

# Law and order in the '90s: why Blair and Schröder implemented very different policies



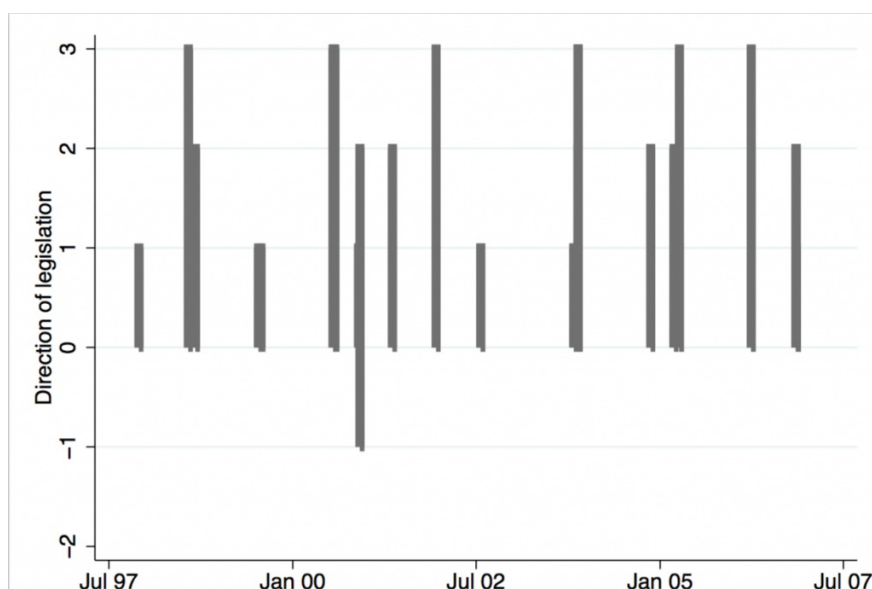
*Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder were both elected in the late 1990s. But whereas Blair's government toughened law and order policies in the UK, the German Social Democrats did not follow suit. [Georg Wenzelburger](#) writes that the ministers involved, as well as the balance of power within each government go some way in explaining why.*

It may seem unthinkable today, but social democratic parties were flourishing in many European countries in the mid-1990s. When Britain's Tony Blair, Sweden's Göran Persson, and the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder met at European summits in Brussels, they discussed mainly with Social democratic party fellows such as the Dane Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, the Dutch Wim Kok, the Austrian Viktor Klima, or the Greek Konstantinos Simitis. Although notable variations did certainly exist between countries, a big part of this success story of European Social democrats during this time was a re-invention and repositioning of their party family as parties of the "third way".

A particularly close relationship existed between New Labour's Tony Blair and Germany's Chancellor Gerhard Schröder who, in June 1999 presented a common manifesto entitled "Europe – The Third Way/Die Neue Mitte". Whereas [much has been written](#) on the social and economic policy agenda of these third way social democrats, the programme also included a less well-known but nonetheless pronounced law and order agenda. The new slogan was "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" – a soundbite which Blair successfully used in the 1997 campaign and the German SPD copied, making it a headline in its 1998 manifesto.

What is puzzling, however, is that the policy output differs starkly between the two governments. If one collects and codes data on the legislation adopted by the two governments, one clearly sees a sharp tightening of law and order policies in Britain after Blair took office with landmark legislation such as the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. In stark contrast, although the Schröder government did issue some tougher terrorism legislation after 9/11, the German policy output is by no means comparable to the policy path taken in Britain (see Figure below).

**Figure 1a: Adopted Bills on Law and Order in the UK**



**Figure 1b: Adopted Bills on Law and Order in Germany**



Note: the above draws on [The 'third way' and the politics of law and order: Explaining differences in law and order policies between Blair's New Labour and Schröder's SPD](#), published in the *European Journal of Political Research* (DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.12202).

### About the Author



[Georg Wenzelburger](#) is Professor of Political Science at the University of Kaiserslautern.

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