

The question I've studied for 20 years:

- **How do citizens react when parties shift their policy positions?**

Approach #1: Counterfactual simulations on election survey data from Britain, France, Norway & the U.S.

Adams, Merrill and Grofman (2005): *A Unified Theory of Party Competition*.

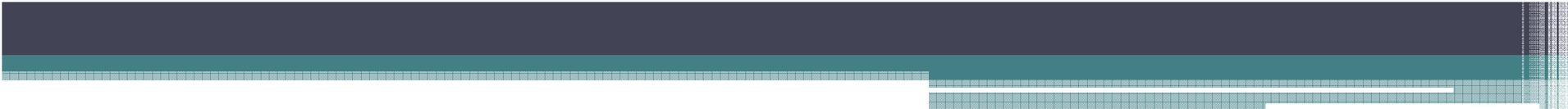
# How do citizens react when parties shift their policy positions?

Approach #2a: Pooled, time-series analyses of parties' Left-Right shifts versus their vote shares.

Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009): "Promise now, win votes later?" *Journal of Politics*.

Approach #2b: Pooled, time-series analyses of parties' Left-Right shifts versus shifts in survey respondents' perceptions of party positions.

Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu (forthcoming). "Is anybody listening?" *American Journal of Political Science*.



## How do citizens react when parties shift their policy positions?

Approach #3: Select on the dependent variable!

Survey data suggests the British public perceived elite policy convergence post-Thatcher. So, how did the public react?

Adams, Green, and Milazzo (forthcoming): “Has the British public depolarized along with political elites?” *Comparative Political Studies*.

## Examples of policy scale questions in the BES

Equalization of Incomes (Redistribution): Some people feel that government should make much greater efforts to make people's incomes more equal. Other people feel that government should be much less concerned about how equal people's incomes are. And other people have views somewhere in-between. Please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about redistributing income.

*1 = 'Make much greater efforts to make people's incomes more equal'*  
*11 = 'Be much less concerned about how equal people's incomes are'*

Other questions relate to nationalization; to unemployment versus inflation; and to social services

**Table 1. Respondents' Mean Placements of the Labour and Conservative Parties, 1987-2001**

		<b>1987</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2001</b>
Social Services	Labour	3.03	2.83	3.59	4.17
	Conservatives	7.16	7.06	6.94	6.21
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>4.23</b>	<b>3.35</b>	<b>2.04</b>
Nationalization	Labour	2.92	3.59	4.66	5.45
	Conservatives	9.14	8.38	8.00	7.50
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>6.22</b>	<b>4.79</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>2.05</b>
Inflation/unempl	Labour	2.33	2.98	3.14	3.73
	Conservatives	6.38	6.44	6.16	5.88
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>4.05</b>	<b>3.46</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>2.15</b>
Redistribution	Labour	2.95	3.08	3.49	4.65
	Conservatives	8.43	7.90	8.21	7.47
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>5.48</b>	<b>4.82</b>	<b>4.72</b>	<b>2.82</b>
<b>Average Lab-Con gap (4 scales)</b>		<b>4.97</b>	<b>4.33</b>	<b>3.61</b>	<b>2.27</b>

**Table 2. Changes in BES Respondents' Mean Self-placements on the Policy Scales, 1987-2001**

		1987	1992	1997	2001
Social Services	All	4.5	4.1	3.7	3.9
	Lab partisans	3.6	3.1	3.2	3.4
	Con partisans	5.2	5.0	4.4	4.6
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.2</b>
Nationalization	All	6.4	5.6	5.3	5.1
	Lab partisans	4.4	4.1	4.6	4.5
	Con partisans	7.9	7.0	6.4	6.1
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.6</b>
Inflation/unemp	All	3.5	3.5	3.6	4.0
	Lab partisans	2.3	2.8	3.0	3.5
	Con partisans	4.5	4.1	4.4	4.7
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.2</b>
Redistribution	All	5.0	4.5	4.1	4.8
	Lab partisans	3.1	2.8	3.0	3.8
	Con partisans	6.7	6.1	5.9	6.6
	<b>Lab-Con gap</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Average Lab-Con gap (4 scales)</b>		<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.7</b>

# **Are Voter Decision Rules Endogenous to Parties' Policy Strategies?**

## **A Model with Applications to Elite Depolarization in Post-Thatcher Britain**

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# Policy Evaluation vs. Party Persuasion

- Do citizens select parties based on policy or do parties cue partisans to adopt the party's policy positions?
- Spatial modelers assume citizens evaluate parties based on policy, but empirical research reaches inconsistent conclusions.

# The Policy Salience Hypothesis

- When parties are polarized on policy issues, then:
  - Parties' incentives to emphasize these policy differences increases.
  - The media's incentive to highlight policy debates increases.
  - Hence, the salience of policy debates to voters plausibly increases.

## H1: (Policy Salience Hypothesis)

When parties are polarized, voters will primarily update their party support to match their policy preferences, rather than vice versa.

# The Political Context Hypothesis

- When parties converge on policy then:
  - Parties are motivated to de-emphasize policy debates while emphasizing non-positional “valence” features (competence, integrity, “delivery”, etc.)
  - The media’s incentive to highlight policy debates decreases.

## H2 (Political Context Hypothesis)

When parties converge on policy, citizens are less likely to update their party support to match their policy preferences, and this causal relationship may be reversed.

# Data & Methods

- British politics (1987-2001)
  - Party Polarization (1980s)
  - Party Convergence (late 1990s - present)
- Panel data
  - 87-92, 92-97, 97-01
- Structural equation modeling
  - Estimate latent variables for partisanship and ideology using survey responses in multiple waves

# Measuring Ideology and Party Attachment

- Party Attachment
  - Party identification in Europe more complicated
  - *Party Attachment* - attachment to both Labour and Conservative parties
  - *Latent Party Attachment* :
    - 1) Feeling thermometer
      - 0 (strongly against ) to 1 (strongly favor)
    - 2) Strength of party identification
      - 0 (no attachment to the Conservative Party) to 1 (strong attachment to the Conservative Party)
- Ideology
  - *Latent Ideology* :
    - nationalization of industry, income redistribution, support for social services, unemployment vs. inflation

# Modeling the Reciprocal Relationship

$$\begin{aligned} Ideology_{it} = & \alpha_1 + \lambda_1 Ideology_{t-1} + \beta_1 Conservative Attachment_{t-1} \\ & + \beta_2 Labour Attachment_{t-1} + \varepsilon_{1it} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} Conservative Attachment_{it} = & \alpha_2 + \lambda_2 Conservative Attachment_{t-1} \\ & + \beta_3 Ideology_{t-1} + \varepsilon_{2it} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} Labour Attachment_{it} = & \alpha_3 + \lambda_3 Labour Attachment_{t-1} \\ & + \beta_4 Ideology_{t-1} + \varepsilon_{3it} \end{aligned}$$

# Stability coefficient estimates

	87-92	92-97	97-01
Strength of Labour Attachment	.65	.91	.86
Strength of Conservative Attachment	.69	.64	.89
Ideology	.98	.81	.64
<i>N</i>	1608	1924	2445

# Cross-lagged structural coefficients

	87-92	92-97	97-01
<i>Labour Party Estimates</i>			
Ideology → Labour Attachment	-.28	-.15	-.02 <sup>ns</sup>
Labour Attachment → Ideology	.04 <sup>ns</sup>	-.12	-.18
<i>Conservative Party Estimates</i>			
Ideology → Conservative Attachment	.24	.16	.04 <sup>ns</sup>
Conservative Attachment → Ideology	-.05 <sup>ns</sup>	-.08 <sup>ns</sup>	-.01 <sup>ns</sup>
<i>N</i>	1608	1924	2445

# Mass Response to Convergence

- 1) British public has depolarized in terms of its partisan loyalties,
  - Decline in *partisan sorting*
  
- 2) British public has not significantly depolarized in terms of its policy attitudes
  - Modest changes in *policy extremity*
  - No significant changes in *attitude constraint*

# Implications

- Political behavior in Britain vs. the U.S.
  - Causal influence of British citizens' policy positions on partisanship stronger than in American context
- Political representation
  - When party elites take divergent positions, voters will choose parties based on policy
- Parties' election strategies
  - When political parties are polarized, policy shifts will cause citizens to update their party support
  - When political parties are not polarized, a policy shift increasing convergence may prompt little or no partisan response