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Through a different lens: researching the rise and fall of New Labour's 'public confidence agenda'

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Abstract

Until June 2010, public confidence in police was at the heart of the UK's police performance framework. In the preceding years, the public confidence agenda (PCA) was addressed through a diverse array of government-initiated programmes and concepts such as 'neighbourhood policing' and 'reassurance policing' that sought to enhance feelings of safety and inspire public confidence in police. Scholars, aware of the significance of fairness in police–citizen encounters and the central importance of visibility in building confidence and trust, began to examine the PCA through surveys and other quantifiable assessments of community safety to explore how cooperation and support for police could be encouraged, evaluating 'satisfactory' levels amongst citizens and communities and generally interrogating the 'public confidence' agenda. While there have been a variety of conceptual framings and methodological approaches to measure and quantify 'public confidence', scholars generally have located the concept of 'public confidence' as an objective condition; like the notion of 'publics', a 'phenomenon to be achieved, rather than a concept that perhaps needs unwrapping itself'. This paper traces the origins and evolution of the PCA. In this paper we advocate the use of a policy analysis approach to explore how 'public confidence' surfaced as a significant policy issue during New Labour's three administrations. The paper seeks to reinsert political analysis into what has become a de-politicised and primarily methodological discussion about the measurement of such a concept. We argue that the PCA is not a collective subject that has sought to express itself universally but was been 'called' into existence and moulded by New Labour in order to construct a useful policy domain.

Introduction: researching New Labour's public confidence agenda (PCA)

In this paper we attempt to trace the origins, evolution and nature of what we define as the PCA policy frame. To do so we have drawn upon an elite policy analysis approach to explore how 'public confidence' surfaced as a 'noisy' policy domain and to endeavour to reinsert political analysis into what has become a de-politicised, primarily methodological discussion about the measurement of such a concept. Public policy analysis has become considerably more sophisticated and multi-faceted during the past decade as it has become the site of interest of scholars from a variety of disciplines. Anthropologists such as Wedel et al. (<u>2005 Wedel , J.R.</u> , et al. , 2005 . Toward an anthropology of public policy . Annals of the American academy of political and social science , 600 (1), 30 – 51 ., p. 38) have argued that conventional policy analysis:

… continues to operate within a positivistic paradigm that treats policy as a reified entity and an unanalyzed given, seldom questioning the conceptual or cultural basis of its own analytic assumptions … there is also a tendency to view policy, if not as a linear process, then as a neat, logical, orderly, and rational set of flows and procedures that more rationally and systematically from formulation and design to execution and evaluation.

The key task is 'studying through' from the source of a given policy, including justificatory discourses, prescriptions and programmes, through to those affected by the policies (Wedel et al. <u>2005 Wedel , J.R.</u> , et al. , 2005 . Toward an anthropology of public policy . Annals of the American academy of political and social science , 600 (1), 30 – 51 ., pp. 39–40). Policy framing and 'enactment' rather than policy implementation is the focus.

The first New Labour government devoted a considerable amount of energy to reforming the policy-making process. Two Cabinet Office (<u>1999a Cabinet Office</u> , 1999a . Modernising government . CM4310 . London : HMSO .; <u>1999b Cabinet Office</u> , 1999b . Professional policy making for the twenty-first century . London : HMSO .) documents spelt out the need to go beyond the traditional policy-making process. The established model was premised on the theoretical idea of a policy life cycle involving: issue definition; legislative proposals and option analysis; law and regulation; compliance; monitoring; and evaluation and review. In

theory, each of these steps is iterative, with the whole process involving feedback mechanisms to continually improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the policy. New Labour acknowledged that policy-making was more complicated and messy than this. The effects of policies can be indirect, diffuse and take time to appear. In the first few years 'unwanted' policies remain vulnerable and can be de-railed in a variety of ways. Real politicking ensures that policies tend to be 'simultaneously watered down and fogged up. As a result, their impact is a pale shadow of the original ambition' (Barber 2007, p. 143). For New Labour:

People are becoming more demanding, whether as consumers of goods and services in the market place, as citizens or as businesses affected by the policies and services which government provides. To meet these demands, government must be willing constantly to re-evaluate what it is doing so as to produce policies that really deal with problems; that are forward-looking and shaped by the evidence rather than a response to short-term pressures; that tackle causes not symptoms; that are measured by results rather than activity; that are flexible and innovative rather than closed and bureaucratic; and that promote compliance rather than avoidance or fraud. To meet people's rising expectations, policy making must also be a process of continuous learning and improvement. (Cabinet Office 1999a Cabinet Office , 1999a . Modernising government . CM4310 . London : HMSO ., p. 1)

However, sitting alongside this managerialist model of policy-making was New Labour's instinctual conceptualisation of policy-making as a form of high-profile political marketing defined by impression management and spin (see Lees-Marshment 2009 Lees-Marshment, J. 2009. Political marketing, London: Routledge. , De Landsheer et al. 2010 De Landsheer, C., De Vries, P. and Vertessen, D. 2010. Political impression management: how metaphors, soundbites, appearance effectiveness and personality traits can win elections. Journal of political marketing, 7(3/4): 217–238.). New Labour was acutely aware of the role that the news-media could play in running agenda-setting campaigns around issues which posed questions about government power and legitimacy. The result was a policy-scape defined by unremitting reform. We would argue that New Labour's PCA provides us with a classic case study of both attempted evidence-led policy-making and political marketing.

• In this paper, we track the emergence of New Labour's PCA through the following key policy texts between 1997 and 2010.

- Home Office (2001 Home Office , 2001 . Policing a new century: a blueprint for reform . London : The Stationary Office , CM5326 .) Policing a new century: a blueprint for reform. London, The Stationary Office, CM5326, (White Paper).

- Home Office (2003b Home Office , 2003b . Policing: building safer communities together . Green Paper . London : HMSO .) Policing: building safer communities together, (Green Paper), London, HMSO.

- Home Office (2003a Home Office , 2003a . Respect and responsibility: taking a stand against anti-social behaviour . London : Home Office . (March) CM 5778 .) Respect and responsibility: taking a stand against anti-social behaviour. London, Home Office. (March) CM 5778.

- Home Office (2004 Home Office , 2004 . Building communities, beating crime . White Paper . London : HMSO , CM6360 .) Building communities, beating crime, (White Paper), London HMSO, CM6360.

- Home Office (2008b) From neighbourhood to the national: policing our communities together (Green Paper) London, Home Office, CM7448.

- Home Office (2009 Home Office , 2009 . Protecting the public: supporting the police to succeed . London : Home Office , CM 7749 .) Protecting the public: supporting the police to succeed (White paper) London, Home Office, CM 7749.

These cross-referencing texts are important because they do more than communicate official governmental policy. They seek to at the very least name, frame and shape a preferred 'reality' and set the parameters of consultation processes with a wide variety of stakeholders. There are of course always gaps between elite policy texts, 'real world' outcomes and the paradoxical nature of institutional life. But we are arguing for police researchers to give due attention to the vital discursive 'truth claiming' work that such texts 'do' in attempting to shift and reconfigure the terms of political debate. The working premise of our paper is that 'the public' that materialises in the PCA is not a 'pre-existing collective subject' that has uniformly expressed itself or put itself forward to be represented (Mahoney et al. 2010 Mahoney , N. , Newman , J. , and Barnett , C. , 2010 . Rethinking the public: innovations in research, theory and politics . Bristol : Policy Press ., p. 2), but was mobilised by New Labour to construct a 'policy domain'. 'Publics' emerge around particular issues and are 'sustained by establishing relations of attention' (Barnett 2008 cited in Mahoney et al. 2010 Mahoney , N. , Newman , J. , and Barnett , C. , 2010 . Rethinking the public: innovations in

research, theory and politics . Bristol : Policy Press ., p. 2). In addition, analysis of the ways the term 'confidence' is used in the government texts on police reform reveals a multiplicity of meanings. It is also notable that in the texts there is continual slippage between 'confidence', 'satisfaction', 'trust' and 'legitimacy'. We have also used New Labour political biographies, HMIC reports and the news-media to provide a contextual understanding for our reading of the policy texts.

The PCA as it pertains to the police has been 'identified' by New Labour as a public problem. As this paper will argue, such a labelling process provided a convenient context for policies that assisted in attempting to challenge the organisational autonomy and stated professionalism of police; encouraging the police organisations of the UK to engage with the service delivery agenda and other new managerialist principles and to impose various reforms on police that have traditionally been difficult to accomplish. The concept of legitimacy corresponds to the British concept of policing by consent and it is perhaps for this reason that the PCA has acquired what Blumer (1971 Blumer , H. , 1971 . Social problems as collective behaviour . Social problems , 18 (3), 298 – 306 ., p. 303) referred to as official legitimation – 'a necessary degree of respectability which entitles it to consideration in the recognized arenas of public discussion'. Following Blumer, legitimation comes through successful mobilisation which often involves constructing a problem as a 'crisis' that is seen as requiring policy intervention. In the case of police, successive crises in the shape of scandals and abuses of power; a perceived rise in the crime rate and a general legitimacy crisis centring on the perceived ineffectiveness of police, provided a fertile ground for the implementation of the 'deliverology' mantra of New Labour's Third Way (Barber 2007 Barber, M. 2007. Instruction to deliver, London: Politicos.). Enhanced public participation at the local level (Lowndes et al. 2001 Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L. and Stoker, G. 2001. Trends in public participation: part 1 – local government perspectives. Public administration, 79(1): 205–222.); crime reduction strategies that emphasised partnerships, collaboration and inter-agency approaches and civil renewal all served at some level to reduce the autonomy and power of the police profession that was perceived as obstructing governmental coordination and centralisation.

New Labour policy frame I: 'choking' public expectations

The overarching theme of the first New Labour administration was resource management, efficiency savings and 'Best Value' (for money) in service delivery in the public sector generally (see Needham 2007 Needham, C. 2007. The reform of public services under new labour, Basingstoke: Palgrave.). In its first term, New Labour backed away from competitive markets as a solution to public sector provision in favour of a 'mixed economy' and strategic 'joined-up' inter-agency approaches. However, there were also continuities in the form of new managerialist forms of governance: the valorisation of private sector management practices to promote entrepreneurship and innovation; and the prioritisation of service delivery through: challenge, comparison, consultation, competition and collaboration (see Cabinet Office 1999a Cabinet Office , 1999a . Modernising government . CM4310 . London : HMSO .). Public sector legitimacy was constituted through outputs, outcomes and efficiency rather than bureaucratic rules. Other continuities included the attempt 'to place public sector professionals on tap rather than on top, by standardizing practice and introducing more coercive forms of regulation and audit' (Boyne et al. 2001 Boyne, G., Kirkpatrick, I. and Kitchener, M. 2001. New Labour and the modernisation of public management. Public administration, 79(1): 1–4. , p. 2). Public service agreements (PSAs) were also introduced, focusing on improving service effectiveness and efficiency of services.

In opposition, New Labour had signalled that if elected there would be no specific police reform programme. The party made political capital out of its active opposition to the previous Conservative government's reform programme and its rhetoric of 'more-money-and-more-officers'. This was an essential part of Labour's electoral strategy to wrest 'law and order' from its traditional home within the Conservative Party; although, as this paper suggests, New Labour would continue much of the civic renewal rhetoric of 'empowerment' and 'engagement' that had become a significant part of the conservative agenda in its latter years. New Labour published a review to set the agenda for 'evidence-based' criminal justice policy-making to reverse increases in recorded crime (Jordan 1998 Jordan , P. , 1998 . Effective strategies for reducing crime . In : Home office Reducing offending: an assessment of research evidence on ways of dealing with offending behaviour . London : Home Office Research Study No. 187 . Available from: http://library.npia.police.uk/docs/hors/hors187.pdf#page=73 [Accessed 10 July 2012] ., p. 72, 129).

At the heart of the review, and indeed two other Home Office reports and two HMIC documents (Bland 1997 Bland, N. 1997. Measuring public expectation of policing: an evaluation of gap analysis. Police Research Series 24, London: Home Office Police Research Group. , Bradley 1998 Bradley, R. 1998. Public expectations and perceptions of policing. Police Research Series 96, London: Home Office Police Research Group. , HMIC 1998a HMIC , 1998a . What price policing . London : HMIC ., 1998b HMIC , 1998b . Beating crime . London : HMIC .) was the belief that the core policy challenge was to manage the surge in public demand for state funded policing services. Identifying 'public needs' rather than meeting 'public demands' was the preferred framework. It was imperative for forces to not just manage public expectations but to dampen public demand in a much more proactive manner. Put simply, an un-realistic public with low knowledge and low information needed to be persuaded that intelligence-led policing was a more effective and efficient use of scarce resources than a nostalgic desire for a visible police presence as represented by 'bobbies on the beat' (see also HMIC 1997a, Fleming and Grabosky 2009 Fleming, J. and Grabosky, P. 2009. Managing the demand for police services, or how to control an insatiable appetite. Policing: a journal of policy and practice, 3(3): 281–291.). In order to 'choke' public expectations effectively and identify the practical limits to service delivery, the police required in-depth information about public priorities, service gaps and quality of service failures. The existing public consultation mechanisms were deemed to be inadequate to the task (Bland 1997 Bland, N. 1997. Measuring public expectation of policing: an evaluation of gap analysis. Police Research Series 24, London: Home Office Police Research Group. , see also Elliot and Nicholls 1996 Elliot , R. and Nicholls , J. , 1996 . It's good to talk: lessons in public consultation and feedback . Police Research Series Paper 22. In : G. Laycock , London : Home Office Police Research Group , 1 − 8 .). It was hoped that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, would remedy this deficit among other things. The legislation required the police and local authorities to work together on localised crime reduction strategies that would be premised on in-depth neighbourhood crime audits and public consultation. Such direction extended the intent of the 1996 Police Act and was in line with New Labour's notion of enhanced public participation which lay at the heart of its modernisation agenda for British local government generally (Lowndes et al. 2001 Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L. and Stoker, G. 2001. Trends in public participation: part 1 – local government perspectives. Public administration, 79(1): 205–222. , p. 205). Implicit in the various proposals was the idea of sharing responsibility for crime reduction and community safety between the police and local authorities.

However, within three years of being elected, New Labour had its first full-blown 'public confidence' crisis in the form of official recognition that:

• the police did not enjoy the confidence of ethnic minority communities (Bradley 1998 Bradley, R. 1998. Public expectations and perceptions of policing. Police Research Series 96, London: Home Office Police Research Group. , HMIC 1999a HMIC , 1999a . Winning the race: revisited . London : HMIC ., 2000a, Macpherson 1999);

• the police were responsive to the Home Office's quantitative performance targets rather than 'quality of service' issues;

• there was a widening gap between how the public perceived the role of the police and how senior police officers perceived their own role;

• there was a disconnect between the police and the public over the importance of tackling anti-social and nuisance behaviour and providing visible beat policing (Bradley 1998 Bradley, R. 1998. Public expectations and perceptions of policing. Police Research Series 96, London: Home Office Police Research Group. , HMIC 2000b);

• negative interactions between police officers and citizens were widespread (HMIC 1999b HMIC , 1999b . Policing with intelligence . London : HMIC .);

• statistics were showing a rise in recorded crime, particularly violent crime, reversing a six year trend;

• police forces were making it difficult for the public to report certain crimes;

• police forces were manipulating and spinning crime statistics.

What is perhaps the most significant bequest from this period in terms of the focus on 'public confidence' was the Macpherson report (1999) requirement for the police to improve relationships with ethnic minorities and the decision to establish an Independent Police Complaints Commission. The official conversion to reform was justified by New Labour on the grounds of the need for 'increased public confidence and trust in the police'.

New Labour policy frame II: from public reassurance to the PCA

The second New Labour government prioritised public sector reform generally as a correlation for investment (see Cabinet Office 1999b, Rawnsley 2001 Rawnsley, A. 2001.

Servants of the people, Harmondsworth: Penguin. , Barber 2007). As Rhodes (2011 Rhodes, R.A.W. 2011. Everyday life in British Government, Oxford: Oxford University Press.) notes, the key development of New Labour's second term was the evolution of new managerialism into a 'delivery agenda' to be realised through a sharper focus on: top-down performance management; continuous improvement strategies; micro accountability categories; innovation and diversity in service delivery; greater 'bottom up' pressure from citizens through 'choice and voice', 'minimum standards', 'delivering against targets' and 'contracting-out'. The government emphasised that it would be the 'user' rather than the 'provider' that would be at the heart of a proposed revolution in public service delivery (see also Office of Public Sector Reform 2002 Office of Public Sector Reform , 2002 . Reforming our public services: principles into practice . London : Cabinet Office .).

Barton (2008 Barton, A. 2008. New labour's management, audit and 'What Works' approach to controlling the 'Untrustworthy' professions. Public policy and administration, 23(3): 263–277. , p. 264) has argued New Labour did not trust in the ability or desire of the public sector professions to be able to achieve this by their own volition, hence the growth in external audit and the use of threats and coercion to ensure compliance. The problem for New Labour was that public services were organised too much around the structure of the providers rather than the users; the intransigence of the professionals in the face of reform; a discernible bureaucratic inertia; a focus on inputs not outputs or outcomes; a risk aversion culture; outdated managerial and workforce practices; and ineffective service delivery. The problem was addressed through audit and evaluation processes inherited from the Thatcher administration that were founded on the 'perceived inability of professionals to implement the drive toward a leaner and fitter welfare state' (Barton 2008 Barton, A. 2008. New labour's management, audit and 'What Works' approach to controlling the 'Untrustworthy' professions. Public policy and administration, 23(3): 263–277. , p. 265); processes that worked just as well in other public sector contexts. The PCA coupled with more overt public participation rhetoric would serve to focus public service delivery in terms of the user and thus curtail much of the recalcitrance of those opposed to reform.

David Blunkett's appointment as Home Secretary in June 2001 signalled a broader and more radical reform agenda than any of his predecessors. Blunkett was one of New Labour's leading advocates of 'shock therapy' reform. Whilst in charge of education, he had used benchmarking league tables, targets and a proactive inspection regime to 'name and shame'

failing schools in his attempts to shape reform in education and schools. He had, as Pollard has observed been 'pointedly criticised for pushing as hard as he could from the centre to compensate for the institutional barriers on the ground' (Pollard 2005 Pollard, S. 2005. David Blunkett, London: Hodder and Stoughton. , pp. 248–250, 280). He would affect the same approach to policing.

Upon appointment as Home Secretary, Blunkett announced that a policing revolution would accompany significant levels of investment. It was accepted that policing was an area of public service provision where the 'exit' disciplines of market choice could not be used to give service users more power and control. In the case of the police, interventionist forms of accountability would be used to amplify the 'voice' of central government on behalf of the public. Blunkett (2006 Blunkett, D. 2006. The Blunkett Tapes: my life in the bear pit, London: Bloomsbury. , p. 282, 299) signalled his determination to break what he viewed as the police grip on the reform agenda. He was always frustrated that 'there were still no [policy] levers by which chief constables or divisional commanders could be made to do what the Home Office wanted' (Pollard 2005 Pollard, S. 2005. David Blunkett, London: Hodder and Stoughton. , p. 280). In addition, an initial audit had confirmed that there was no evidence that policies had actually been implemented or evaluated for effectiveness.

Police reform was inevitably crisis-driven rather than an incremental process. Headline-grabbing, 'sort it out or get out' announcements indicated that the new Home Secretary was determined to assert his authority over any chief constable who might be tempted to defend outdated and outmoded procedures and practices. To this end, Blunkett laid down several markers as evidence that he was determined to succeed where Jack Straw, his predecessor, had apparently failed. The political discourse had changed with the police being labelled as one of the few remaining public services that had resisted meaningful reform. This of course echoed the discourse used by the Conservative government in their unsuccessful attempt to reform policing in 1993. For Blunkett, the problem was not working out what the police should be doing, but to find mechanisms requiring them to deliver.

Through a relentless number of legislative initiatives, New Labour appropriated and transformed 'public confidence' into a heavily coded 'Third Way' signifier. Building the public's confidence in the police and 'changing people's perception of the police so that they feel they are on their side' (Blunkett 2006 Blunkett, D. 2006. The Blunkett Tapes: my life in the bear pit, London: Bloomsbury. , p. 685) were now major objectives. Such narratives were

used to attempt to re-set and re-structure public debate on the need for police reform and in particular stronger accountability. The PCA first surfaced in the 2001 White Paper (Home Office 2001 Home Office , 2001 . Policing a new century: a blueprint for reform . London : The Stationary Office , CM5326 .). Confidence had eroded because of a range of issues: public dissatisfaction with the levels of visible police patrol, particularly foot patrol; the impact of anti-social behaviour; high levels of public fear of crime; women's particular crime fears; victims of crime feeling unsupported; ethnic minority perceptions about disproportionate rates of police attention; public unwillingness to report crime; the stalling of reductions in crime; the problem of persistent serious offenders; low conviction and detection rates; and ineffectiveness in the management of public demands. The restoration of public confidence was deemed to be the key to crime reduction. The police needed not just public support but 'active public' cooperation to provide information and intelligence, act as witnesses in court and participate in local crime reduction schemes. This would in turn further reassure and encourage people to work with the police (2001, p. 22). Blunkett (2001 Blunkett, D. 2001. Politics and progress: renewing democracy and a civil society, London: Demos. , p. 3) insisted that:

In the end, it will not be the statistics on crime falling, or targets met for burglary or vehicle crime, but rather the difference felt in the neighbourhood and community itself which will be the judge and jury of these reforms. It is time to focus on preventing crime and protecting the victims, and to place the weight of society behind this drive to reform the police.

The White Paper (2001) argued that in order to improve public confidence there needed to be much better use of police resources. Maximising the effectiveness of the police required a performance management framework and an adaptable workforce operating with flexible work practices and pay and conditions. The White Paper sought to redefine the 1964 tripartite agreement in favour of the Home Secretary. Legislatively, it embedded the concept of 'public confidence' stating that it would be improved through: the introduction of an annual National Police Plan; the setting up of a Police Standards Unit whose role would be to identify and disseminate 'best practice'; improved training, leadership and professionalism and appraisal systems for police; new powers for the Home Secretary to intervene to suspend, retire or resign the Chief Constable for a lack of public confidence in his/her area; or to require improvement in performance; reform of police pay and conditions of service; making better use of police officers' time and skills, tackling unnecessary bureaucracy; extending the

'police family' through the use of a panoply of para-professionals to support the police in dealing with 'low level crime' and anti-social behaviour; and a new police complaints system. Under-performing police forces would not only be 'named and shamed' in league table form, but taken over by the HMIC and a new Police Standards Unit.

Performance measurement and accountability directives began in earnest to strengthen central control over police priorities and determine preferred policing styles. Reforms were couched in terms of meeting community expectations and public satisfaction with service delivery. The nationalisation of the PCA had begun. In July 2003, a 'National Policing Plan' was released requiring police forces in England and Wales to produce three-year plans which incorporated 10 PSAs with 17 key performance indicators; four strategic priorities with 10 core actions, 17 local actions and 19 more key performance indicators; six performance domains with 21 best value performance indicators; and three reform-priority areas with 51 local planning points. In producing the plans, police forces were required to consult local police authorities, other criminal justice agencies, crime and disorder reduction partnerships, youth offender teams, drug action teams and the new criminal justice boards, all of whom had their own multiple sets of priorities, performance indicators and targets. All of this was to work within a 'Policing Performance Assessment Framework' which required additional performance indicators under five domain headings. In addition, the Home Office issued statutory codes of practice for all forces. Perhaps, not surprisingly, the plan was criticised by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Police Federation that argued that Home Office micro-management would ensure that resources would be focused on hitting central targets across a bewildering range of networked activities rather than responding to local concerns.

In conjunction with a renewed legislative focus on anti-social behaviour (see Home Office 2003a), in October 2003, the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP) was launched. Understanding how the public experienced, perceived and felt about policing was now a critical task for police officers (see Innes 2004 Innes, M. 2004. Signal crimes and signal disorders: notes on deviance as communicative action. British journal of sociology, 55(3): 335–355. , 2005 Innes, M. 2005. What's your problem: signal crimes and citizen-focused problem-solving. Criminology and public policy, 4(2): 1201–1215. , Tuffin et al. 2006 Tuffin, R., Morris, J. and Poole, A. 2006. An evaluation of the impact of the National Reassurance Policing Programme. Home Office Research Study 296, London: Home Office.

). In addition, in 2003/2004, the British Crime Survey (BCS) question used to measure respondents' perceptions of their local police was changed in order to improve the quality of the data and to enable estimates at police force area level. This became the first BCS question to be used to measure confidence in the local police at a police force area level. This measure calculated the percentage of respondents answering 'good' or 'excellent' when asked: 'Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in this area are doing?' In 2004, an additional seven questions on public perceptions of the local police were added to the survey.

New Labour policy frame II: expanding the PCA policy domain

From 2003, a second wave of public sector reform was launched. Opinion surveys continued to show a 'perception gap' over major public services – a divergence between the personal experience people report and their views of the trend in the quality of services more generally. Members of the public tended to be satisfied with their own school, hospital or police officers specifically, whilst holding more negative views of the education system, the NHS and the police generally. Critics linked New Labour's 'command-and-control' managerialism to declining levels of public confidence in governmental capacity and increasing levels of public dissatisfaction with public services. 'Dead weight' performance indicators and targets were said to stifle diversity and creativity and confuse local democratic checks and balances. This was compounded by the fact that New Labour's response to regulatory failure was to add yet more punitive targets. Consequently, inspection/audit bodies were broadening and/or deepening their remit. As a result, a new generation of public sector managers had been oriented towards Whitehall's 'box ticking' requirements rather than delivering quality services. This, in turn, was breeding cynicism among the public, who viewed professionals and practitioners as responding not to their needs, but to the auditors and inspectors. This critique opened a 'new localism' debate on the need for the centre to 'let go' and devolve power to local government to work with service users in service design and delivery and neighbourhood governance (see McLaughlin 2005 McLaughlin, E. 2005. Forcing the issue: new labour, new localism and the democratic renewal of police accountability. Howard journal of criminal justice, 44(5): 474–489.).

New Labour's Green Paper (Home Office 2003b) and White Paper (Home Office 2004 Home Office , 2004 . Building communities, beating crime . White Paper . London : HMSO ,

CM6360 .) on police reform amplified the use of 'public confidence' as the anchoring concept. This was reinforced by a Downing Street report on 'citizen-focused' policing that emphasised the need to close the gap between high public expectations of and declining public satisfaction with the police (Office of Public Sector Reform 2002 Office of Public Sector Reform , 2002 . Reforming our public services: principles into practice . London : Cabinet Office .). The police were criticised for the inability to see the service through the eyes and experience of users. Responsive, accessible, visible policing were now viewed as central to cross-departmental initiatives ranging from neighbourhood regeneration and community cohesion through to countering the threat of terrorism.

The organising premise of the reform agenda was that a second phase reform was now possible because of record numbers of police officers who were supported by Police Community Support Officers; new powers and neighbourhood policing team (NPT) strategies that had impacted positively on crime and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. However, crime levels were still too high, the performance of police forces was variable, public confidence in the police was not improving communities, had little meaningful information about local policing, there was limited community involvement in local policing decision-making processes and the structure of local accountability was weak. The NPT initiative would be structured through: the installation of a 'customer service culture'; a performance measurement and inspection regime which would drill into public priorities and the public's views about the quality of the local policing service they received; the provision of local 'contracts' detailing service rights and 'report cards' about the performance of the local police; and the right of communities to 'trigger' a police response if there were persistent crime and anti-social behaviour problems. Many of the core accountability proposals were weakened or indeed withdrawn as a result of:

• having to work through an inflexible policy apparatus and confusing constitutional arrangements;
• responding to the organisational tension between delivering local policing services and regional and national level demands;
• reacting to critical incidents, for example, terrorist attacks, immigration and asylum scandals, race riots, high-profile crimes, recurrent crime waves and prison riots;
• the need to rebuild its relationships with police staff associations and police authorities.

An already perplexing policy-scape was further complicated between 2007 and 2009 with an unprecedented number of reports emanating from government, political parties and think tanks (see Flanagan 2008 Flanagan, R. 2008. The review of policing. Final Report, London: Home Office. , Herbert 2007 Herbert, N. 2007. Policing for the people, interim report from the police reform taskforce, London: Conservative Party. , Loveday 2007 Loveday, B. 2007. Fitting the bill, London: Policy Exchange. , Casey 2008 Casey, L. 2008. Engaging communities in fighting crime, London: Cabinet Office. , Home Affairs Select Committee 2008 Home Affairs Select Committee , 2008 . Policing in the 21st century . London : The Stationery Office (TSO), Seventh Report ., Muir and Lodge 2008 Muir, R. and Lodge, G. 2008. A new beat: options for more accountable policing, London: IPPR. , Sergeant 2008 Sergeant, H. 2008. The police and the public, London: CIVITAS. , Berry 2009 Berry, J. 2009. Reducing bureaucracy in policing, interim report, London: Home Office. , Blunkett 2009 Blunkett, D. 2009. A people's police force: police accountability in the modern era, London: Home Office. , Conservative Party 2009 Conservative Party , 2009 . Back on the beat . London : Conservative Party ., Mallen 2009 Mallen, R. 2009. A force to be reckoned with, London: Centre for Social Justice.). The reports started from a remarkably similar script. On the positive side: there had been record levels of funding with police officer numbers standing at an all time high; officers had been provided with a battery of new powers; and the official crime rate had fallen, with more crimes being detected and more offenders being processed by the criminal justice system. However key crime categories, particularly violent crime and persistent, prolific criminality remained unaffected and opinion polls evidenced significant levels of: public disbelief about the crime statistics; fear of crime; and public dissatisfaction with the policing of anti-social behaviour. Once more, the refrain across the news-media was that 'Middle England' had lost confidence in the police. The problem of 'public confidence' was re-framed as making the police democratically accountable for under-performance. Proposals emanating from reports published during this 'democratic deficit' period ranged from the democratic reconstitution of police authorities, the establishment of elected neighbourhood policing boards, the introduction of American-style elected sheriffs or police commissioners and the handing over the control of policing to New York-style elected mayors who would be required to present voters with a policing and law and order manifesto. In the meantime, in July 2007, the Home Office introduced a specific 'confidence' measure which would form the basis for PSA 23 on public confidence in local agencies in reducing crime and disorder and making communities safer. From October 2007, the BCS widened the reach of the PCA to include a further question to

measure public confidence in the ability of the police and the local council to deal with the anti-social behaviour and crime.

New Labour policy frame III: the PCA in a volatile political climate

During 2008 and 2009 we witnessed the third, and what would turn out to be the concluding phase of New Labour's PCA. In an unexpected move, in May 2008 four Chief Constables announced that they were abandoning the government's performance measurement and monitoring regime as it was distorting police priorities and generating unethical practices (Times 1 May 2008). Another Green Paper (Home Office 2008a) was published arguing that previous reforms had raised (1) public expectations of the police and (2) police expectations in terms of what they could achieve in service delivery terms. This government-orchestrated shift in expectations was deemed to be a policy success in itself and could form the basis for raising both government and public expectations of the police. The Green Paper declared that the government was 'freeing' the police from all central performance targets relating to crime and detection except for one: the requirement to boost levels of 'public confidence' as defined in the PSA indicator. The Green Paper floated the 'big idea' of a 'Policing Pledge' consisting of a national set of service standards. Local crime maps would be used to provide communities with accurate information and electorally reconstituted police authorities would be required to raise their public visibility and take a proactive lead on local policing matters. At the same time as New Labour was signalling the need to raise public awareness about the new policing arrangements, it (in December 2008) closed down the 'democratic deficit' debate by dropping plans for elected police authorities.

Despite police concerns about the danger of generating unrealistic public expectations, in March 2009, New Labour launched its 'Policing Pledge' in a high-profile multi-media public awareness campaign. 'The Pledge' represented an attempt to shift the terms of police–public relationships by 'locking' the police into an 'at-your-service' contract consisting of 10 guarantees on accessibility, availability, response and communication whether as a neighbourhood resident, caller, victim or complainant. This contract was constructed through the 'confidence drivers' of: fairness, dignity and respect; engagement and consultation; responsiveness and reliability; transparency; and accountability.

In December 2009, New Labour released what would turn out to be its final police reform White Paper. This document included the recommendations of the Green Paper, the Flanagan

Report (2008) on organisational capacity and resilience, the Berry Report (2009) on bureaucracy, the Casey Report (2008) on 'visible justice' and the Blunkett Report on governance (2009). It was a self-congratulatory document asserting that the government had delivered: historically high levels of officers; year-on-year reductions in crime; the successful national roll out of the NPT scheme; the extended police family; the 'Policing Pledge'; and a single public confidence target. The 'deal' with the police, whereby central controls were 'relaxed' and unproductive 'red tape' lessened in return for 'putting the public at the centre of policing' in the form of the 'Policing Pledge' was paying dividends. In the PCA, New Labour had found a successful 'confident policing' stratagem: disclosing public expectations of the police and unlocking the ability of leading police forces to deliver. However, inevitably, further reform was necessary to remove the remaining obstacles to real success, that is, delivering on both the 'public confidence' target and the requirements of the 'Policing Pledge'. 'Confident policing' would be realised through:

• Improving inter-personal skills and service encounters – encouraging police officers to 'get it right the first time' and responding to service failures;
• Providing accurate, timely, accessible and comparative information about resource allocation and performance;
• Transparent priority setting;
• Effective grievance and redress mechanisms operating at neighbourhood, borough and force level.

The PCA was to be stretched by the public's 'right to know' and 'right to challenge'. 'Visibility' was being co-joined with 'transparency'. In addition to the requirement to demonstrate and communicate significant national improvements in general public confidence and satisfaction, the police were also obliged to evidence that they had reduced anti-social behaviour as part of improving public confidence and enjoyed the confidence of segmented 'publics', for example, ethnic minorities, neighbourhoods, strategic partners, ethnic minorities and in the new age of austerity, taxpayers (see also Brown and Evans <u>2009</u> <u>Brown, R.</u> and <u>Evans, E.</u> 2009. Public confidence in the police: guidance for police authorities and police forces, London, SW1: Association of Police Authorities. , HM Government <u>2009</u> <u>HM Government</u> , 2009 . Engaging communities in criminal justice . London : TSO, Downing Street CM 7583 ., Home Office 2010b). In its final incarnation it is possible to identify New Labour's preferred integration model of policing and safety services

and multi-professional collaboration geared towards building 'confident' neighbourhoods, communities and service users. Ironically, this is what New Labour had proposed in 1997.

Conclusion: the political death of the PCA

Noting that the importance of 'paying attention to the historical context in which publics are summoned, or different issues … raised as public matters' (Mahoney et al. 2010 Mahoney , N. , Newman , J. , and Barnett , C. , 2010 . Rethinking the public: innovations in research, theory and politics . Bristol : Policy Press ., p. 2), this paper has provided an alternative perspective on the issue of public confidence. We forsake the rational policy analysis approach for a constructivist approach that explores how 'public confidence' became such an entrenched and ultimately, contested policy domain. We have sought to put the politics back into the policy by examining how it was constructed by elite policy-makers rather than focusing on quantitative discussion about the measurement of confidence and trust. This political policy perspective does not negate the important quantitative work but provides a perspective for interpreting such data.

Policy texts are a remarkably under-used research resource in police and criminal justice studies. And as Laver et al. (2003) note they can be and should be analysed and re-analysed 'again and again'. At a given moment, they enable us to compare and contrast the nature and quality of government deliberation about police reform. The texts also allow us to trace how, in its various framings New Labour's PCA produced a flurry of policy activity. First, the PCA provided a rationale for the painfully slow re-evaluation and re-invention of community policing in the form of the NPT initiative. Second, it triggered methodological scrutiny of the available broad-brush public confidence indicators and data. Home Office commissioned research on the BCS data sought to identify levels of confidence in the police amongst different social groups and the key factors that were associated with confidence in the police. Thorpe (2009 Thorpe, K. 2009. Public perceptions of the police and local partners – results from the BCS year ending September 2008, London: Home Office.) analysed BCS data for the year ending September 2008 and identified a number of factors that were independently associated with confidence in the police and local council dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime. Myhill and Beak (2008 Myhill, A. and Beak, K. 2008. Public confidence in the police, London: NPIA Research, Analysis and Information.) carried out multivariate analysis on the 2005/2006 BCS on two measures of confidence in the police ('how good a job the

local police are doing' and 'overall confidence in the local police'). There was also the Metropolitan Police public attitudes survey programme that understood 'confidence' as a multi-dimensional sentiment that needs to be broken down into what matters to whom, why, where and when. This research has also tested how confidence can be influenced through procedural justice principles and the use of different public communication models (see Bradford et al. 2009 Bradford, B., Stanko, E. and Jackson, J. 2009. Using research to inform policy: the role of public attitude surveys in understanding public confidence and police contact. Policing: a journal of policy and practice, 3(2): 139–148.). Third, the PCA generated much needed deliberation about the nature and production of 'policing by consent' and foregrounding the links between police legitimacy, public compliance and procedural justice with 'what the police do, can do and should do' (Stanko and Bradford 2009 Stanko, B. and Bradford, B. 2009. Beyond measuring how good a job the police are doing: the MPS model of confidence in the police. Policing: an international journal of policy and practice, 3(4): 322–330.).

However, it could also be argued that the policy texts stand as evidence that in political terms the PCA became a self-limiting governing strategy. Over dependence on 'public confidence' as an imagined reform lever, concealed the fact that New Labour made little to no headway with other aspects of its 'fixing the police' reform agenda. In terms of operational philosophy, what was rolled out in the form of the NRPP, NPT, the 'Policing Pledge' etc. was hardly different to what had been proposed by the Metropolitan Police Service 'Plus Programme' in 1989–1990 and ACPO in 1991 and 2001. Given the sophisticated methodological tools developed to research 'consumer confidence' establishing what various 'publics' want from the police and why is no longer rocket science. As New Labour found out configuring the police organisation to deliver on what various publics – including the government – want is a very different matter. All the policy texts analysed in this paper included inter-connected proposals to re-structure police forces, 'modernise' the workforce and work practices, deliver cost-effective resource management, overhaul police leadership and constitutional governance and get a grip on expenditure. This explains why New Labour had to repackage and re-launch the PCA across a range of legislation and policy documents. However, each re-packaging and re-launch had a 'cut-and-paste' feel to it, testifying to New Labour's ever-increasing desperation to 'prove' that if nothing else it had boosted 'public confidence' in the police. When combined with New Labour's other re-packaged and relaunched law and order

initiatives, particularly relating to anti-social behaviour, the result was an extremely confusing policing policy-scape.

In March 2010, the credibility of the PCA was damaged when the Advertising Standards Agency concluded that 'Policing Pledge' advertisements that had cost £1.9 million had been misleading in their promises as to what the public could expect from their police force. The advertisements did not make it sufficiently clear that the promises did not apply to all police officers but only to NPTs and that not all police forces had signed up to delivering on the core commitments. In the countdown to the election, New Labour once more stood accused of not just spin but of deliberately deceiving the public on policing. The Home Office and chief police officers stood accused of being complicit in the New Labour deceit. Anything to do with the PCA was now politically tainted.

The new coalition government declared that the police accountability system they had inherited was not fit for purpose and would be abolished immediately, 'freeing' the police from the 'Policing Pledge'. The coalition government subsequently released its 'democratic de-centralisation' plans to replace police authorities with elected Police and Crime Commissioners, 'representing their communities, understanding their crime and anti-social behaviour priorities and holding the Chief Constable to account for achieving them, and being able to fire her or him if they do not' (Home Office 2010a). The plans would make the police 'more accountable, accessible and transparent to the public and therefore make our communities safer'. The development of accessible real time, multi-dimensional 'street level' crime data would enable the public to scrutinise police performance. Multi-dimensional 'transparency' would seem to be the preferred mode of localised police governance. Although concern was expressed by the police staff associations and particularly by the police authorities about the coalition government's plans to politicise policing through Police and Crime Commissioners (Home Office 2010c) there was no public outcry. If this is followed through, it represents another move towards democratisation and the greater use of popular referenda which will provide a political 'entry point' for voters to determine policing priorities. Public expectations, public demands (concrete and abstract) public confidence and police performance will be gauged through voter preferences and electoral decisions. However, critical tasks for the coalition government will be to mobilise public interest and instil public confidence in the proposed electoral process. As an end-note, in September 2011, the Labour Party in opposition announced that it would set up an independent review of the

challenges facing the police in twenty-first century. It was as if New Labour's previous decade of highly publicised police reform – and the PCA – had never happened.

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