Causes and Consequences of Core Political Value Change[1]

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Paper Presented at the 99th Annual Conference of the American Political Science Association, 28-31 August 2003, Philadelphia, USA.

The notion of core political values has long been of central importance in understanding how citizens evaluate policies, parties and candidates. However, the characterisation of these higher order values as, if not immutable then highly stable, has meant little attention has been paid to the causes and consequences of shorter term fluctuations. This paper demonstrates that switching allegiance between main parties led to significant shifts in the left-right political value dimension amongst the British public during the early 1990s. I use a True Intra-individual Change (TIC) structural equation model (Steyer, Eid and Schwenkmezger 1997; Steyer, Partchev and Shanahan 2000; Steyer and Krambeer 2003) on data from the British Election Panel Survey to examine the influence of party allegiance and changes in party allegiance, on change in the left-right political values of individual voters between 1992 and 1997. Results indicate that switching allegiance from the Conservative to the Labour party between 1992 and 1994 resulted in significant and enduring shifts in left-right values in the direction of the party of defection. Some change was observed between 1992 and 1996 for those defecting from the Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats, though this group had returned to their 1992 positions by the time they were re-surveyed in 1997. Those who stuck with the Conservative Party between 1992 and 1994 had moved significantly to the right by 1996, a position they retained up to the General Election in 1997. No change was observed amongst stable Labour and Liberal Democrat voters. While the absolute magnitudes of these value shifts were not large, the fact that left-right position has itself such an over-riding influence on party popularity, means that even small shifts in this value dimension can have sizeable impacts on the popularity ratings and vote share of the main parties.

Politicians and parties routinely seek to mobilise electoral support through appeals to shared values amongst key constituencies. New Labour's contentious ditching of Clause 4 of its constitution in 1995, to take a recent example, was portrayed by its critics as a departure from Labour's traditional redistributive values, while its proponents argued that it was merely an updating of these same values to make them relevant in 21st Century Britain. The Major government's protracted slide into electoral unpopularity was, during the same period, strongly associated with an attempt to reassert traditional Conservative 'family values'. Appeals to such deeply held, core values and beliefs have been broadly interpreted as strategic attempts by parties to mobilise core supporters while attracting as many new voters as possible. That is to say, voter preferences on these dimensions are assumed fixed, with parties positioning themselves so as to maximise popular support (Downs 1957; Dunleavy and Ward 1981).

Appealing to core political values as an electoral strategy would, moreover, seem sensible from a close reading of the extant literature on voting behaviour. Political scientists have consistently invoked the notion of core values as a fundamental explanatory variable in models of vote choice and as a means of saving the mass public from charges of political ignorance (Converse 1964; Rokeach 1973; Peffley and Hurwitz 1985; Feldman 1988; Bartle 1998). A key, perhaps definitional, criterion of core values, from this perspective, has been their long-term stability and resistance to change (Kinder and Sears 1985). To talk of labile and ephemeral core values is in many ways oxymoronic. This focus on stability and resistance, however, has meant that the role of core values in explaining medium and short-term electoral volatility has consequently been underemphasized in electoral research. Where core values have been deployed as explanatory mechanisms in patterns of party popularity, the primary focus of empirical research has been on inter-generational replacement. Political preferences may shift through core value change but only as older cohorts die and are replaced by younger ones with different value constellations (Inglehart 1990).

In the remainder of this paper I provide some background on theoretical and empirical work on the ontological status of core values, before outlining some of the reasons why we might expect parties to shape as well as react to preferences on these dimensions in the short to medium term. In the empirical section of the paper I use micro-level panel data to examine how stability and change in party allegiance in Britain during the early 1990s impacted subsequently on the locations of individual voters on the left-right political value dimension. By using data with a longitudinal element and examining inter-individual differences in intra-individual change, a more powerful case for a causal link is provided than that produced by cross-sectional analyses or conventional longitudinal regression models. Using a True Intra-individual Change (TIC) Structural Equation Model, I also provide estimates from the same model of how short-term changes in this core value impact on the subsequent popularity ratings of the main parties. I conclude by discussing the implications of these results for our understanding of the electoral significance of core political values.

FORMATION AND CHANGE OF CORE VALUES

Values are standardly conceived of as being deeper, more enduring and causally antecedent to more proximal political preferences such as issue and candidate evaluations (Katz 1960; Allport 1961; Converse 1964; Rokeach 1973). They are the building blocks upon which less resistant psychological constructs, such as attitudes and opinions are formed and maintained. For, being essentially *evaluative* tendencies (Zaller 1991; Zaller 1992; Eagly and Chaiken 1993), attitudes require dimensions of judgement against which objects may be compared and ranked in terms of some preference function. Values are, therefore, the 'glue' that bind together the apparently disparate elements of a political belief system (Converse 1964), forming a common evaluative base for judgements over the likelihood that particular candidates, parties and policies will support and affirm the deeply held values of a particular social and political epoch (Lipset 1959). As Zaller puts it "*Every opinion is a marriage of*

information and values – information to generate a mental picture of what is at stake and values to make a judgement about it" (Zaller 1991 p.215) .

There is some debate as to the number and ontological status of core political values in modern liberal democracies such as Britain and the United States and the extent to which different nation states weight and prioritise somewhat different constellations (Lipset 1959; Rokeach 1973; McClosky and Zaller 1984). Rokeach's seminal study of individual and social value orientations detailed 18 conceptually distinct core values (Rokeach 1973; 1979), while Feldman (1988) and Kinder (1998) suggest that the core values of the American public can be accounted for by just three basic dimensions; 'individualism'; 'egalitarianism'; and 'limited government'. In Britain, a similarly parsimonious, 'libertarian/authoritarian' 'socialist/laissez-faire' two dimensional model has gained empirical support in work by Heath and colleagues (Heath, Jowell and Curtice 1985; Heath et al. 1991; Heath, Evans and Martin 1993; Evans and Heath 1995).

Yet, while there is no clear consensus as to the exact number and nature of core political values, most investigators are in general agreement about their genesis and trajectory through the life course. In seeking to understand the mechanisms underlying value formation and change, most emphasis has been placed on socialisation processes during adolescence and early adulthood (Campbell et al. 1960; Butler and Stokes 1969; Rokeach 1973; Inglehart 1990). In a world in which 'rationally ignorant' citizens maintain only a limited grasp of matters politic, values are not so much learned as instilled. We gain our conception of 'the good society', osmotically, through the interaction of personality with a network of familial bonds, work place associations and ties with key socio-political institutions. Inglehart's well known account of materialist and post-materialist values (Inglehart 1977; Inglehart 1990; Inglehart 1997), for example, sees adult values as largely determined by the extent to which their early years were characterised by a relative need to fulfil each of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Maslow 1954).

CORE VALUES AS ENDOGENOUS TO POLITICAL CONTEXT

However, while the predominant social scientific characterisation of core values has been of powerful and highly stable evaluative tendencies developed early in the life course, there is reason to believe that parties do not merely react to fixed voter preferences on these dimensions but seek to shape them to their own electoral advantage. If core values are as important determinants of vote choice as many writers have suggested, this is an eminently sensible strategy, for even small aggregate shifts in the desired direction would reap large electoral rewards. Downs himself, realised that the restriction of fixed voter preferences in spatial models of party competition was a necessary but unrealistic simplifying assumption:

"Though parties will move ideologically to adjust the [ideological] distribution under some circumstances, they will also attempt to move voters towards their own location, thus altering it"

(Downs 1957 p. 140)

Dunleavy and Ward (Dunleavy and Ward 1981; Dunleavy 1991) have delineated some of the ways in which parties can seek to shape voter preferences, concentrating their analysis on medium to long term strategies aimed at altering the social structural composition of the electorate, or the relations between groups within existing social relations. Incumbent parties can, for instance, increase the proportion of voters with favourable attitudes to free-market economics by instigating policies which increase share and home ownership (Dunleavy 1980b; Heath, Jowell and Curtice 1985). Alternatively, left leaning parties may seek to mould preferences in the opposite direction by increasing workforce sizes in state-run bureaucracies, the employees of which have a vested interest in maintaining more regulatory and interventionist forms of government (Dunleavy 1980a; Dunleavy and Ward 1981). Extant empirical research has, however, provided only mixed support for the existence and effectiveness of such strategies (Stauberger 2003).

But parties need not be limited to such indirect, 'sociological' strategies for shaping voter preferences. As Heath et al point out, we fall prey to "naïve social determinism" if we overlook the fact that parties might put together a coherent and persuasive policy platform, which not only attracts votes but serves to shape and mould the core values of the public toward their particular programmatic agenda:

"Public attitudes can be shaped by political leadership as well as by social change. The political parties can perhaps help to define what counts as class ideology. Parties are not the prisoners of social change and social structure; they are probably one of the major agencies which help to shape subjective awareness of class interests and to translate these into class values".

(Heath, Jowell and Curtice 1985 p. 134)

Heath and colleagues present evidence in support of this more communicative form of preference shaping between 1964 and 1983 in Britain but this is rather indirect, based as it is, on the observation that value change over this short a period could not readily be accounted for by social structural change. More direct evidence comes from a study by McCann (1997) who showed that declaring support for a particular candidate in the 1992 U.S. Presidential race between George Bush and Bill Clinton was associated with change in 'egalitarianism' and 'moral traditionalism' between 1990 and 1992. McCann concludes that his analysis,

"boldly challenges the assumption that values and beliefs are fully exogenous to participation and remain constant throughout an election. The portrait painted here is of an electorate that relies on fairly stable core principles when making choices, but reassesses these principles during political involvement"

(McCann 1997 p.580)

In this paper I build on this pioneering work by examining a different political context, over a longer time period and with a different type of statistical model, well suited to the task. Before turning to a presentation of empirical results, however, I briefly review below, some of the theoretical and conceptual bases for expecting short to medium term volatility in party support to impact on the core values of individual voters.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON VALUE CHANGE

The idea of cognitive consistency has long been of central importance in understanding belief system structure. Heider's (Heider 1944; 1946) Balance Theory proposes the need for cognitive consistency as a basic motivational drive, paving the way for later theories such as Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger 1957), Self-Perception Theory (Bem 1965; 1972) and Associative Networks (Anderson 1981; 1983) all of which, implicitly at least, rest on the notion of consistency as a central tenet of human interaction and psychology. That individual elements within broader cognitive structures are in some way consistent with one another also has a strong intuitive rationale: we expect 'consistency' in the expressed views and actions of others and are keen to portray our own outlook as comprising a coherent and integrated whole (Aronson 1968; Tedeschi and Rosenfeld 1981).

Such theories have clear implications for understanding how changes in party support might impact on the core values of individual voters. As parties articulate their policy agendas with a particular set of value positions, voters switching parties should soon become aware of any disparity between their existing values and those of their currently supported party. This will be particularly evident during election campaigns when such appeals attain their greatest media prominence (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Guadet 1948; Kinder and Sears 1985). Processes of self-perception and dissonance reduction should then serve to move such individuals in the ideological direction of the party of defection. From this perspective, party allegiance is seen as a predominantly *internal* driver of value change, which follows rather than precipitates vote choice.

Party support is also inextricably linked with notions of identity (Campbell et al. 1960; Butler and Stokes 1969; Price 1989). The Michigan tradition of electoral research, in particular, sees political affiliation as a fundamental aspect of social identity developed during adolescence and early adulthood, with the party acting as a sort of ideological orientation mechanism through which new information can be weighed up and evaluated:

"Identification with a party raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favourable to his partisan orientation. The stronger the party bond, the more exaggerated the process of selection and perceptual distortion will be"

(Campbell et al. 1960 p. 133)

And although the notion of Party Identity has mostly been associated with explaining stability rather than change in voter preferences, as key parts of our social identities, changing party allegiance should be expected to have a considerable impact on core values and beliefs. For, as individuals change their party of support and begin to integrate this into their lattice of existing social group memberships, they will come to apprehend the archetypal or 'referent' characteristics of the group and gradually 'impute' this into their own cognitive and behavioural makeup (Turner et al. 1987; Turner 1991). As with the effects of cognitive consistency mechanisms, the internal drivers of attitude change from the social identity perspective are as consequences as opposed to drivers of stability and change in party allegiance. Likewise, we should expect these identity based mechanisms to be at their most powerful during election campaigns, when political issues attain their greatest prominence in the media and political campaigning and debate is routinely portrayed as group conflict (Price 1989).

DATA

The data that form the basis of this study come from the 1992-1997 British Election Panel Study (BEPS). The 1992-97 BEPS is a multi-stage, stratified, face-to-face probability survey of the British electorate, the first wave of which was conducted shortly after the 1992 General Election. Respondents to this cross-sectional survey were then followed up, each year, until 1997, with the final wave falling shortly after the subsequent general election when the whole process began anew with a fresh sample (see Brook and Taylor 1996 for full technical details). The first wave of the study was conducted in April 1992, with a response rate of 73%, representing a total sample size of 3534. Respondents were then followed up each year until 1997 using a combination of face-to-face, telephone and postal methods. The analytical focus for this study comprises those individuals who were interviewed in 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1997, which due to attrition reduced the analytical sample to 1640 respondents. Previous investigations of the attrition on this survey indicate that the sample remained representative of the GB population (Brook and Taylor 1996; Taylor, Heath and Lynn 1996).

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

In order to empirically evaluate the impact of changes in party support on the ideological positioning of voters, it would appear sensible to select a political context in which significant numbers of voters did change their party of support. It was for this reason that the 1992-1997 British Election Panel Study was chosen as the data for this analysis. The period 1992-1997 witnessed a sharp decline in support for the Conservative party and the ensuing rise in popularity of the Labour party, initially under John Smith and subsequently Tony Blair and the New Labour 'project'. Polling and academic survey evidence suggests that majority support for the Conservative party had remained relatively stable at approximately 40% from 1990 through to the 1992 General Election[2]. Following the 1992 election victory and the subsequent debacle of Britain's departure from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM),

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[2]Although see Jowell et al (1993) for a description of how the non-probability sampling methods of the pollsters almost certainly led to a systematic underestimate of Conservative support in early months of 1992.

support for the Conservative government began to haemorrhage in early summer of that year. By the beginning of 1993 poll evidence showed that support for the Conservative party had slipped to approximately 30%, with the Labour party on around 45% of the popular vote, a position which remained largely unaltered up to and including the 1997 General Election (see Norris and Evans (1999) for detailed analysis of trends in party support over this period). This would seem, then, to offer a particularly suitable context in which to situate this analysis.

MODELING

The primary research hypotheses investigated in this analysis are:

H1   Switching party allegiance between 1992 and 1994 led to change in 'left-right' core values in the direction of the party of defection, net of other factors.

H2   Change in 'left-right' core values between 1992 and 1996 led to change in assessments of party favourability in 1997, net of other factors.

The type of model used to test these hypotheses is a True Intra-individual Change (TIC) Structural Equation Model (Steyer, Eid and Schwenkmezger 1997; Steyer, Partchev and Shanahan 2000; Steyer and Krambeer 2003). Such models are related to the general family of latent growth curve models (McArdle and Nesselroade 1994) and provide estimates of inter-individual differences in intra-individual change in concepts measured with a correction for measurement error. The basic idea behind the TIC model is to express change in the same construct over repeated measurements as a latent variable, which can then be used simultaneously as both an exogenous and an endogenous variable in full structural models to investigate the causes and consequences of change. At each time point the concept of interest is measured by an observable indicator, with some degree of error:

$$Y_1 = \tau_1 + \varepsilon_1 \tag{1}$$

Where Y_1 denotes the observed score, τ_1 denotes the true score and ε_1 is an error term. A second measurement can be denoted by changing the suffixes in equation (1) to 2:

$$Y_2 = \tau_2 + \varepsilon_2 \tag{2}$$

The true score term in equation (2) can also be expressed as a function of the true score at time 1 and the difference between true score at time 2 and the true score at time 1:

$$\tau_2 = \tau_1 + (\tau_2 - \tau_1) \tag{3}$$

The observed score at time 2 can therefore be expressed as a function of the true score at time 1, the difference in true scores between occasions and an error term:

$$Y_2 = \tau_1 + (\tau_2 - \tau_1) + \varepsilon_2 \tag{4}$$

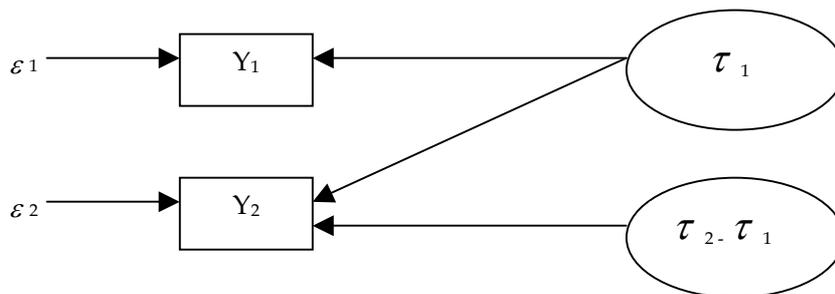Equation 4 can be expressed as a simple path diagram thus:

Figure 1 Path Diagrammatic Representation of a TIC Model

The model, as specified in equation (4) and Figure 1 is, however, unidentified. That is to say, unique estimates cannot be found for the unknown parameters in the model because the number of parameters to be estimated outnumber those that are known. In order to obtain an over-identified TIC model, it is necessary to extend the number of observed indicators at each point of measurement. If we impose the restriction of uncorrelated error terms, this can be achieved with a minimum of two indicators at each measurement occasion. This restriction is only necessary to obtain an over-identified model and need not apply if there are sufficient indicators and waves of measurement. The TIC model can be extended to accommodate an unlimited number of measurement occasions by using general subscripts i and k to denote change for the ith individual at the kth point of measurement:

$$Y_{ik} = \tau_1 + (\tau_k - \tau_1) + \varepsilon_{ik} \tag{4}$$

Because this model provides estimates of change relative to the first point of measurement, this specification is referred to as the *baseline* TIC model. TIC models can also be specified such that change is relative to the previous (as opposed to the first) point of measurement, the so-called Neighbour model. I do not provide further details of this latter form of model here but see Steyer et al (1997) for a detailed discussion.

TIC models have many benefits relative to other approaches to analysing individual change. In contrast to cross-sectional multivariate methods, the incorporation of a time element with repeated measurements on the same individuals gives far greater leverage on the direction and flow of causal mechanisms. Additionally, the analysis of dependencies in lagged estimates of *change* in key constructs yields a stronger causal argument than that of covariances between levels. That is to say, we should have greater confidence that two constructs are causally related if it can be shown that micro level change in construct A at time point 1 is followed by change in construct B at time point 2 than if we show that an individual's position on construct A at time point 1 is associated with their position on

construct B at time point 2. This is because the former schematic model fits better with commonly held assumptions regarding the nature of causality (Holland 1986; Pearl 2000) and can, in some instances, override concerns regarding unmeasured variables, which is generally the most serious threat to valid causal inferences (Freeman 1984; Duncan 2000).

The use of multiple indicators for the purpose of model identification, also allows correction for measurement error in the estimation of change in the concept(s) of interest, yielding a True Score variable in the sense of Classical Test Theory (Lord and Novick 1968). This brings all the standard advantages of True Score variables (see Bollen 1989; Joreskog 1993) which may be considered all the more important when the variable in question is one of change as opposed to level. This is because the ratio of signal to noise is generally lower in measures of change than in measures of level for, in most cases, correlations between true scores are higher than those between error scores on the same variable over time (Duncan 2000).

A further benefit of the use of multiple indicators is that longitudinal measurement invariance may be evaluated. The problem, generally stated, is that questions may change their meaning over time, rendering estimates of stability and change inferentially problematic. In the context of political attitudes and values, Heath et al (Heath, Jowell and Curtice 1985) describe the problem when analysing a time series question from the British Election Studies which, between 1964 and 1983, asked respondents to evaluate whether more industries should be nationalised. Because the extent of nationalisation changed quite markedly over the period in question, changes in marginal distributions are difficult to interpret, "the electorate may not have changed its mind at all about the preferred extent of public ownership; it may simply be reacting in a perfectly consistent way to the institutional changes" (Heath, Jowell and Curtice 1985 p. 132). While it is clearly not possible to impose invariant meaning on survey questions through any statistical procedure, it is possible to impose such a constraint and then test its reasonableness through standard measures of model fit. The TIC model used in this analysis imposes the constraint that the unstandardised

factor loading between each observed variable and the latent construct it measures remains constant over time. The empirical reasonableness of this constraint is then evaluated through comparisons of standard measures of model fit between this model and one with no such constraints imposed (Meredith 1993).

Missing data rates on the items used in this analysis were generally low (less than 1% of all responses), though on some of the control variables as many as 8% of responses were non-substantive. All models were, therefore, estimated using Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) implemented in Amos 4.0 (Wothke 1998).

VARIABLES AND MEASURES

The variables used in these models fall under four broad categories: left-right core value; vote choice; party popularity; and control variables. These are described in detail below.

Left-right core value: The British Election Panel Study contains a six item scale designed to measure 'left-right' (also referred to as 'socialist/laissez-faire') core economic values developed by Heath and Evans (Heath, Evans and Martin 1993; Evans and Heath 1995). The six items are all asked in an 'agree-disagree' format with five response categories and a 'don't know' option. The subject matter of the items covers collectivism v individualism; government intervention v free enterprise; and economic and political equality. To control for response sets some of the items were reverse coded in the questionnaire. For the analysis, then, all items were recoded so that 'strongly agree' (5) always indicates a right wing response and 'strongly disagree' (1) a left wing response. The exact wordings of the six items are provided in the Appendix.

Vote choice: In the 1992 and 1997 waves respondents were asked which party they had voted for in the most recent General Election. In the intervening waves they were asked who they would have voted for had there been a recent General Election. These variables were used to form six dummy variables indicating the individual's pattern of party support between the

General Election in 1992 and the 1994 waves of the panel. Three variables indicated unchanging support for each of the three main parties and three indicated switching from a) Conservative to Labour b) Conservative to Liberal Democrat c) Labour to Liberal Democrat. Variables indicating switching in other directions between parties were not included in the analysis as the sample sizes of these categories were too small to be of analytical utility. Full question wordings are provided in the Appendix.

Party popularity: The popularity of the two main parties in both 1992 and 1997 was measured using a five point scale ranging from (1) Strongly in Favour to (5) Strongly Against. Respondents were asked to "choose a phrase from this scale to say how you feel about the Labour/Conservative party". These variables were retained in their raw form, the 1992 variables employed as controls on 1997 popularity and those from 1997 as dependent variables of value change between 1992 and 1996.

Control Variables: The primary aim of the analysis was to investigate the impact of variations in party support on changes in core political values and how such change, in turn, impacts on party popularity in the short to medium term. In order to be confident that any relationships observed between these key constructs were not attributable to other factors, a number of theoretically important control variables were specified in the model. Change in core economic values controlled for age, sex, education, social class, region, party support (all measured in 1992) and retrospective evaluations of personal financial circumstances and performance of the economy between 1992 and 1993 (measured in 1993). Change in party popularity in 1997 controlled for all these variables but also for party popularity in 1992 and pattern of party support between 1992 and 1994.

RESULTS

I begin by comparing the mean scores on a summed version of the six item left-right scale by main party support at the 1992 General Election (Table 1). As the key hypothesis being evaluated in this analysis is that parties are able to shape core political values in the short to

medium term, it seems sensible to establish that the value in question (and our measure of it in the data) is a dimension on which the parties are clearly distinct. As we might expect, there are substantial differences between supporters of the three main parties on this value dimension, with Conservative voters furthest to the right and Labour voters furthest to the left. All differences are significant at the 99% confidence level.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The first model to be fitted, represented as a path diagram in Figure 2, is a state-trait longitudinal common factor model, with the state factors (U1-U6) indicating a method or uniqueness factor and the common factors (left-right 92 – left-right 97) representing True Score measures of the left-right value at each time point (see Sturgis (2002) for a detailed discussion of this model). The state-trait model is used to determine the level of aggregate stability in left-right values and to examine the pattern of factor means between 1992 and 1997.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Estimates of the parameters of interest from this model are presented in Table 2. Looking first at the implied factor means, we can see that there was little movement in aggregate preferences on this value dimension during the period in question. There is some indication of a small rightward drift between 1992 and 1996[3] but this is followed by a move back to a position slightly to the left of the 1992 starting position by the time of the General Election in 1997. Although the magnitude of these changes appears small, they are nevertheless all significant at the 95% level of confidence or below[4]. While the exact fit of the model indicates

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[3] Higher scores indicate right wing positions on the latent factors in these models.
[4] Difference tests were performed by constraining factor means to equality and subtracting the likelihood ratio of this model from a model without this constraint. This statistic is distributed as Chi square with degrees of freedom calculated as the difference in degrees of freedom between the two models (Bollen 1989).

a highly significant discrepancy between implied and observed variance/covariance matrices (Chi Square = 309; df = 115; p = 0.000), this is to be expected with this size of sample and this many over-identifying constraints (Maruyama 1998). Conventional adjusted measures of global fit (RMSEA = 0.035; CFI = .97) indicate that the model provides a good representation of the observed data (Hu and Bentler 1999)[5].

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The picture of aggregate stability on this dimension in mean structures is supported by the high correlations between factors over time. As we would expect the lowest correlation, 0.8, is between the 1992 and 1997 waves of measurement, while the highest is that between 1996 and 1997 at 0.96. So, while there is near perfect stability over a one year period, we are still able to account for around two thirds of the variance in left-right value position from knowledge of where individual voters stood on the same dimension five years previously. Aggregate stability, however, cannot be simply extrapolated to what is happening at the micro level. The fact that correlations between factors are less than unity means that individuals are changing positions on this dimension and that some are changing more than others (Steyer and Krambeer 2003). To investigate the nature and extent of intra-individual change on this dimension, I re-specify the model in Figure 1 such that the latent factors in 1996 and 1997 represent individual change from the 1992 position – the so-called baseline TIC model. Figure 3 provides a simplified schematic representation of the full TIC model[6].

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5 There is an ongoing debate amongst practitioners of SEM concerning the relative merits of measures of 'exact' and 'close' model fit. I do not attempt to resolve these issues here but present both varieties and leave readers to judge the adequacy of the models themselves.

6 For the sake of explanatory simplicity Figure 3 presents a simplified, schematic representation of the full model, omitting many variables and parameters that were actually included in the estimated model. For instance, it was necessary to include covariance paths between the variables indicating pattern of party support but these are not shown as they make it difficult to discern the variables and parameters of real analytical interest. For the same reason, Figure 3 shows neither the control variables described on pages 14-15, nor the state factors (U1-U6) shown in Figure 2. Contact the author for all output relating to the full model.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

As with the state-trait model, an exact fit test indicates a reliable discrepancy between implied and observed variance/covariance matrices (Chi Square = 3163; df = 899; p = 0.000), while adjusted measures indicate that the theoretical model fits the data well (RMSEA = 0.039; CFI = .96). The variances of the two latent change variables from the baseline TIC model are 0.06 and 0.08 for the 1992-1996 and 1992-1997 periods respectively. Both are significant at the 99% level of confidence, indicating that there were real inter-individual differences in intra-individual change on the left-right value dimension during this period (Steyer and Krambeer 2003). Having established that true change is present, we can move to a consideration of its causes and consequences.

Table 3 shows the main estimates of interest in this regard from the baseline TIC model. Those individuals who switched from the Conservative to the Labour party between 1992 and 1994 became significantly more left wing in 1996 than they had been in 1992. This effect was not short-lived, with switchers soon returning to the 'ideological fold', as they remained significantly more left wing by the time of the General Election in 1997 than they had been in 1992. Those who switched from the Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats also exhibited a significant leftward drift in their core economic values between 1992 and 1996. However, by 1997, the value positions of this group were not significantly different from what they had been in 1992. This lends some support to the idea that, for many voters, switching to the Liberal Democrats from one of the other main parties represents more of a short-term protest than any sort of political or ideological conversion (Heath, Jowell and Curtice 1985). The number of voters switching from Labour to Conservative was too small to provide reliable estimates of value change amongst this population sub-group. The evidence from this analysis, then, supports hypothesis H1, although not for all patterns of switching between parties; only those switching from Conservative to Labour and Conservative to the

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Liberal Democrats exhibited subsequent change in left-right values and, only in the former group did this value change persist until the 1997 election.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Looking next at the stable supporters of each of the three main parties between 1992 and 1994, we see that only those who stayed loyal to the Conservative party during this period showed any change in left-right values. Between 1992 and 1996, stable Conservative voters moved to the right on economic issues, although this estimate falls just outside the conventional 95% confidence level. Between 1992 and 1997, however, the effect size is of comparable magnitude and significant at the 95% level, so it is probably safe to conclude that this effect is not a result of sampling variation. Stable supporters of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties showed no reliable change in left-right values during this period. This pattern of results would seem to suggest that hypothesis H1 is possibly over-restrictive, as it shows that sticking with a party in a changing political climate can engender equivalent ideological change to that found amongst party switchers.

Also included in Table 3 are the coefficients for the paths between 'sociotropic' and 'pocket-book' retrospective economic perceptions in 1993 and the two value change variables. These were included in the model as control variables more than from substantive interest. However, it is interesting to note, in the context of the ongoing debate over the importance of 'economic voting' (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier; Sanders, Ward and Marsh 1991; Sanders 1993; Sanders and Price 1994; Evans and Anderson 2001) that retrospective perceptions of the performance of the economy are significant predictors of core economic value change. Specifically, in 1993 the more the economy was seen to have deteriorated since the election in 1992, the more respondents were likely to have moved to the left economically between 1992 and 1996/7. This indicates that perceptions of the performance of the macro-economy are likely to have indirect as well as direct effects on party popularity and vote choice.

Individuals' perceptions of changes in their own economic circumstances during this period, however, had no impact on left-right values.

Turning finally to a consideration of the *consequences* of change in this core political value, Table 3 shows that hypothesis H2 is strongly supported: core value change between 1992 and 1996 was a strong and highly significant predictor of party popularity in 1997, even controlling for popularity ratings, party support, age, sex, education, social class and region measured in 1992 and retrospective economic perceptions measured in 1993. Specifically, the model estimates that a one unit change on the 'left-right' value dimension leads to a three to four unit change in the popularity ratings of the two main parties. The scale of the left-right latent variable is taken from the first item in the scale and, therefore, ranges from 1-5. The same range applies to the popularity variable, with 1 indicating 'strongly in favour' and 5 indicating 'strongly against'. We saw from Table 2 that the mean change on the left-right value dimension was only 0.06 between 1992 and 1996 and 0.13 between 1992 and 1997. Clearly, then, most individuals are some way from a whole unit change on the left-right value over this time period and this should be borne in mind when evaluating the extent to which value change can account for short-term volatility in party popularity.

The model can also be used to estimate the extent to which switching from the Conservative to the Labour party between 1992 and 1994 impacted on party popularity ratings in 1997, through its effect on left-right values; switching parties in this way was associated with a 0.28 unit shift to the left between 1992 and 1996, a change which itself yielded a 0.88 unit increase in popularity rating of the Labour party and a 1.1 unit decrease in the equivalent rating of the Conservative party. Thus, the *indirect* effect of switching from the Conservative to the Labour party during this period on party popularity in 1997 would have been sufficient *on its own* to significantly alter ratings of party favourability at the individual level through its *direct* effect on left-right values.

DISCUSSION

Conventional spatial models of party competition see voter preferences on ideological dimensions as fixed, with parties competing to converge on the 'median' voter. The separate tradition of research on the nature and significance of core values has, similarly, characterised these constructs as highly stable evaluative tendencies developed early in the life course, which serve to lend order and structure to more proximal and less resistant political preferences. The result of this view of core values as fixed or highly stable has been an under-emphasis in electoral research on the causes and consequences of change in core values in the short to medium term.

Several writers, including Downs himself, have however recognised that assuming constant preferences on these dimensions is an unrealistic constraint and have proposed a number of mechanisms and strategies through which parties can seek to shape as well as respond to voter preferences on these core values and beliefs. Mostly, the emphasis here has been on strategies which seek to change the social-structural composition of the electorate (Dunleavy 1980a; Dunleavy 1980b; Dunleavy and Ward 1981; Dunleavy 1991), though the case for more communication-based, social psychological mechanisms has also gained a degree of theoretical and empirical support (Heath, Jowell and Curtice 1985; McCann 1997).

In this paper I used a True Intra-individual Change (TIC) structural equation model fitted to data from the 1992-1997 British Election Panel Survey to demonstrate that patterns of stability and change in party allegiance significantly altered voter preferences in the short to medium term on the left-right core economic value. Furthermore, such change was a strong and highly significant predictor of subsequent ratings of party popularity. The model employed corrected for measurement error in the observed indicators of the 'left-right' value and constrained the pattern of factor loadings to be invariant over time, removing uncertainty concerning the invariance of the meaning of these items during the period in question.

Voters who switched allegiance from the Conservative to the Labour party between 1992 and 1994 showed a significant shift to the left between 1992 and 1997. Those switching

from the Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats exhibited a left-ward drift between 1992 and 1996 but had returned to their 1992 positions by the time of the General Election in 1997. Movement between parties in other directions was either associated with no significant value change or sample sizes were too small to estimate a reliable effect. Of those with a stable party allegiance, only consistent supporters of the Conservative party showed any change in core values, moving significantly to the right between 1992 and 1997.

The magnitude of the short-term effect of party allegiance on core values is not, on this evidence, large. The greatest change in left-right value in this analysis was found amongst those switching support from the Conservative to the Labour party between 1992 and 1994. The unstandardised coefficient for this parameter was just 0.28, indicating a quarter unit move to the right on the underlying latent construct as a result of this change of allegiance. However, it is important, when judging the substantive as opposed to the statistical significance of these findings, to bear in mind that the left-right value dimension is itself an extremely powerful predictor of vote choice (Bartle 1998; Evans and Anderson 2001). This quarter unit change in left right value was sufficient to engender a full unit decrease in the popularity of the Conservative party in 1997, net of other factors.

The theoretical mechanisms through which this value change was argued to operate are based on social psychological theories of cognitive consistency (Heider 1944; Heider 1946; Festinger 1957; Bem 1972) and social identity (Tajfel 1981; Turner et al. 1987; Turner 1991). As individuals change their party of allegiance, or have their existing allegiance made salient, they will be motivated to minimize inconsistency between their own core values and those articulated by their party of allegiance. Hence, the focus of attention here is not so much on factors such as leadership, personality, media framing and campaign strategy which precipitate vote choice (see Kinder and Sears (1985) for a review) but on the social psychological mechanisms of internal attitude change which follow on the heels of such factors.

The pattern of value stability and change across different paths of party allegiance observed here lends support to these mechanisms as drivers of core value change. The group of voters whose preferences changed most during the period under study were those who had supported the Conservative party at the 1992 General Election. Those switching to the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties from the Conservatives would clearly be subject to such pressures as they moved to parties with historically very different core values and beliefs. Those staying with the Conservative party during this period would, similarly, have had their party identities made very salient as poll ratings plunged and the government lurched from one crisis to another. Only what we might consider 'committed Conservatives' stayed with the party during this period and this commitment would have been highly apparent to individual voters as they observed the sudden rise in popular support for the New Labour project.

True, a competing hypothesis is not discounted by the evidence presented here. It may be the case that value change had already begun, engendered perhaps by changing economic circumstances, prior to the 1992 survey and that vote change occurred as a consequence rather than a cause of value change. By this logic, had the 1992 election not occurred, we would still have seen the same pattern of ideological stability and change. While the data do not allow a test of this hypothesis, this should not necessarily be seen as a competing but, rather, a complementary account of the relationship between core value change and party support. We saw from the TIC model that patterns of party support between 1992 and 1994 impacted on left-right values between 1992 and 1996 and that this had a concomitant impact on party popularity in 1997. The picture this presents then is not one in which causality flows in just one direction but a complex, reciprocal relationship between party allegiance and value change, with parties both shaping and being shaped by the evolving value constellation of the polity over time.

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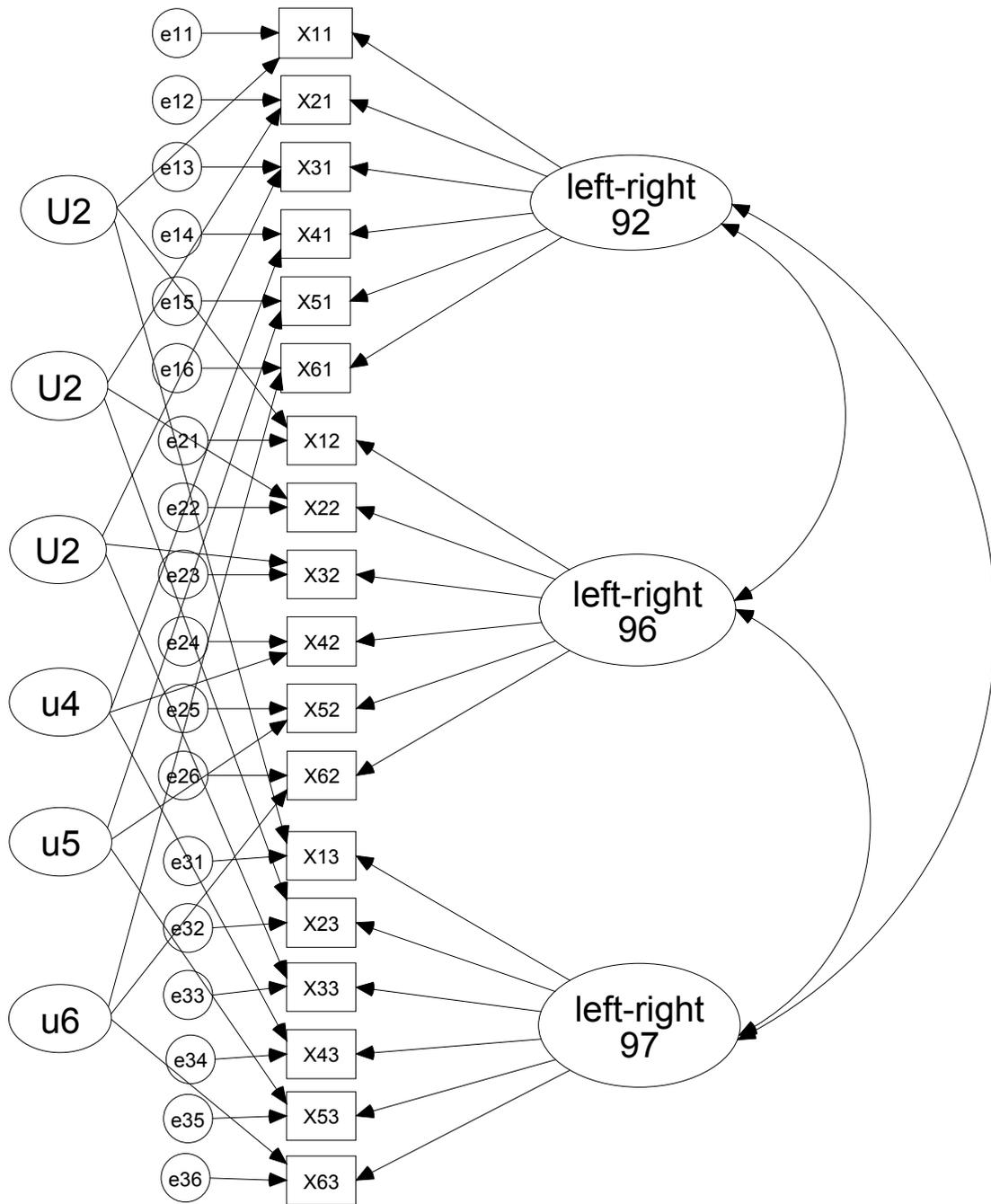**Figure 2 Simplified Path Diagram of State-Trait Model**
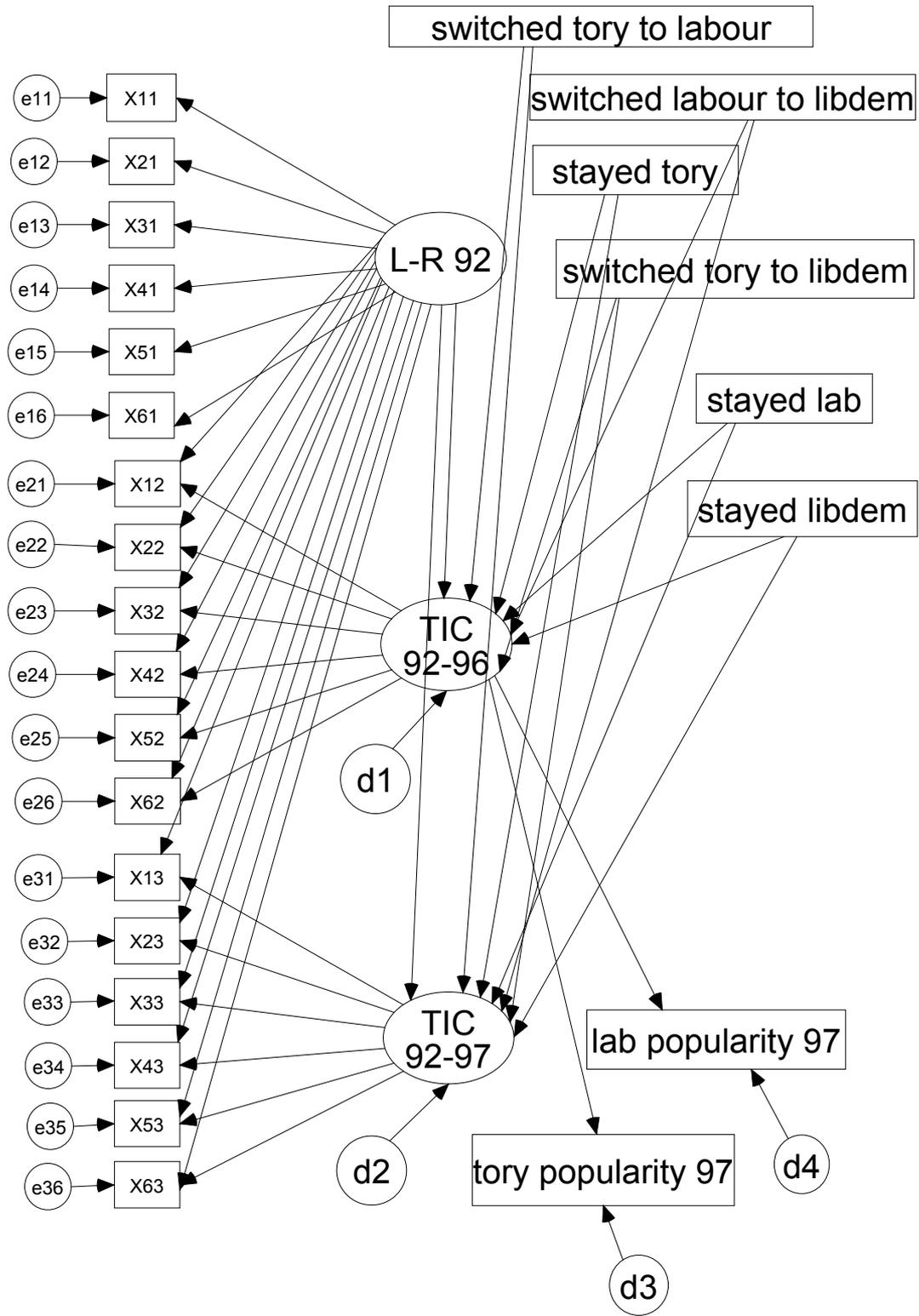
Figure 3 Simplified Path Diagram of Baseline TIC Model

TABLE 1 MEANS ON LEFT-RIGHT SUMMED SCALE BY PARTY (1992)

	mean	n
Conservative	16.5	627
Labour	22.9	490
Liberal Democrat	20.7	269

TABLE 2 MEANS & CORRELATIONS BETWEEN LEFT-RIGHT POSITIONS 92-97

	1992	1996	1997
mean	*3.47*	*3.53*	*3.34*
1992	1		
1996	0.84	1	
1997	0.8	0.96	1

TABLE 3 KEY ESTIMATES FROM TIC BASELINE MODEL

Dependent Variable	Predictor	b	s.e.	p value	Beta
Value Change 92-96	switched Con-Lab 92-94	0.28	0.042	0.000	0.30
Value Change 92-97	switched Con-Lab 92-94	0.14	0.045	0.002	0.12
Value Change 92-96	switched Con-Lib 92-94	0.15	0.039	0.003	0.17
Value Change 92-97	switched Con-Lib 92-94	0.07	0.042	0.082	0.07
Value Change 92-96	switched Lab-Lib 92-94	0.01	0.076	0.857	0.01
Value Change 92-97	switched Lab-Lib 92-94	0.01	0.084	0.864	0.01
Value Change 92-96	stayed Con 92-94	-0.07	0.034	0.052	-0.11
Value Change 92-97	stayed Con 92-94	-0.12	0.039	0.002	-0.16
Value Change 92-96	stayed Lab 92-94	-0.04	0.036	0.259	-0.04
Value Change 92-97	stayed Lab 92-94	-0.03	0.055	0.589	-0.07
Value Change 92-96	stayed Lib 92-94	-0.04	0.050	0.462	-0.05
Value Change 92-97	stayed Lib 92-94	0.02	0.050	0.721	0.02
Value Change 92-96	pocket-book retro 93	0.01	0.014	0.711	0.03
Value Change 92-97	pocket-book retro 93	-0.03	0.014	0.079	-0.07
Value Change 92-96	sociotropic retro 93	0.04	0.015	0.012	0.13
Value Change 92-97	sociotropic retro 93	0.05	0.015	0.001	0.14
Labour Popularity 97	Value Change 92-96	-3.14	0.469	0.000	-0.74
Conservative Popularity 97	Value Change 92-96	3.77	0.553	0.000	0.74

APPENDIX

Question Wordings for Heath et al. (1993) 'Left-Right' Value Scale

1. Ordinary people get their fair share of the nation's wealth.

2. There is one law for the rich and one for the poor.

3. Private enterprise is the best way to solve Britain's economic problems.

4. Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership.

5. It is government's responsibility to provide a job for everyone who wants one.

6. There is no need for strong trade unions to protect employee's working conditions and wages.

Response categories ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Items 1, 3 and 6 were reverse coded for the analysis.

Question wordings and coding for Vote Choice Variables

In the 1992 wave of the survey, respondents were asked, "Which party did you vote for in the general election?"

In 1994, respondents were asked, "If there had been a general election on the 9th of June, which political party do you think you would have been most likely to have voted for, or do you think you would not have voted?"

From these two questions dummy variables were created to indicate: stable Conservatives, stable Labour, stable Liberal Democrats, switchers from Conservative to Labour, switchers from Conservative to Liberal Democrat and switchers from Labour to Liberal Democrat.

Question wordings for Party Popularity Variables

In 1992 and 1997 respondents were asked the following question:

Please choose a phrase from this card to say how you feel about …

The Conservative Party, The Labour Party, The Liberal Democrat Party.

Response categories ranged from: strongly in favour (1) to strongly against (5)

Control Variables

Change in left-right value between 1992 and 1996 and 1992 and 1997 controlled for a range of stable respondent characteristics measured in the 1992 wave of the panel. These are described below:

Social Class: five dummy variables were computed from the six category version of the Goldthorpe social class variable (Goldthorpe 1997).
Education: six dummy variables were created from the seven category variable measuring highest educational qualification.
Region: six dummy variables were created to indicate whether the respondent's region of residence was in the North, the Midlands, the South (including London), Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.
Age: age in years was included as a continuous variable.
Sex: a dummy variable for sex was included with 1 = male.

In 1993 respondents were asked two questions relating to economic circumstances. These were used as controls on change in left-right value between 1992 and 1996 and on party popularity ratings in 1997:

- Since the last general election in June 1992, would you say that your own standard of living has increased or fallen?

- Since the last general election in June 1992, would you say that the general standard of living has increased or fallen?

Response categories ranged from 'gone up a lot' (1) to 'gone down a lot' (5)