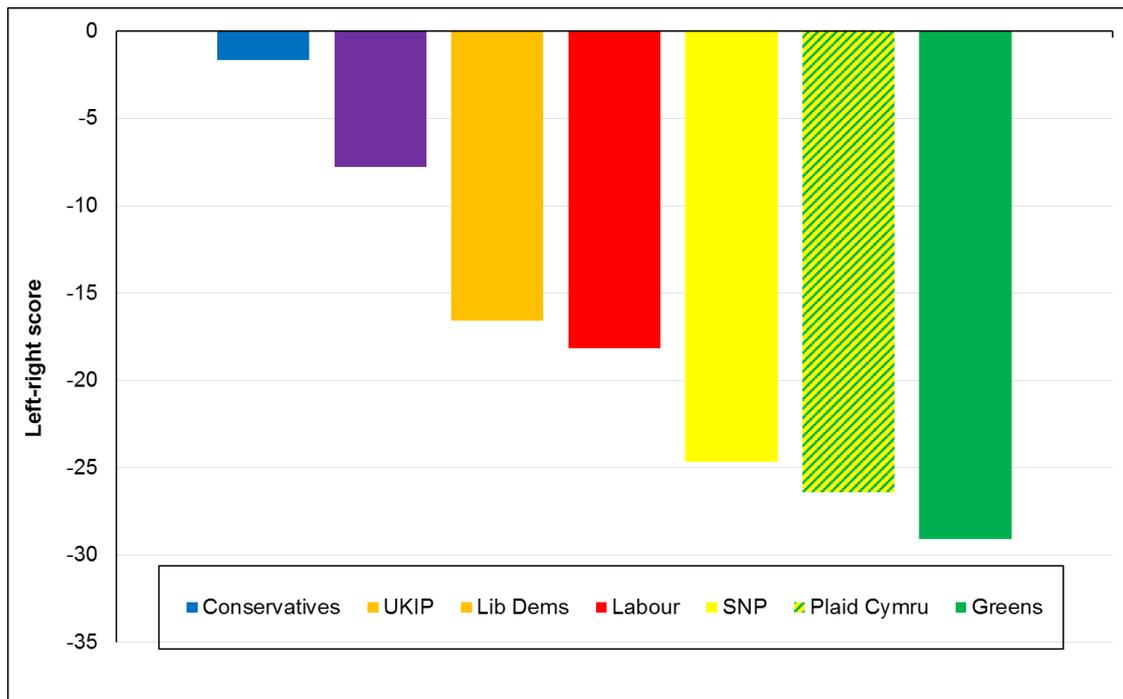
Source: Volkens et al. 2015

FIGURE 4: *Party scores for neo-liberal economics, 1945-2015*
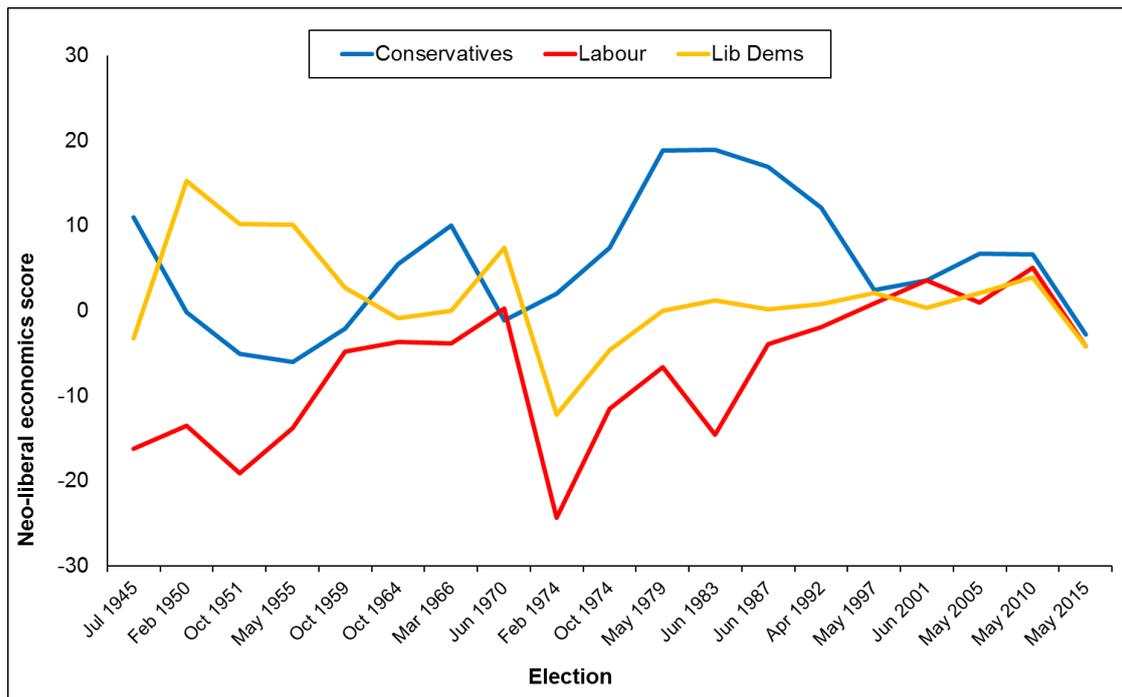
Source: Volkens et al. 2015

FIGURE 5: *Party scores for social conservatism, 1945-2015*
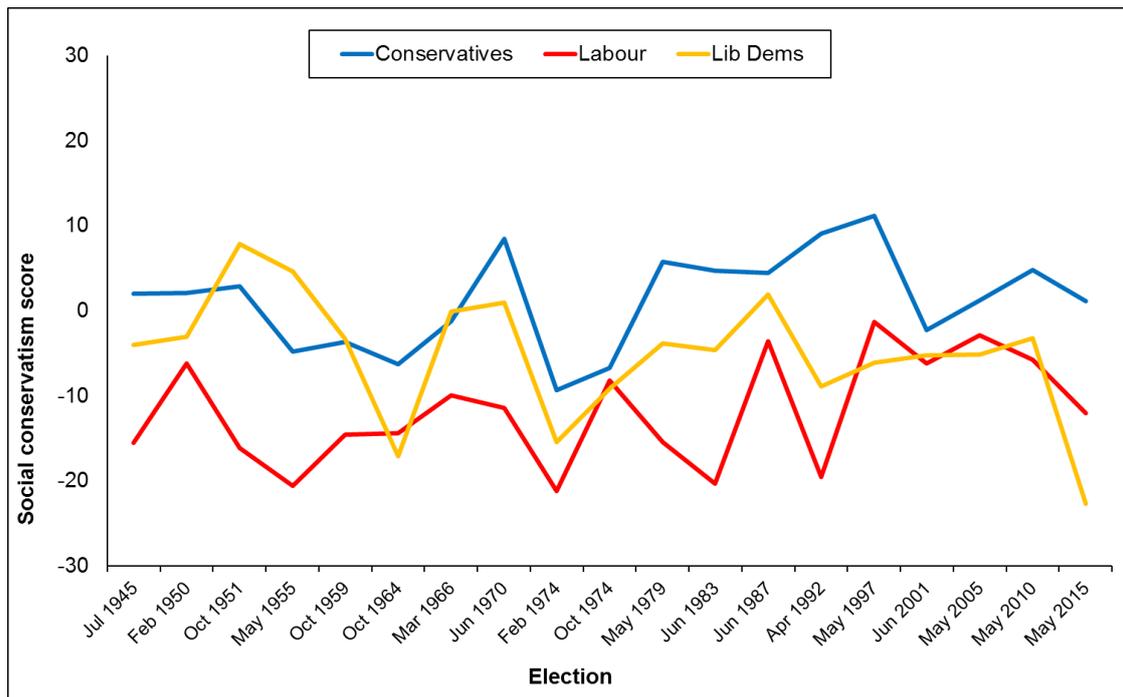
Source: Volkens et al. 2015

FIGURE 6: *Party scores for neo-liberal economics and social conservatism, 2015*
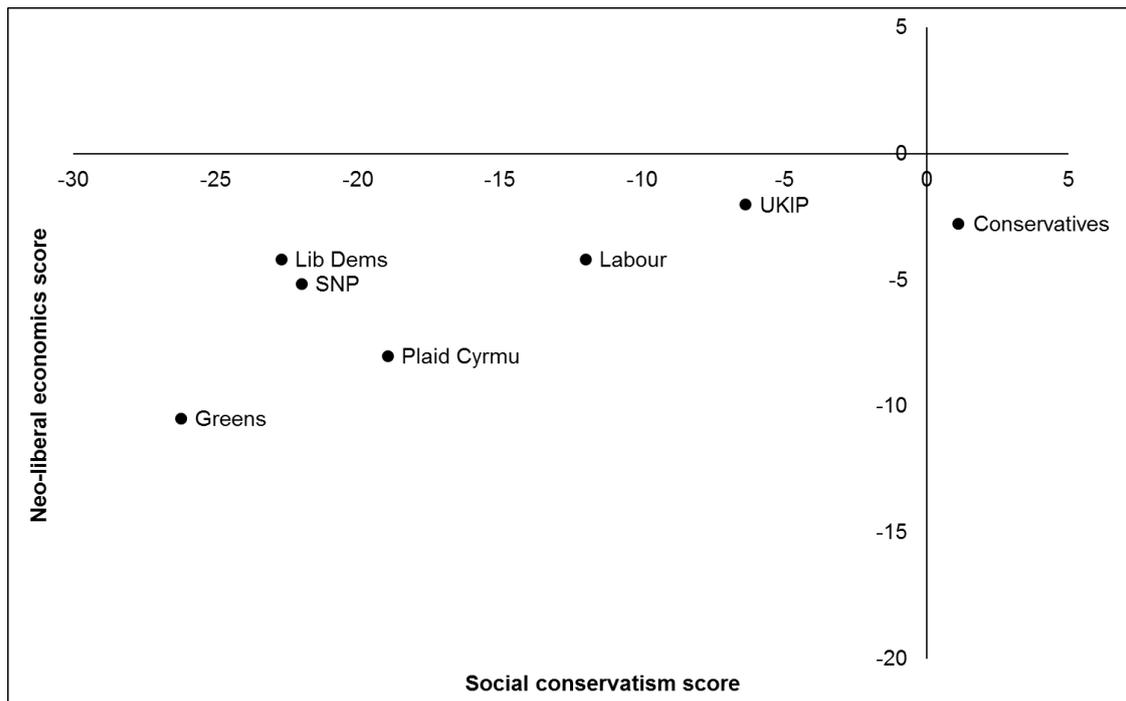
Source: Volkens et al. 2015

FIGURE 7: *Support for European integration, 1945-2015*
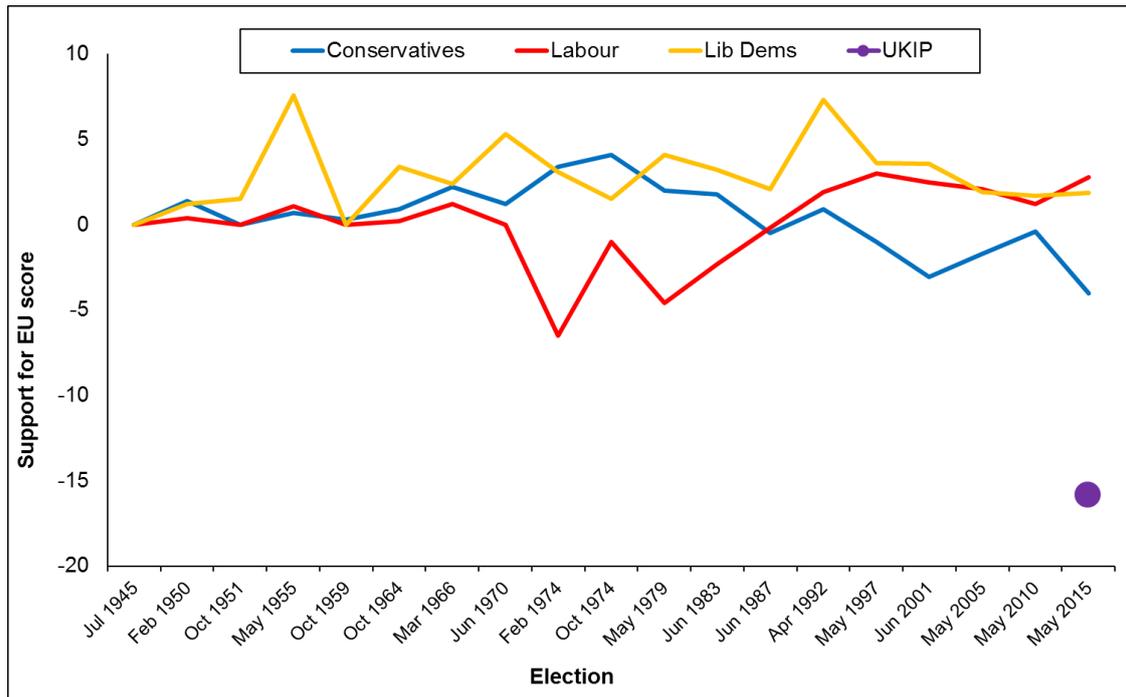
Source: Volkens et al. 2015

FIGURE 8: *Environmentalism scores, 1945-2015*
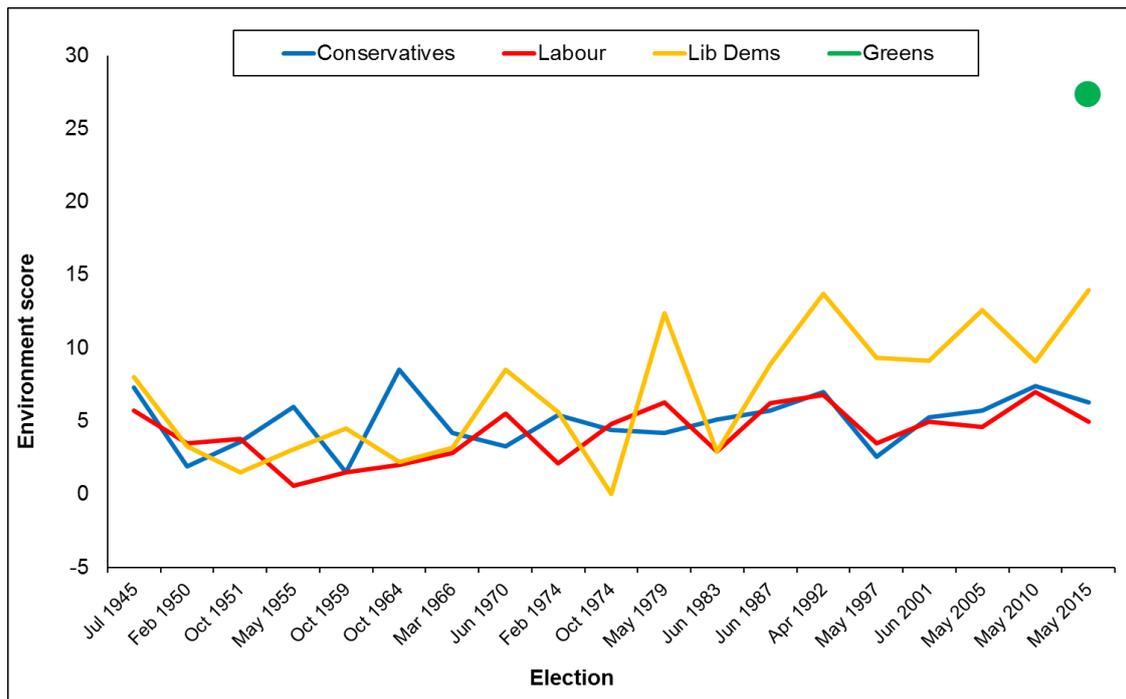
Source: Volkens et al. 2015

FIGURE 9: *Pro-devolution scores, 1945-2015*
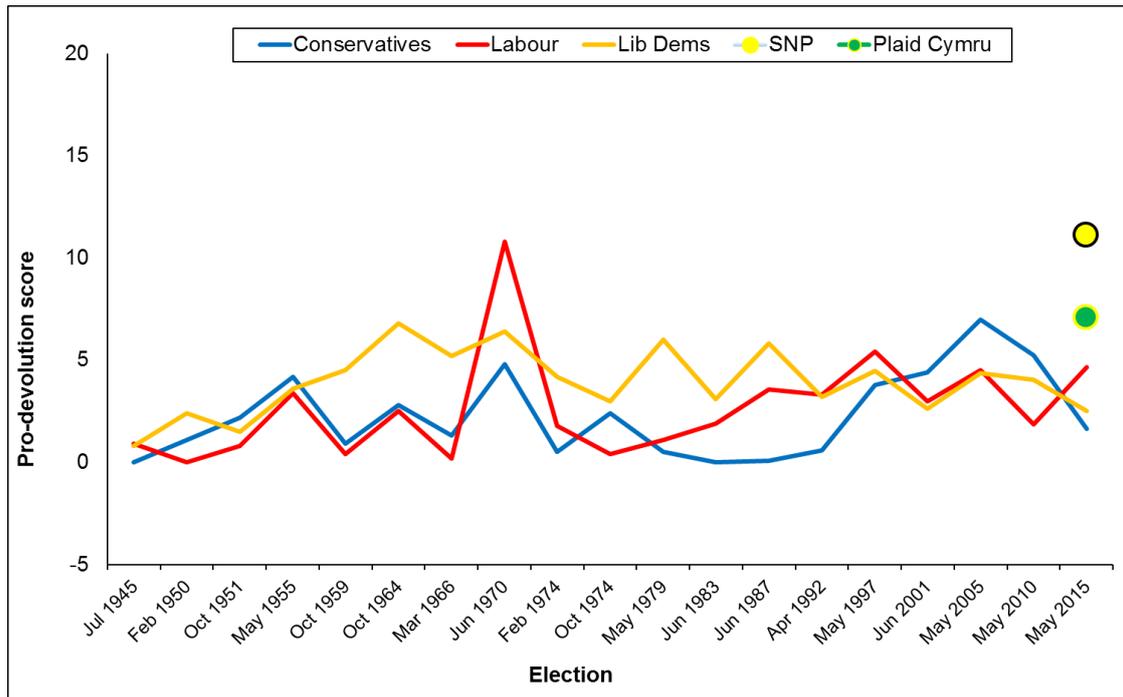
Source: Volkens et al. 2015

TABLE 1: *Party manifestos published ahead of the 2015 general election*

Party	Main manifesto	Length (words)	Alternate manifestos (by topic)
Conservative	*The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015*	30,231	England Scotland Wales Northern Ireland Business
Labour	*Britain can be better*	17,938	Scotland Wales Business Disabled Environment Women Workplace Young People
Lib Dems	*Manifesto 2015*	33,941	Scotland Wales BAME Disabled Environment Families Mental health Older People Women (video) Young People
UKIP	*Believe in Britain*	27,191	Scotland Wales Northern Ireland
Greens	*For the Common Good*	40,430	Mini manifesto Scottish Greens Wales Northern Ireland Greens Animals BAME LGBTIQ Young People
SNP	*Scottish National Party Manifesto 2015*	18,103	Women Young People
Plaid Cymru	*Working for Wales*	18,111	

TABLE 2: *Most salient Manifesto Project categories, 2015*

		Conservative		Labour		Lib Dems	
		Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
504	Health and Welfare: Positive	1	8.7	1	12.8	2	10.1
605	Law And Order	2	8.4	3	7.7		
404	Economic Planning	3	5.9				
411	Technology	4	5.6	7	4.8	=6	4.5
506	Education: Positive	5	5.2	8	4.4	=6	4.5
403	Market Regulation	6	5.0	2	8.1	5	6.4
503	Social Justice	7	4.7	5	5.7	1	15.2
110	Europe: Negative	8	4.6				
301	Decentralisation	=9	4.2	6	5.4	10	3.8
104	Military: Positive	=9	4.2				
601	National Way of Life: Positive	=9	4.2				
701	Labour Groups: Positive			4	6.9		
202	Democracy			8	4.4	8	4.2
414	Economic Orthodoxy			10	4.3		
501	Environment					3	9.9
201	Freedom					4	7.5
107	Internationalism: Positive					9	3.9

TABLE 3: *Most salient Manifesto Project categories, 2010*

		Conservative		Labour		Lib Dems	
		Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
305	Government Effectiveness	1	12.2				
303	Government Efficiency	2	8.7			1	10.2
605	Law and Order	3	5.7	8	3.8	9	3.8
706	Demographic Groups	4	5.4	5	5.9	5	6.3
504	Health and Welfare: Positive	=5	5.2	1	8.2	10	3.7
301	Decentralisation	=5	5.2			6	5.5
501	Environment	=5	5.2			3	7.4
411	Technology	8	5.0	2	7.3	2	7.5
107	Internationalism: Positive	9	4.7	9	3.6	8	5
414	Economic Orthodoxy	10	3.9	6	4.4	7	5.3
506	Education: Positive			3	6.7	4	6.4
502	Culture			4	6.2		
701	Labour Groups: Positive			7	4.1		
402	Incentives			10	3.4		

TABLE 4: *Most salient Manifesto Project categories for other parties, 2015*

		UKIP		Greens		SNP		Plaid Cymru	
		Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
110	Europe: Negative	1	16.5						
504	Health and Welfare: Positive	2	15.1	3	10.8	1	13.9	2	11.7
601	National Way of Life: Positive	3	8.5						
403	Market Regulation	=4	5.2	5	6.8	4	7.6	6	6.2
506	Education: Positive	=4	5.2	7	3.9	7	4.4		
605	Law and Order	6	4.8			10	2.7		
104	Military: Positive	7	4.7						
402	Incentives	8	3.7			5	6.1		
503	Social Justice	9	3.5	2	16.9	3	8.3	1	13.5
303	Government Efficiency	10	3.2						
501	Environment			1	19.7	8	3.6	=4	6.3
416	Anti-Growth			4	7.5				
107	Internationalism: Positive			6	4.3				
606	Civic Mindedness			8	3.4			9	4.3
413	Nationalisation			9	3.1				
701	Labour Groups: Positive			10	2.9	9	2.9	10	4
301	Decentralisation					2	11.4	3	7.5
411	Technology					6	5.7	=4	6.3
607	Multiculturalism: Positive							7	5.5
502	Culture							8	4.4

TABLE 5: *Most salient issues in party manifestos (CATA) and most important pre-election issues, 2015*

Relative salience	The manifestos							MII: the polls		
	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	UKIP	SNP	Plaid	YouGov	IpsosMori	BES
1st	Economy	Economy	Economy	Economy	Economy	Constitution	Constitution	Economy	Economy	Economy
2nd	Constitution	Constitution	Constitution	Environment	Constitution	Economy	Economy	Immigration	Immigration	Immigration
3rd	Foreign	=Jobs =Education	=Education =Health =Environment	Constitution	=Europe =Foreign	=Jobs =Welfare	Education	Health	Health	Health
4th	Education			=Foreign =Education =Health =Jobs			Jobs	Welfare	Jobs	Poverty
5th	=Health =Jobs	Foreign			=Health =Education	Health	Health	Housing	Poverty	=Jobs =Environment =Defence =Housing
6th		=Health =Defence	Foreign			=Education =Defence =Environment	=Environment =Foreign =Culture	Europe	Welfare	
7th	Defence		=Jobs =Poverty =Crime		=Jobs =Environment			Education	=Education =Housing	
8th	=Europe =Welfare =Crime =Environment =Culture	Crime		=Transport =Poverty				=Crime =Environ		
9th		=Environment =Poverty			=Defence =Crime =Housing	=Europe =Housing	=Europe =Welfare =Crime =Poverty		=Europe =Crime	=Constitution =Foreign =Education =Europe
10th				=Welfare =Defence				Transport		

Note: For full results, see Appendix Table A4.

Technical Appendix

TABLE A1: *The Manifesto Project's basic coding scheme for election manifestos*

101	Foreign Special Relationships: Positive
102	Foreign Special Relationships: Negative
103	Decolonization
104	Military: Positive
105	Military: Negative
106	Peace
107	Internationalism: Positive
108	European Community: Positive
109	Internationalism: Negative
110	European Community: Negative
201	Freedom and Domestic Human Rights
202	Democracy
203	Constitutionalism: Positive
204	Constitutionalism: Negative
301	Decentralization
302	Centralization
303	Government Efficiency
304	Government Corruption
305	Government Effectiveness And Authority
401	Free Enterprise
402	Incentives
403	Regulation of Capitalism
404	Economic Planning
405	Corporatism
406	Protectionism: Positive
407	Protectionism: Negative
408	Economic Goals
409	Keynesian Demand Management
410	Productivity
411	Technology and Infrastructure

412	Controlled Economy
413	Nationalization
414	Economic Orthodoxy
415	Marxist Analysis
416	Anti-Growth Economy
501	Environmental Protection
502	Arts, Sports, Leisure, Media
503	Social Justice
504	Social Services Expansion
505	Social Services Limitation
506	Education Expansion
507	Education Limitation
601	National Way of Life: Positive
602	National Way of Life: Negative
603	Traditional Morality: Positive
604	Traditional Morality: Negative
605	Law and Order
606	National Effort And Social Harmony
607	Multiculturalism: Positive
608	Multiculturalism: Negative
701	Labour Groups: Positive
702	Labour Groups: Negative
703	Agriculture
705	Minority Groups
706	Non-Economic Demographic Groups
Uncoded	Not placed in any of above categories

Source: Budge et al. 2001, pp.181-4.

TABLE A2: *Constructing summative scales using Manifesto Project categories*

The sum of…	Minus the sum of…
Left-right score	
Pro-Military (104)	Decolonization (103)
Freedom, Human Rights (201)	Anti-Military (105)
Constitutionalism (203)	Peace (106)
Effective Authority (305)	Internationalism (107)
Free Enterprise (401)	Democracy (202)
Economic Incentives (402)	Regulate Capitalism (403)
Anti-Protectionism (407)	Economic Planning (404)
Economic Orthodoxy (414)	Pro-Protectionism (406)
Social Services Limitation (505)	Controlled Economy (412)
National Way Of Life (601)	Nationalization (413)
Traditional Morality (603)	Social Services Expansion (504)
Law And Order (605)	Education Expansion (506)
Social Harmony (606)	Pro-Labour (701)
Neo-liberal economics*	
Free enterprise (401)	Regulation of Capitalism (403)
Incentives (402)	Economic Planning (404)
Protectionism: Positive (407)	Protectionism: Positive (406)
Economic Orthodoxy (414)	Controlled Economy (412)
Welfare: Negative (505)	Nationalisation (413)
Social Conservatism*	
Constitutionalism: Positive (203)	Social Justice (503)
National Way of Life: Positive (601)	Welfare State Expansion (504)
Traditional Morality: Positive (603)	Traditional Morality: Negative (604)
Law and Order (605)	Multiculturalism: Positive (607)
National Effort (606)	Labour Groups: Positive (701)
	Underprivileged Minorities (705)
Support for European Union†	
European Community: Positive (108)	European Community: Negative (110)
Environment†	
Agriculture (703)	Nil

Environmental Protection (501)

Anti-Growth Policies (416)

Pro-devolution†

| Decentralization (301) | Centralization (302) |

Note: The left-right scores are set out by Budge et al. (2001), p. 22. *These indicators are developed from the combined categories established by Laver and Budge (1992). In the case of social conservatism, the category of Government Effectiveness (305) has been removed. † The European Union, Environment and Devolution indicators have been developed by principal investigators of the CMP

TABLE A3: *% of respondents identifying selected issues as the 'most important' in*

YouGov, Ipsos MORI and BES pre-election polls, 2015

Categories	YouGov	Ipsos MORI	BES
Economy[1]	50	21	26
Immigration	50	19	23
Health[2]	45	18	14
Welfare[3]	38	4	na
Housing	20	3	2
Poverty[4]	na	4	6
Jobs[5]	na	9	2
Education	16	3	1
Crime	9	2	0
Constitution	na	<1	1
Europe	17	2	1
Foreign[6]	na	1	1
Defence[7]	na	1	2
Culture	na	na	na
Transport	3	0	na
Environment	9	1	2

Notes: 'Don't knows' are excluded. Because of different response categories,

identifying the most important issues from three sources required judgement. Thus

some of the pollsters' original categories were merged: [1] includes tax; [2] includes the

NHS; [3] includes pensions; [4] includes inequality; [5] includes employment, unemployment

and wages; [6] includes general aspects of international affairs; [7] includes terrorism.

Moreover, YouGov allowed respondents to chose up to three issues whereas Ipsos

MORI and the BES allowed respondents to cite only one. The effects of such

differences are minimal as our analysis rests on the rankings not the percentages.

The YouGov data ('The Sun Survey Results') came from an online survey

fielded between 27 and 28 April 2015 and based on a sample of 1,749 GB adults,

recruited from YouGov's panel. The question was: 'Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three'. The Ipsos MORI data come from its 'Issues Index April 2015'. The question was put to a representative quota sample of 982 adults (18+) at 167 sampling points across Great Britain. Interviews were conducted face-to-face between 10 and 20 April 2015. Data were weighted to match the profile of the population. The question wording was: 'What would you say is the most important issue facing Britain today?'

Finally, the BES data came from Wave 5 of the 2014-2017 British Election Study Internet Panel, which was conducted by YouGov between 31 March 2015 and 6 May 2015. In total 30,725 respondents participated. Within this number was a smaller core sample (18,020) that constitutes a cross-sectional group which is more representative than the full sample. The BES team advised using this core sample for cross-sectional work. The relevant questions asked: 'As far as you're concerned, what is the SINGLE MOST important issue facing the country at the present time?' The open-ended responses were automatically coded by using machine learning on the older surveys.

TABLE A4: *CATA-derived scores—% of quasi-sentences in each manifesto associated with each category*

Categories	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dems	Greens	UKIP	SNP	Plaid Cymru
Economy[1]	20	17	16	18	14	15	12
Immigration	2	1	1	1	3	1	<1
Health[2]	6	6	8	6	7	7	6
Welfare[3]	4	3	3	4	3	8	3
Housing	3	3	4	3	4	3	2
Poverty[4]	3	4	5	5	2	2	3
Jobs[5]	6	9	5	6	5	8	7
Education	7	9	8	6	7	4	8
Crime	4	5	5	3	4	<1	3
Constitution	14	13	15	12	12	32	31
Europe	4	3	3	2	9	3	3
Foreign[6]	8	8	7	6	9	2	5
Defence[7]	5	6	3	4	4	4	2
Culture	4	2	2	2	2	1	5
Transport	2	2	3	5	2	0	2
Environment	4	4	8	13	5	4	5

Notes: [1] includes tax; [2] includes the NHS; [3] includes pensions; [4] includes inequality; [5] includes employment, unemployment and wages; [6] includes general aspects of international affairs; [7] includes terrorism.