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# Core Political Values and the Long-Term Shaping of Partisanship in the British Electorate

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## Abstract

Party identification has been thought to provide the central organizing element for political belief systems. We argue in contrast that core values concerning equality and government intervention versus individualism and free enterprise are fundamental orientations that can themselves shape partisanship. We evaluate these arguments in the British case with a validated multiple-item measure of core values, using ordered latent class models to estimate reciprocal effects with partisanship on panel data from the British Household Panel Study, 1991-2007. We demonstrate that core values are more stable than partisanship and have far stronger cross-lagged effects on partisanship than *vice versa* in both polarized and depolarized political contexts, for younger and older respondents, and for those with differing levels of educational attainment and income, thus demonstrating their general utility as decision-making heuristics.

**Keywords:** Political values, partisanship, panel data, latent class analysis, cross-lagged analysis.

**Highlights of the paper:**

1. Advances our knowledge of the nature of modern political partisanship and the influences on stability and change in party support.
2. Advances knowledge on the impact of a key structuring principle through which people can make sense of the political world - core values
3. Uses high quality data and advanced methods to study the dynamics of partisanship.
4. Helps us to understand dynamics in British party politics.

## Introduction

Since *The American Voter* it has been argued that voters rely on party identification and impressions about candidate image when deciding how to vote, whilst ideology, values or opinions on specific policies play at most a muted role. There is indeed considerable evidence that partisanship shapes voters' political views. A growing body of studies stemming originally from Campbell et al (1960) and Converse (1964), and re-energized in work by Bartels (2002) and Green et al (2002) demonstrates the centrality of partisanship in shaping issue/policy preferences (Carsey and Layman 2006; Highton and Kam 2011; Milazzo et al 2012), issue-proximity (Evans and Andersen 2004), issue salience (Neundorf and Adams 2016), government performance (Evans and Chzhen 2016) and perceptions of the economy (e.g. Anderson et al 2004; Evans and Andersen 2006; Ladner and Wlezien 2007; Chzhen et al 2014). However, partisanship can itself be thought of as endogenous. It seems unlikely that people randomly attach themselves to parties.

In the British context social background attributes such as class were at one time assumed to anchor partisan orientations (Butler and Stokes, 1974; Heath et al 1985), but they have lost their power to shape party preferences in a depolarized party system where relevant choices are no longer provided (Milazzo et al 2012; Evans and Tilley 2012). They thus provide neither strong predictive power nor a mechanism for understanding why people gravitate to different political parties. In recent decades, however, various authors have argued that it is possible to identify core political values that are coherent and stable in which individuals hold fundamental and enduring attitudes towards general moral and political principles like equality (McClosky and Zaller 1984; Feldman 1988; Zaller and Feldman 1992; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Heath et al. 1994; Evans et al 1996; Ansolabehere et al 2008). It is argued that such values inform preferences across a wide range of specific issues. For Feldman (1988) these enduring core beliefs can account in part for the individual's

attitudes towards the more transient political issues of the day. This occurs because values provide a heuristic that can be applied to a set of political decisions. As ‘cognitive misers’ (Fiske and Taylor 2013; Lau and Redlawsk 2001), voters need only assess the relevance of the core value to such decisions rather than drawing upon political attitudes to particular issues on which information is often costly to obtain.

If people hold fundamental and enduring attitudes towards economic and political principles, such as equality, that influence their attitudes towards political issues, it is also likely that these values can shape their partisanship. Such central elements of political belief systems can be expected to influence party preferences as voters update their partisan identities to correspond with their values: if values “predispose us to favor one particular political or religious ideology over another” (Rokeach 1973: 13), it is plausible that they can predispose people to favor one political party over another. Consistent with this idea, when opinions on political issues are measured via multiple indicators of core values they have been shown to have powerful effects on party choice in cross-sectional analyses (e.g. Ansolabehere et al 2008; Bartle 1998; Evans et al 1996; Heath et al 1994).

These observed patterns of association do not establish whether values influence party choice or *vice versa*. If someone has a commitment to limited government they are likely to find parties of the right appealing and move in that direction over time, while someone who believes in big government should find parties of the left appealing. Party support should be updated to fit with core values.<sup>1</sup> Equally, however, partisanship could provide a cue that shifts responses on values over time, with Labour supporters becoming, for example, more

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘core values’ and ‘ideology’ can be used interchangeably to denote an overarching or underlying orientation, which summarizes important areas of voters’ attitudes towards politics. We use the term “core values” to avoid confusion with the abstract, self-placement measures of “left-right ideology” commonly used in survey studies of electoral behaviour.

pro-redistribution, and Conservative partisans more opposed to redistribution if the parties themselves shift in those directions.

If, as we shall argue, core values are stable aspects of voters political belief systems they should lead to vote switching in response to perceived movements by parties either towards or away from valued goals. Given that perfect equilibrium is unlikely to exist at any point time – electoral politics is not a system preserved in aspic - the tension between core values and party signals provides the incentive to switch from one party to another closer to the core value held by a voter. What we propose is thus not precisely analogous to the thermostatic model (Wlezien 1995; Wlezien and Soroka 2005) of a responsive electorate in which the average expressed *policy* preference shifts in the opposite direction to government policy. Instead we propose that voters will sort themselves by switching their *party* preference in response to such party movements.<sup>2</sup>

The only study we know of that examines these dynamics of values and partisanship directly is that of Goren (2005). He examined a range of core principles in a multi-dimensional analysis of US panel surveys and found that partisanship had a stronger influence than core values in cross-lagged analyses. Goren's analysis suggests that, as in the Michigan model, partisanship is 'the unmoved mover' of values. However, Goren's analysis is of US voters and previous studies have indicated that partisanship has a stronger influence, at least on policy preferences, in the US than in Britain (Adams et al 2012; Milazzo et al 2012). There is also a long-standing debate on the extent to which partisanship is as distinct from vote preference in Britain as it is in the USA (Butler and Stokes 1974; Heath and Pierce

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<sup>2</sup> This is not dispute that voters' expressed policy preferences are likely to be influenced by the activities of governments. As a government moves to left, the electorate will probably on average move to the right. The thesis of a moving centre has been advanced fruitfully in the British case by Bartle et al (2011) for understanding election outcomes. However, fundamental to the core values approach is the idea that the stability of voters' core values is likely to be substantially higher than that of their policy preferences. It is this which leads to their switching parties rather than values.

1992; Sanders and Brynin 1999), which suggests why its relative influence might differ. We return to these issues in the discussion.

In the rest of the paper we develop and test the argument that core values dynamically shape partisanship rather than *vice versa*. We proceed by first examining the nature of core values in the British context and why these core values are likely to be more influential than partisanship. We also consider the extent of this disproportionate influence across political contexts and for different groups of voters. The empirical analysis examines the association between values and partisanship by following respondents over 16 years across multiple survey waves throughout the 1990s and 2000s and establish which has the stronger effects: core values or party identification. We show that core values drive partisanship and there is no significant reciprocal effect in both polarized and depolarized electoral contexts. Likewise, core values have strong effects on partisanship across the age structure: for both young and old values matter for partisanship, but not *vice versa*. This pattern also holds across diverse sectors of the electorate: not just among the affluent and highly educated, but amongst those who are typically less-involved in politics, such as the poor and less highly educated. Core values thus appear to provide a generalized decision heuristic that limits preference shaping by parties and can provide a source of political stability or change.

### **Core values in the British context**

Rokeach (1973: 169) argued that political ideologies are “fundamentally reducible, when stripped to their barest, to opposing value orientations concerning the political desirability or undesirability of freedom and equality in all their ramifications”. Consistent with this idea, analyses of attitudes in Britain have repeatedly found that opinions on issues such as income redistribution, government intervention and collective provision of public goods are

associated along such lines of freedom versus equality. The notion of core beliefs and values has been introduced to make sense of these patterns (Heath et al 1994). These core beliefs are not the same as an over-arching left-right ideology, as views on economic equality typically have little empirical connection with those on social and cultural issues. The latter involve distinct and often conflicting moral principles.

In the period we are examining, and for several decades previously, the axis of division in British politics is very much about redistribution, government intervention and free enterprise. In other words, it is about economic and political equality (Bartle 1998; Bartle and Stimson, 2013; Evans et al 1996; Heath et al 1994; Laver and Budge 1992),<sup>3</sup> in which “the basic logic of party competition in Britain remained similar to that which held in the 1950s (...) a predominantly left-right dimension of competition” (Webb 2004: 39). The Labour Party has generally been the advocate of leftist, redistributive positions, while the Conservative Party has a long-standing reputation for holding more right-wing, free market positions.<sup>4</sup> These values have been central to British political debate and public responses to it for decades. But are they likely to be shaped by party or *vice versa*?

Core political values are thought to develop early in the adult life cycle and to persist over time, transcending the influence of short-term political events and party changes. If values are stable there is less room for them to be influenced by partisanship. Conversely, the greater stability of values compared with partisanship should provide a basis for updating

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<sup>3</sup> In this respect Heath et al (1994: 119-120) noted that their second dimension of core values (libertarian-authoritarian) is harder to measure and less well-structured as a dimension, as well as being far less strongly predictive of political preferences.

<sup>4</sup> The rise in immigration from the EU in the last decade has made that a matter of concern to many voters, leading to its growing political prominence, its key role in the 2016 EU Referendum and an increase in the political salience of values pertaining to social conservatism. However, the potential for a reduction in levels of EU immigration provided by Brexit and the accompanying sorting of parties and voters occasioned by the Conservatives having firmly grasping the mantle of ‘hard Brexit’ suggest that redistribution and inequality are unlikely to forgo their central place in political discourse and division, even if other values currently have a magnified political presence (Evans and Melon 2017).



partisanship in response to political changes. In other words, influence should run from values to party not *vice versa*. A first step therefore is to examine the stability of values and partisanship. A second, is to examine whether core political values influence the updating of party identification or *vice versa*.

*Hypothesis 1: (a) core values should be more stable than partisanship, and (b) the cross-lagged effects of core values on partisanship should be stronger than vice versa.*

In addition to these general hypotheses, we examine potential conditioning influences on the relationship between values and partisanship.

### **Contextual variation**

In the US, panel-based research on the temporal inter-relationship between political attitudes and partisanship has examined the relationship in varying contexts. Carsey and Layman (2006) look at the effect of issue saliency on the relationship between attitudes and partisanship, showing that issues have more impact when they are salient (c.f. Abramowitz and Saunders 1998). Dancey and Goren (2010) demonstrate the impact of media attention in accentuating the strength of updating between issues and partisanship. While Highton and Kam (2011) find that issue polarization influences the direction of influence in updating beliefs: Issue convergence appears to weaken the effect of issues on partisanship as it strips away the relevance of issue positions to party choice.

In the British case, the main parties ideologically converged in the mid/late 1990s (Budge 1999; Bara and Budge 2001, Bara 2006), as well as converging in their social composition (Heath 2015, 2016). This suggests that the impact of issues on partisanship should weaken in a more depolarized context. Milazzo et al (2012) find that the effects of

issues on partisanship declined over time as the British party system depolarized. However, most of these studies examine attitudes towards potentially transient political issues of the day rather than underlying values. To the degree that core values are more central elements of political belief systems than partisanship, they should function as heuristics that provide a basis of party choice even when parties are not polarized. Coefficients generally may be of weaker magnitude, but the strength of influence of core values *relative to that of partisanship* should persist.

Most of the period covered by the BHPS has been characterized by similarity between the main parties in their respective positions on inequality and redistribution, as ‘New Labour’ muddied the ground between itself and the Conservatives and thus weakened the distinctiveness of their signals to voters (Green 2007; Green and Hobolt 2008; Adams et al 2012). However, the period before 1997 was marked by larger differences between the main parties. The 1997 election represented a step change in perceptions of party convergence (Budge 1999; Bara and Budge 2001; Evans and Tilley 2017). To examine the contextual robustness of the relative impact of values on partisanship we can therefore compare models for the period before the 1997 election with those for 1997 onwards. Although we might expect to see generally weaker effects in the latter, depolarized context, core values should still be relatively more stable and have relatively stronger cross-lagged effects than partisanship.

*Hypothesis 2: in both more and less polarized contexts (a) core values should be more stable than partisanship and (b) the cross-lagged effects of core values on partisanship should be stronger than vice versa.*

## Variation by voter characteristics

***Younger and older voters.*** Central to an understanding of the relative centrality of values and partisanship to political beliefs is the timing of their emergence in someone's political understanding. If attitudes are well-formed – as indicated by their stability – at an earlier point in adult political socialization they are more likely to influence the adoption of attitudes formed at a later point (Abramson 1979; Jennings 1989; Alwin and Krosnick 1991). If partisanship precedes and influences someone's values we would expect to see evidence of its cognitive presence earlier in the life cycle. If values influence partisanship then we would expect them to stabilize earlier and condition responses to partisan cues.

*Hypothesis 3: (a) core values should be more stable than partisanship at an earlier age, and (b) the cross-lagged effects of core values on partisanship should be stronger than vice versa.*

***More or less educated voters.*** If core values are widespread and meaningful we would expect them to be consequential for partisanship throughout the electorate. Both 'sophisticated' and 'unsophisticated' voters should hold values independently of partisan cues. So although we could expect the less politically aware to have less stable core values than the more aware (Bartle 2000), those values are still likely to be relatively more stable than, and influential on, partisanship than *vice versa*. Not only can political sophisticates be expected to bring their partisan attachments into line with their values, so can the politically unsophisticated. We test this by using educational level as a proxy for political sophistication to examine the relative impact of core values and partisanship among politically informed and uninformed voters.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This is a particularly interesting test of the relevance of values as partisanship has been argued by some to be a more important heuristic for less politically aware voters who do not want to expend the extensive costs in time and cognitive involvement required to make sense of politics. In comparison with uninformed voters, politically aware citizens are more interested in politics, follow debates, and are more likely to update partisanship in line with their values (Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012; Zaller 1992). On this account, there should be an interaction between level of political sophistication and direction of influence.

*Hypothesis 4: The (a) stability and (b) strength of the cross-lagged effects of core values on partisanship will be stronger than vice versa across regardless of level of education.*

***The rich and the poor.*** In addition to their appeal to the less politically involved, we might also expect core values that concern, specifically, inequality and redistribution to provide a heuristic that shapes the political preferences of voters across income levels. Income inequality is likely to make these core values relevant to political preference formation via a desire for redistribution by the poor, and endorsement of the free market and opposition to redistribution by the wealthy. Redistribution taps into the concerns of both rich and poor, even if in opposing ways (Meltzer and Richard 1981). It is perhaps not surprising then that analyses using very similar instruments to the core values operationalized here find stable and persisting divisions between income groups on redistribution, even when parties themselves have de-polarized on these issues (Evans and Tilley 2012).

*Hypothesis 5: The (a) stability and (b) strength of the cross-lagged effects of core values on partisanship will be stronger than vice versa across levels of income.*

## **Method**

### ***Data***

As we are interested in the long-term relationship between individual's party identification and their core values we use panel data that tracks individual-level changes over an extensive time period. For this we use data from the British Household Panel Study (BHPS), an annual face-to-face, stratified random sample survey of occupants of British households that began

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in 1991.<sup>6</sup> Besides numerous questions on the socio-economic status of households and individuals, the BHPS asks respondents' partisanship. The survey also includes a six-item socialist/laissez faire scale of core values developed by Heath et al. (1994) in seven waves between 1991 and 2007.<sup>7</sup> This extensive time-coverage gives us the opportunity to analyze the individual-level dynamics of core values and party identification across a lengthy period in British politics.

The BHPS contains respondents from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but we restrict our sample to respondents domiciled in England. The 'two-party-plus' system pitting Labour against the Conservatives with the Liberal Democrats as the main minor party operates in pure form only in England. Elsewhere, parties focused on nationalist concerns make the choice set more complex. The number of observations is also reduced for model estimation purposes by only including those respondents that took part in at least three waves.<sup>8</sup> This leaves 7,582 respondents of which 80% entered the first wave of the panel in 1991.

### ***Measuring core political values***

The labels 'left' and 'right' (or 'liberal' and 'conservative') can be employed as shortcuts that help citizens connect their underlying ideological/value predisposition to specific policy preferences (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989). Similarly, political parties and commentators use these labels to describe whole packages of policies (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al 2006). However, it is unclear how respondents interpret

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<sup>6</sup> More information on the BHPS is available at: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/survey/bhps>.

<sup>7</sup> The years in which the battery of questions was included are 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2004, and 2007. Waves in which the values items were not asked were excluded from the analysis.

<sup>8</sup> Some 46% of our respondents took part in all seven waves in which the ideology items were asked. Another 19% only missed one wave. Less than 10% of the respondents in our final model have only three valid responses. The model can be viewed as a hierarchical setup with responses nested within individuals. Missing responses mean less information per individual, but maximum likelihood estimates are still consistent.

such labels, so we do not measure them by asking people whether they are ‘left-wing’ or ‘right-wing’<sup>9</sup>, but instead use six observed indicators that refer to examples of either a left or right-wing value position. In this we follow, for example, Ansolabehere et al. (2008) who use multiple survey items to measure latent dimensions of values and beliefs, and demonstrate their predictive validity for vote choice in U.S. Presidential (Ansolabehere et al 2008) and Congressional elections (Ansolabehere *et al* 2006).

Heath and his colleagues (1994) developed and validated a scale to measure core values by drawing up a list of items designed to cover the main theoretical components of the core ‘socialist versus laissez faire’ value domain.<sup>10</sup> To measure socialist/laissez-faire values they designed items to tap into collectivism and individualism, government intervention and free enterprise, and economic and political equality. These items were asked in an agree/disagree format with five response categories. Since the aim was to design scales that could be used over a period of many years, the items did not address topical policy issues, but were framed as questions about general principles that could be asked in future studies when the specific political issues of the day might have changed. Most items were designed specifically for the scale. The items in the final six-item, core values scale were obtained via an item selection procedure designed to tap into collectivism and individualism, government intervention and free enterprise, and economic and political equality while maintaining acceptable levels of inter-item reliability. This scale was consequently included in multiple waves of the BHPS, where respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed

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<sup>9</sup> Heath et al (1994) demonstrated that left-right self-placement had lower levels of stability and weaker predictive validity than the core values scale, especially among less educated respondents.

<sup>10</sup> Heath et al (1994) also developed a libertarian-authoritarian values scale. However, because of the relatively minor political importance of libertarian-authoritarian values in the years covered by the BHPS, it did not include the scale in any of its waves.

(strongly agree 1; agree 2, neither agree nor disagree 3; disagree 4; strongly disagree 5)<sup>11</sup> with the following statements:

- A: Ordinary people get their fair share of the nation's wealth (reversed)
- B: Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership
- C: There is one law for the rich and one for the poor
- D: Private enterprise is the best way to solve Britain's economic problems (reversed)
- E: It is Government's responsibility to provide a job for everyone who wants one
- F: Strong trade unions are needed to protect employees working conditions and wages

### ***Measuring party identification***

In each wave respondents receive the following question battery: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party?" Respondents who answer "yes" are asked "which one". Respondents who answer "no" are asked two follow-up questions that first ask if they think of themselves as "a little closer to one political party than to the others." If they still reply "no", they are asked "if there was a General Election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support." In keeping with much of the literature (Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994; Green et al. 2002), we only consider as partisans those who responded "yes" to the first two questions, excluding respondents who only express support for a party in the event of an election. At each time point, respondents are assigned to the following: (1) Labour; (2) Conservative; or (3) not supporting any of the major parties. This latter category includes 43% of the respondents: 9% identify with the Liberal Democrats; 1% with any of the other smaller parties; and 33% have

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<sup>11</sup> Answers were coded so that 1 equals the most left-wing, and 5 the most right-wing response. Exploratory factor analysis confirms they load on only one factor. The items have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.65, indicating a reasonably high degree of inter-item correlation.

no party identity. As shown in Appendix 1, analyses distinguishing Liberal Democrats produce substantively the same results.

### ***Measurement of conditioning variables and controls***

Numerous analyses of British Election Survey data (cf. Butler and Stokes 1974; Heath et al 1991; Heath et al 1994; Evans et al 1996) suggest that a range of socio-demographic characteristics are important for capturing individual differences in both party support and values, and we model partisanship and values as a function of these observed individual attributes. Age is coded as categorical, dividing respondents into six categories (15-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+) to allow comparison of effects across age groups. Income is measured as total individual annual income from wages and transfers. We use income quintiles for each panel wave, dividing the respondents in five groups from annual bottom to top-20% income.<sup>12</sup> Education is coded as respondent's highest qualification achieved. We recoded the original 13-category variable to a six-category education variable with the following highest qualifications: 1. no qualifications, 2. less than O-levels, 3. O-levels, 4. A-levels, 5. other degree (e.g. teaching or nursing) and 6. university degree. Other socio-demographic controls included in the BHPS include gender, social class and housing status. Social class is measured using the European Socio-economic classification (Rose and Harrison 2010). Besides using detailed occupational codes (based on ISCO88), it uses an individual's supervisory status and (for employers) number of employees to determine class positions. Housing status distinguishes between homeowners, mortgage holders, private renters, and those in social housing.

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<sup>12</sup> We use the imputed income data provided by the BHPS. For more information on the income variables and the imputation process see Jenkins (2011), chapter 4.



## *Analysis*

Although political values can be thought of as lying on a continuum, typically measured via additive Likert scales, we focus our primary analysis on their qualitative character. It is common to talk of left versus right and these constructs are likely to cluster responses to individual items accordingly. In the same way as we can examine whether people update their partisanship by, for example, moving from being a Labour to a Conservative partisan, we can examine whether people move from being left-wing to being right-wing in their value positions from one time point to the next. Since we also treat choice of party as nominal and are primarily interested in switching between left and right-wing political choices this approach allows direct comparisons of the strength of effects of values on partisanship. For the cross-lagged analysis, in particular, this degree of measurement equivalence provides important information for interpreting the relative strength of their effects.

For this purpose we use latent class analysis (LCA). LCA is a categorical data reduction method analogous to factor analysis.<sup>13</sup> The main feature of LCA is the ability to investigate relationships among categorical or ordinal variables assuming local independence between these indicators. This can be undertaken for the six values items to reveal their latent structure, and also for the partisanship measure. Numerous previous analyses of the dynamics of party identification have found measurement error to be endemic (e.g. Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994; Green et al. 2002). We can therefore specify ‘true’ partisan identification as a latent variable measured imperfectly by observed individual choices. This

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<sup>13</sup> The appropriateness of the LCA method is also suggested by tests conducted during the development of the items. When the scale was divided arbitrarily into three broad categories, the associations between the scale and other variables were more or less unaffected (Heath et al. 1994: 127).

results in a single-indicator latent variable model where partisan identification, the indicator, is measured on multiple occasions (Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh 2004).<sup>14</sup>

### ***LCA estimation***

Our latent class model of the latent value position of respondent  $i$   $\delta_i$  can be expressed as (see McCutcheon 1987; Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh 2004):

$$\delta_i = P(\mathbf{y}_i) = \sum_{c=1}^3 \pi_{ic} \prod_{j=1}^6 P(y_{ij}|c) \tag{1}$$

where  $P(\mathbf{y}_i)$  is the probability of a specific observed response pattern of the six indicator variables  $j$   $\mathbf{y}_i = (y_{1i}, \dots, y_{6i})$ .  $\pi_{jc}$  represents the probability of respondent  $i$  being in one of the discrete latent classes  $C$  ( $c=1,2,3$ ), and the local independence assumption is met by  $P(\mathbf{y}_i)$ , as the specific response to each single survey item by each respondent ( $y_{ij}$ ) solely depends on the latent class a respondent is classified into once measurement error is taken into account.<sup>15</sup> Each of our six indicators is linked to the latent value  $\delta_i$  via conditional probabilities, which are comparable to factor loadings in a factor analysis. The conditional probabilities of the model and the distributions of the three latent classes – leftist, centrist and rightist – on the six-item additive index score are reported in Appendix 3, which also presents further information on the LCA analysis. The latent classes distinguish the value positions very effectively. For example, 94% of respondent who were classified as left agreed that

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<sup>14</sup> As well as estimating the relationship between latent classes for the values scales and those for partisan identification, we include analyses using linear Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) estimation as robustness checks in Appendix 2. These model use continuous-level versions of our two key variables - core values and partisanship - by for example measuring party attachments use a 7-point scale ranging from strong Labour to strong Conservatives, mimicking the empirical approach used by for example Goren (2005).

<sup>15</sup> As we cannot directly observe the values of a person, we need to utilize manifest or observed variables that help us to approximate the ‘true’ political belief. However, these indicator variables  $y_j$  do not perfectly reflect the underlying latent variable they are supposed to measure. Hence, responses to these will have some measurement error, an expected mean of zero, and are uncorrelated with each other and the latent variable.

‘public services ought to be state owned’, while 63% of those classified as right disagreed with this statement. The remaining items have similar conditional probabilities depending on the classification of respondents. The modal category for each classification is always correct.

Table 1 presents the mean distribution of political values across these three different classes. It can be seen that 58% of the respondents of the BHPS are classified as centrist, about 20% have coherent leftist values, and 22% rightist political values. Table 1 also reports the proportion of party identifiers in each of the latent classes. It shows that the values classification is able to distinguish the partisanship of each class very effectively. The modal category of each latent class is as expected. For example, 58% of leftists are also Labour partisans, while only 5% support the Conservative party. The clear ideological distinction of partisans is also obvious for those with right-wing values. Those classified as centrist are most likely not to have a party identification or to support a smaller party.

**Table 1:** Latent values and partisanship (in %)

	<b>Core values: Classification</b>		
	Centrist	Leftist	Rightist
Estimated proportion	58	20	22
Observed party identification (PID)			
No/other PID	52	37	28
Labour	27	58	05
Tories	20	05	66

### ***Modeling the dynamics of partisanship and values***

We use cross-lagged models to analyze the dynamics of partisanship and values. These allow us to simultaneously estimate 1) the effect of previous partisanship on current values, while controlling for previous values and 2) the effect of previous value positions on partisanship, while controlling for previous partisanship. As we employ discrete categories – leftist versus rightist values, Labour versus Conservative partisanship - we use maximum likelihood

estimation in a series of multi-nominal logit models. The final cross-lagged model of values and partisanship (both treated as categorical latent variables) can be summarized as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
P(PID_i | \mathbf{y}_i, \mathbf{x}_i) &= \sum_{\theta_0=1}^T \dots \sum_{\theta_T=1}^T P(\theta_0 | \mathbf{x}_{i0}) \sum_{t=1}^T P(\theta_t | \theta_{t-1}) \sum_{t=1}^T P(\theta_t | \delta_{t-1}) \sum_{t=1}^T P(PID_{it} | \theta_t)
\end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
P(\mathbf{y}_i | PID_i, \mathbf{x}_i) &= \sum_{\delta_0=1}^T \dots \sum_{\delta_T=1}^T P(\delta_0 | \mathbf{x}_{i0}) \sum_{t=1}^T P(\delta_t | \delta_{t-1}) \sum_{t=1}^T P(\delta_t | \theta_{t-1}) \sum_{t=1}^T P(PID_{it} | \theta_t)
\end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

whereas  $PID_i$  in model (2) is the observed party identification of respondent  $i$ , which is conditioned on the observed response pattern of the six value position indicators  $j \mathbf{y}_i = (y_{1i}, \dots, y_{6i})$  and covariates  $\mathbf{x}_{i0}$  on the initial state of partisanship. This model specifies the nominal level variable measuring latent party support  $\theta_{i,t}$ , to be a function of partisanship as reported by the BHPS respondent  $PID_{it}$  and a level of measurement error that is assumed to be time invariant for reasons of identification ( $P(PID_{it} | \theta_t)$ ). The value position of a respondent  $i$  is measured by the latent variable  $\delta_{it}$ , described in model (1) above. The central parts of model (2) and (3) are the transition probabilities (partisanship:  $P(\theta_t | \theta_{t-1})$ ; values:  $P(\delta_t | \delta_{t-1})$ ) that account for the stability of our two dependent variables and most importantly the estimated cross-lagged effects of values on partisanship ( $P(\theta_t | \delta_{t-1})$ ) and partisanship on values ( $P(\delta_t | \theta_{t-1})$ ). As the models show, we control for relevant covariates

$x_{i0}$  predicting a person's (latent) partisanship ( $\theta_0$ ) and values ( $\delta_0$ ) when they first enter the panel.

## Results

### *The dynamics of partisanship and core values*

First we examine and contrast the stability and change of partisanship and core values, testing Hypothesis 1 (a). The estimated transition probabilities for the three latent classes of values and partisanship based on the models described above are shown in Table A3.3 in Appendix 3. They indicate that both partisanship and core values are relatively stable, with more than 90% of respondents not changing their partisanship or core values across waves. Leftists are slightly more volatile, with on average 15% of respondents changing their latent classification from leftist to centrist from one wave to the next, but the general picture is one of stability. The cross-classifications themselves suggest that values are more likely to have a lagged impact on party support than *vice versa*: About 60% of leftists in the previous wave become Labour supporters, while 36% do not identify with one of the two major parties. By comparison only 38% of Labour supporters at t-1 were classified as leftist in the next panel wave. Similarly, 70% of those classified as right-wing in t-1 identify with the Conservatives in t, but only 52% of Conservatives at t-1 are classified as right-wing at t.

The cross-lagged models, which results' are reported in Table 2, confirm these descriptive patterns. Here we report effect coding which, unlike dummy-coding, uses ones, zeros and minus ones to convey all of the necessary information on group membership (e.g. party support and core values). This allows us to directly compare the effects of all categories rather than having to set one of the categories to be the reference point. In this model, both latent variables are dependent (at time t) and independent variables (at time t-1) simultaneously.

**Table 2:** Cross-lagged models: Estimates of transition probabilities

<i>DV = Core values</i>	<b>Rightist</b>		<b>Centrist</b>		<b>Leftist</b>	
	<i>coef.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>coef.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>coef.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
Intercept	-0.89 ***	0.27	1.69 ***	0.22	-0.79 *	0.39
<u>Cross-lagged effects</u>						
Conservative(t-1)	-0.06	0.10	0.17 **	0.06	-0.11	0.09
No/oth PID (t-1)	-0.07	0.08	-0.06	0.05	0.13 *	0.06
Labour(t-1)	0.13	0.11	-0.11	0.06	-0.02	0.08
<u>Stability coefficients</u>						
Rightist (t-1)	4.47 ***	0.44	-0.90 *	0.41	-3.57 ***	0.79
Centrist (t-1)	-0.94 **	0.29	1.26 ***	0.23	-0.32	0.41
Leftist (t-1)	-3.53 ***	0.45	-0.36	0.28	3.89 ***	0.44
<hr/>						
<i>DV = Partisanship</i>	<b>Tories</b>		<b>No/oth PID</b>		<b>Labour</b>	
	<i>coef.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>coef.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>coef.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
Intercept	-0.61 ***	0.06	0.72 ***	0.04	-0.11 **	0.04
<u>Cross-lagged effects</u>						
Rightist (t-1)	0.80 ***	0.05	-0.11 **	0.04	-0.69 ***	0.06
Centrist (t-1)	-0.10 *	0.04	0.01	0.03	0.09 *	0.04
Leftist (t-1)	-0.71 ***	0.07	0.11 **	0.04	0.60 ***	0.05
<u>Stability coefficients</u>						
Tories (t-1)	2.48 ***	0.06	-0.62 ***	0.05	-1.86 ***	0.07
No/oth PID (t-1)	-0.66 ***	0.07	1.31 ***	0.05	-0.65 ***	0.05
Labour(t-1)	-1.82 ***	0.10	-0.69 ***	0.06	2.51 ***	0.06

*Significance:* \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Data: BHPS 1991-2007. Effect coding.

*Note:* The model includes the effects of socio-demographic covariates on initial partisanship and core values when respondents entered the panel. The coefficients are reported in Appendix 4.

Comparing the stability coefficients – which measure the lagged effect of partisanship on partisanship and lagged core values on current value – we find that consistent with Hypothesis 1(a), values are about twice as stable as partisanship. Table 2 also displays the cross-lagged effects on the updating of the two dependent variables. With the exception of two cases, party identification does not affect core values, whereas consistent with hypothesis 1(b) core values have strong, consistent and significant effects on changes in partisanship.

The direction is as expected: Right-wing respondents are more likely to identify with the Conservatives in the next wave and less likely to identify with Labour, and *vice versa*.

### ***Core political values and partisanship in polarized and depolarized contexts***

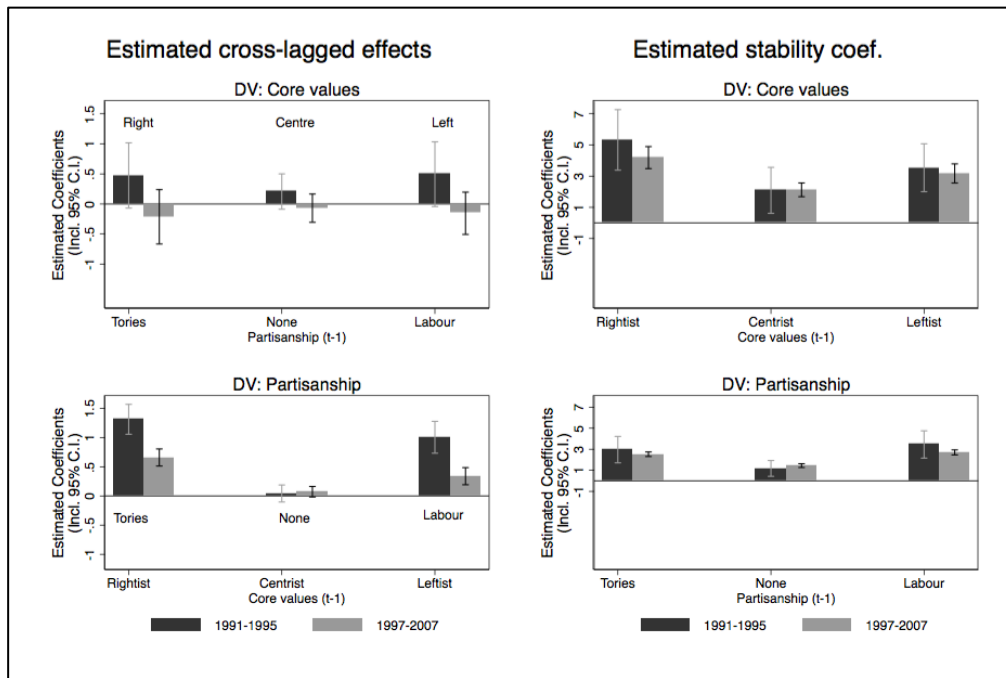
To test whether these results are consistent across political contexts we split the panel into two periods. The first period includes three panel waves from 1991-1995 and covers the Conservative government. The second time period includes the four panel waves between 1997-2007 when ‘New’ Labour was in government and the two main parties converged ideologically, whether measured using manifesto data (i.e. Budge 1999; Bara and Budge 2001; Bara 2006), expert surveys (Rehm and O’Reilly 2010); or public perceptions (Evans and Tilley 2017).

The findings are summarized in Figure 1, which graphically plots logit coefficients and corresponding 95% confidence intervals of stability and cross-lagged models for the Conservative (black bars) and Labour governmental periods (grey bars).<sup>16</sup> The two panels on the left plot the cross-lagged effects, comparing the size of the effect for the two periods for core values (upper panel) and partisanship (lower panel), while the panels on the right plot the stability coefficients for core values (upper panel) and partisanship (lower panel). For this and following figures we use different scales to more easily compare stability coefficients and cross-lagged effects, as the former are much larger than the latter.

The top-left panel of Figure 1 shows that partisanship does not affect core values. This is the case in both more (1991-95, black bars) and less polarized periods (1997-2007, grey bars). However, the lower-left panel reveals a clear difference between the two periods. In the more polarized context the effects are significantly stronger. For example, in the New Labour era characterized by depolarization the effect of being leftist on subsequent Labour

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<sup>16</sup> The corresponding numerical results can be found in Appendix 5.



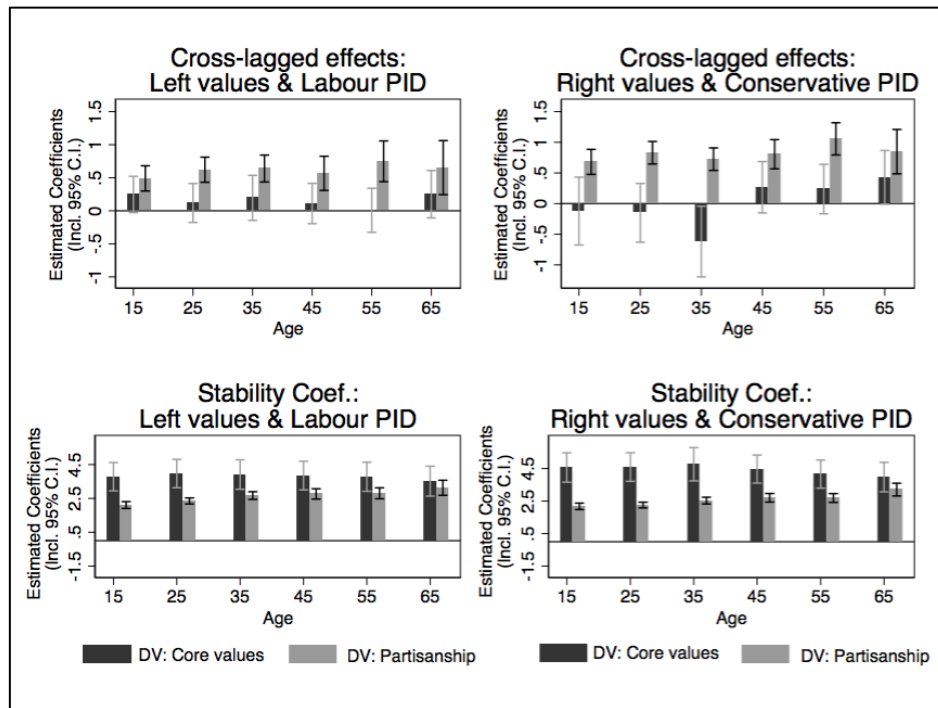
**Figure 1:** Cross-lagged models: estimates on transition probabilities of ideological and partisan consistent responses (incl. 95% c.i.). For full results see Appendix 5.

support is only  $b=0.34$  ( $p<0.001$ ), whereas the effects of leftist values were three times as strong during the 1991-1995 period ( $b=1.01$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Similarly, the lagged effect of right-wing core values on support for the Conservatives halved between the 1991-1995 ( $b=1.30$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and 1997-2007 periods ( $b=0.66$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In contrast we find no significant period differences in the stability of either core values or partisanship between the two periods.

***Sources of heterogeneity: Core values and partisanship across age, education and income***

We next conditioned the stability and cross-lagged estimates by age. The results are summarized in Figure 2, which shows that core values drive partisanship to a much greater extent than vice versa across all age groups. The cross-lagged effects of party identification on core values are jointly not even significant (Wald-test (df): 32.4 (24)). Strikingly, the stability coefficients of core values are also very similar across all age groups, which suggests that core values do indeed develop early in life and remain stable thereafter. In contrast, the

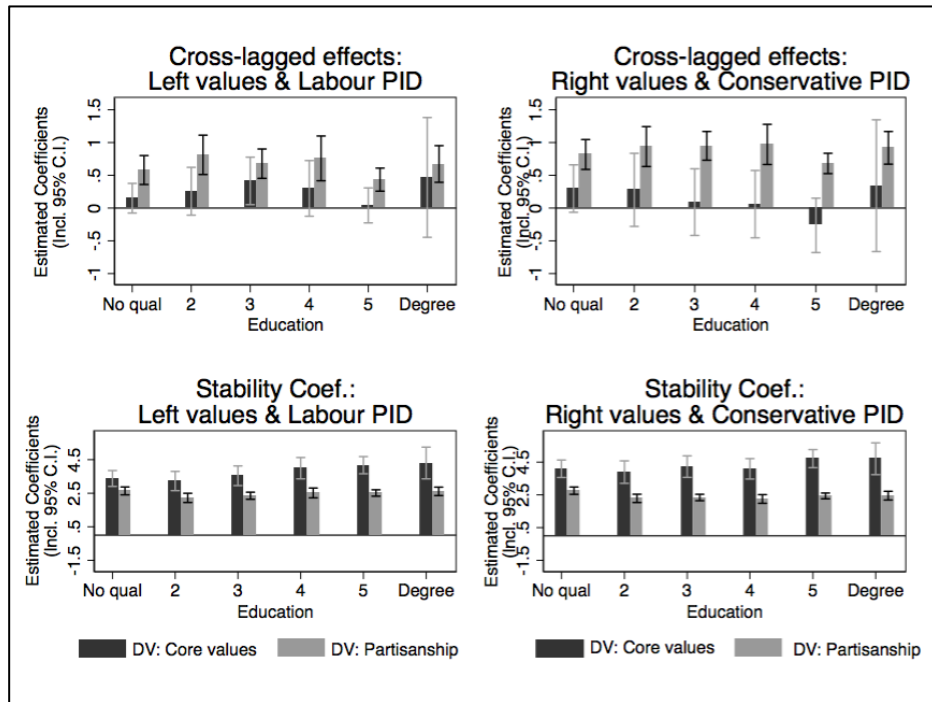




**Figure 2:** Cross-lagged interactions and stability coefficients conditioned on age (incl. 95% c.i.).  
(For full results see Appendix 6.)

figure shows the well-documented pattern of increasing partisanship stability with age from a relatively low starting point. We see for example, the stability coefficient in Labour support increases from  $b=2.11$  ( $p<0.001$ ) among 15-24 year olds to  $b=3.13$  ( $p<0.001$ ) among those 65 and older. However, with the sole exception of these respondents aged 65 and over, core values are significantly more stable than partisanship.

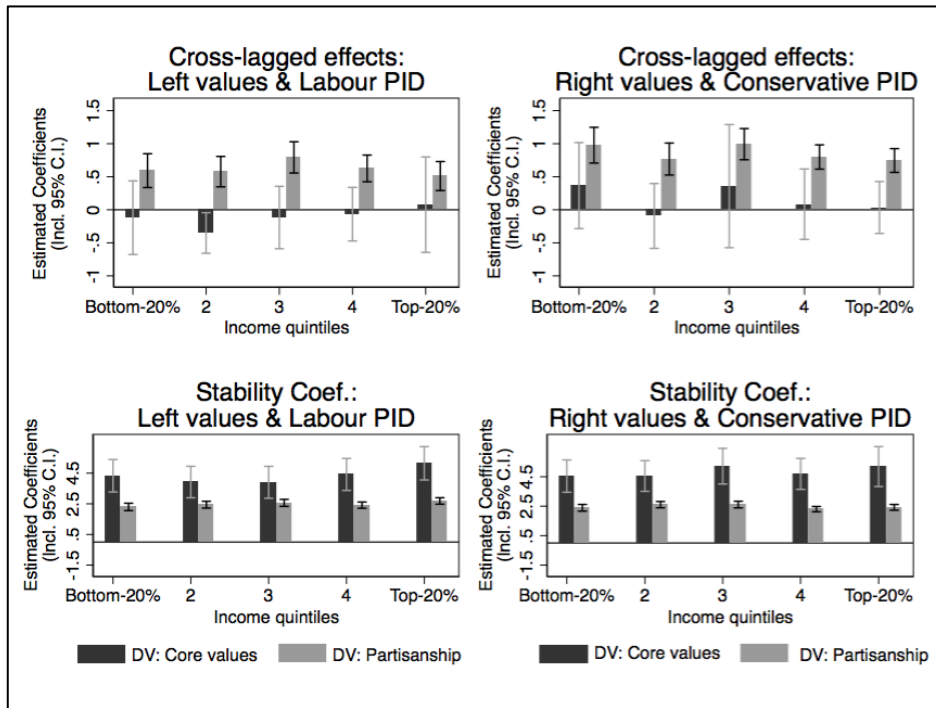
Finally, looking at the results for the associations between right values and Conservative partisanship and left values and Labour partisanship for educational position and income, we again see familiar patterns. Figure 3 confirms that the cross-lagged impact runs from core values to partisanship in all education levels: e.g. right-wing respondents are more likely to support the Conservative party in the next panel wave. The cross-lagged effects of partisanship on values are insignificant for all educational levels except those with less than 'O' levels, for whom the effect of Labour partisanship on values just reaches significance.



**Figure 3:** Cross-lagged interactions and stability coefficients conditioned on education level (incl. 95% c.i.). (For full results see Appendix 7.)

As expected (e.g. Bartle 2000), the stability coefficients (reported in the lower panels) of political values are weaker for less highly educated respondents. For example, the stability coefficient for leftist respondents is 4.32 for the highly educated and 3.21 for those with only primary education. However, even among primary-educated respondents the stability of values is higher than the stability of partisanship among the most highly educated respondents.

Looking finally at income (Figure 4), we again see that party identification does not affect values, regardless of respondents' level of income, whereas values consistently affect partisanship across all income levels on both left and the right, for Labour and the Conservatives respectively. We find only one significant effect of partisanship on values: Labour respondents in the 20-40% quintile are *less* likely to be leftist. All other effects of partisanship on core values are insignificant.



**Figure 4:** Cross-lagged interactions and stability coefficients conditioned on income quintiles (incl. 95% c.i.). (For full results see Appendix 8.)

The stability coefficients reported in the two lower panels also show that on both left and right core values are significantly more stable than partisanship across the full range of income quintiles. Even the lowest level of stability for core values is substantially higher than that obtained for the highest level of partisan stability. It is also worth noting that there is no clear decrease or increase in effect strength with changing income.

## Conclusions

This study advances our knowledge of the influences on stability and change in partisanship. It also advances our understanding of a key structuring principle through which people make sense of the political world - core values. The use of unusually long-term and high quality survey data to study the dynamics of values and partisanship adds strength to these claims. Ultimately, they help us to understand current dynamics in British party politics.

To elaborate on these points, our analysis provides powerful evidence that over the long-term values shape partisanship rather than *vice versa*. We draw this conclusion from cross-lagged analyses, which find that core values are more stable than partisanship and have a substantially stronger lagged influence on partisanship than *vice versa*. In ‘Conversionian’ terminology, we infer that core values are more central elements of political belief systems than is partisanship. Because of the size and scope of the BHPS these analyses are able to range across a 16 year period in which British politics changed considerably, establishing that the impact of values was predominant over that of partisanship in both relatively polarized and depolarized contexts. This pattern also holds for young and old, more or less educated, and rich and poor respondents. That core values were as stable amongst those aged 15-24 as they were amongst older age groups is particularly informative regarding the likely timing of their consolidation in political belief systems when compared with the later stabilization of partisanship.

The extent and quality of the panel data and the measurement of the key construct give us some confidence in these findings. However, the use of latent class analysis (LCA) was also important as it facilitated equivalence in the measurement of the key constructs of core values and partisanship by estimating them as latent classes. This enabled comparison of the cross-lagged effects as well as the stability of our instruments. By doing so, we controlled for the potential artifact of comparing a larger range of scores derived from a standard scale with a smaller one obtained from typical partisanship measures. Given this, what then can we infer with respect to the implications of relationship between partisanship and values in Britain and elsewhere?

Firstly, we shall consider how core values help us to understand current dynamics in British politics. Core values appear to differ from many other political perceptions and attitudes that, as mentioned in the introduction, have been shown to be more strongly

conditioned by partisanship than *vice versa*.<sup>17</sup> One key implication of the centrality of values within voters' political belief systems is a resistance to political 'preference shaping' by parties. Parties simply cannot 'lead' their supporters. As recently noted: "non-convergence of the British public's policy beliefs has an important implication for parties' election strategies: namely, that the electoral "market" for clearly left- and right-wing social welfare policies today has not changed markedly over the past twenty years" (Adams, et al 2012: 510; see also Baldassarri and Gelman 2008). Core values prevent parties transforming the electorate into a mirror of their own positions. Instead, voters constrain parties. Moreover, the broad nature of these findings across diverse sectors of the electorate – not just among the rich and highly educated but among the poor and those with little formal education – could put pressure on parties to represent the preferences of these otherwise potentially marginalized groups, depending on the electoral system and the presence of challenger parties.<sup>18</sup>

So, for example, although Labour moved to a more centrist position on both redistributive and social issues from the 1990s onwards, their traditional supporters working class did not, leaving the latter relatively unrepresented and 'up for grabs' electorally (Evans and Tilley 2017). The main consequence of this increasing value discrepancy between the party and its traditional voters was an increase in non-voting amongst poorer voters and those with low levels of formal education. A secondary consequence, as Evans and Mellon (2016) illustrate using BES panel data, was the failure of the political left to carry its traditional

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly Milazzo et al (2012) find that "the influence of British citizens' policy viewpoints on their party attachments is stronger—and the effect of British citizens' party attachments on their policy beliefs is weaker—than it is in the United States". They interpret this in terms of the higher levels of polarization between the US parties, which may well be the case with respect to policy preferences. However, our evidence suggests that in Britain core values are more influential than partisanship even in the somewhat more polarized era of the early 1990s.

<sup>18</sup> In this sense, Britain can be thought to have value-based pressures for a broader, more egalitarian form of political representation than the US. Researchers such as Gilens (2005) and Bartels (2008) have argued that US politicians respond disproportionately to the preferences of affluent and educated voters in part because they believe these voters are more responsive to policies than are the poor and less highly educated. The potential for egalitarian representativeness depends for its effectiveness however on such voters having credible alternatives, which can be hard to establish in a majoritarian system.

supporters with it as it moved to more liberal positions on social issues such as immigration and the EU (Ford and Goodwin 2014). This in turn led to defection over the period from 2005-2015 as voters switched to other parties, primarily UKIP, rather than adjust their core values to fit with those of the Labour Party.

Core values can also help us to understand current political events such as the outcome of the recent EU Referendum. If the electorate's preferences are less mutable by parties and partisanship than has sometimes been assumed, then despite all of the political parties - with the obvious exception of UKIP - being pro-Remain, many of their partisans chose not vote with them. To a substantial degree, even the partisans of the pro-Remain parties in the EU Referendum failed to comply with the choice the parties advocated (Curtice 2016).

The explanatory power of core values is apparent – even if not necessarily the ones examined in this study. We are, however, left with the question of why our findings differ from those of Goren, whose path-breaking work in this area indicated that partisanship is the primary driver of values rather than the reverse. There are several possible answers. Firstly, Goren's analysis was undertaken with US respondents. Over the years, various scholars have suggested that responses to questions on partisan identity have different meanings in the USA and Britain. Butler and Stokes (1969: 43) famously stated that 'the British voter is less likely than the American to make a distinction between his current electoral choice and a more general partisan disposition'. The assumption being that in Britain the two instruments are more likely to be measuring expressions of the same thing – party preference (Brynin and Sanders, 1993; Sanders and Brynin, 1999).<sup>19</sup> If in the USA partisanship is more clearly distinct from vote choice, it is in a sense perhaps more 'real' as an independent element of

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<sup>19</sup> Though, as Bartle (2001) has noted, this could also be an artefact resulting from differences in the way that party identity is measured in the two countries.

political cognition. As such, it is likely to be more exogenous. In contrast, to the degree that British party preference is less distinguishable from vote intention, there is more room for an alternative ‘unmoved mover’ of party preference – i.e. core values.

There is also a second possibility. Goren’s analysis was undertaken using the ANES panel study of 1992–94–96, a relatively short period covering just the 1<sup>st</sup> Clinton Administration. This finding might not still hold given the politicization of social values that has occurred in the 25 or so years since. It is tempting to imagine that Trump’s recent US presidential election victory might represent a historic example of the supremacy of values over partisanship, much as we have suggested was the case with Brexit. A re-analysis of the impact of core values in the US could be timely.

We need to keep in mind of course that this paper is only a first step at providing British evidence of the impact of values on partisan switching. It only covers the last 25 years or so, and it only concerns core values concerning inequality and redistribution. An important area for future analysis lies in the conditionality of the extent of the influence of core values *vis-a-vis* partisanship. It is possible for example that the well-known decline in the strength party identification in the final third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in conjunction with a similar decline in the political impact of social class produced a vacuum in the basis of political orientations that has been occupied by core values. In the 1975 Referendum, for example, consistent with the government position, Labour supporters voted to stay in the European Economic Community despite strong opposition earlier in the campaign (Butler and Kitzinger 1976). There was no evidence of such strong party influence in the 2016 referendum. Further research is necessary to help unravel the temporal and comparative conditions in which core values are more or less politically consequential and the extent to which parties shape the preferences of their constituencies. Also, of course, recent events on both sides of the Atlantic

suggest it might be fruitful to delve further into the partisan impact of values other than those pertaining to redistribution and equality.



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