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## Behavioural Thatcherism And Nostalgia: Tracing the Everyday Consequences of holding Thatcherite Values

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### Abstract

With the passing of time and the benefit of hindsight there is, again, growing interest in Thatcherism – above all in its substantive and enduring legacy. But, to date at least, and largely due to data limitations, little of that work has focussed on tracing the behavioural consequences, at the individual level, of holding Thatcherite values. That oversight we seek both to identify more clearly and to begin to address. Deploying new survey data, we use multiple linear regression and structural equation modelling to unpack the relationship between ‘attitudinal’ and ‘behavioural’ Thatcherism. In the process we reveal the considerably greater behavioural consequences of holding neo-liberal, as distinct from neo-conservative, values whilst identifying the key mediating role played by social, political and economic nostalgia. We find that neo-liberal values are positively associated with Behavioural Thatcherism, whilst neo-conservative values are negatively associated with Behavioural Thatcherism. In exploring the implications we also reveal some intriguing interaction effects between economic nostalgia and neo-conservative values in the centre-left vote for Brexit. In the conclusion we reflect on the implications of these findings for our understanding of the legacy of Thatcherism and, indeed, for Brexit itself.

Keywords: Brexit; Thatcherism; nostalgia; survey data; neo-liberalism; political legacy.

### Introduction

‘What is Thatcherism?’ was a question to which much attention was focused during the late-1980s and 1990s (Hall, 1979). Various contributors saw Thatcherism as a Janus-faced phenomenon, flexibly combining the seemingly contradictory combination of a liberal and/or liberalising economic disposition with a socially conservative instinct (Gamble 1988; Hayes 1994). Later termed ‘neo-liberalism’ and ‘neo-conservatism’, these twin ideational pillars came to be seen as key building blocks of a distinct New Right approach to the economy and society (Hay 1996; King 1987; Levitas 1986). Contemporaneously with her period as Prime Minister, many of the studies of Thatcherism, as we shall see below, focused on the social and economic *attitudes* which were assumed to be associated with this doctrine. The social and economic *policies* pursued by the Thatcher governments also came under scrutiny, as well as research on which socio-demographic groups were

sufficiently attracted to the vision espoused by Thatcher and her supporters to *vote* conservative.

Our contribution to this literature, almost three decades after Margaret Thatcher left office, is to explore the longer-term and *behavioural* legacy of Thatcherism.<sup>1</sup> By this we mean the daily, mundane and taken-for-granted ways in which the attitudinal values associated with Thatcherism came, and continue, to inform lived social, political and economic practices in Britain today. Our working assumption is that social practices in keeping with core Thatcherite tenets have become the norm in many aspects of economic and social life, with the accretion of time and with the slow institutionalisation and ideational embedding of Thatcherite ideals via reforms conducted in its image. This process, we suggest, is likely to leave (indeed, to *have* left, see Grasso et al 2019, forthcoming, Gray et al 2019) enduring (and empirically identifiable) behavioural traces in both the ways in which people's lives are shaped and, above all, in what they desire and strive for.

In order to assess this empirically, we draw on new survey data collected as part of an ESRC-funded project. Alongside a series of questions designed to gauge the degree of Behavioural Thatcherism (reported behaviour consistent with Thatcherite values), we also asked respondents about their beliefs relating to the economy and social norms, Margaret Thatcher's time in office, and feelings of nostalgia. Nostalgia has come to the fore in recent political science attempts to explain, for example, votes for radical right populist politicians, parties and social movements (Gest 2016). Like Gest, we find evidence to support the claim that nostalgic values shape current political attitudes and beliefs.

In the next section of this paper, we review how Thatcherism has been approached in previous studies. Following this, we outline our thinking on Behavioural Thatcherism and the implicit conception of the model Thatcherite subject on which it seems to be predicated. We then outline our methodology and modelling strategy. This includes outlining our operationalisation of Behavioural Thatcherism to gauge its prevalence in contemporary British society. After this we explore the ways in which neoliberal and neo-conservative values, beliefs about Thatcherism and feelings of nostalgia are related to the markers of Behavioural Thatcherism. Our modelling is then reported as repeated multiple linear regressions (with robust and appropriate controls for key socio-demographic variables) and a structural equation model of the conceptual variables. Our paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of our findings. We suggest that a pronounced behavioural legacy of Thatcherism can be found and said to 'exist' in the day-to-day lives of ordinary Britons; neo-liberalism, in particular, remains a powerful and organising concept of social and political life.

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<sup>1</sup> On which see also Farrall and Hay (2014) and Farrall, Hay and Gray (forthcoming).

## Conceptualising the Legacy of Thatcherism

In the existing literature 'Thatcherism' has been approached by political scientists and political sociologists as, variously:

- (1) as an *attitude*;
- (2) as a set of social and economic *policies*; and
- (3) as the act of *voting* for the Conservative Party whilst Margaret Thatcher was its leader (linked in turn to associated analyses concerning which social groups voted for the Conservative Party during this period).

Let us consider each in turn.

### *The Attitudinal Aspects of Thatcherism*

Some of the earliest forays into the impact of Thatcherism focused on *attitudinal* measures. One of the earliest surveys of attitudes towards Thatcherism was conducted in Manchester by researchers at the University of Salford (Edgell and Duke, 1991). These surveys ran in late-1980 to early-1981 and again in late-1983 to early-1984, and found little by way of support for Thatcherite values. The surveys suggested that respondents wanted increases in spending and taxation (rather than decreases, a tenet of what might be seen as the neoliberal aspect of Thatcherism) with an attendant drop in support for spending on the armed services (which would be against the expectations of what might be seen as a neo-conservative element of Thatcherism). The surveys also found high levels of support for local government (1991:81) although they also found support for curbing the power of trade unions (trade unions were still seen as being needed, however, 1991:83).

Crewe and Searing (1988) asked 'has the electorate become Thatcherite?', to which they answered 'no', pointing out that by some analyses the population was taking a 'hard line' on some issues before 1979 and that by 1987 was actually showing quite *anti*-Thatcherite sentiments. They argued that there was little evidence that Thatcherite ideology had gained much popular support, although there were some signs that significant blocks such as the Monday Club had started to share some of the pillars of Thatcherism. When it came to a consideration of the extent to which Thatcherite thinking was shared by the electorate, most of the dimensions of Thatcherism identified by Crewe and Searing suggested that the electorate had shifted little or had, in fact, become *less* Thatcherite (1988:376). McAllister and Mughan (1987) concluded their study by suggesting that there had been "little fundamental change in the electorate's overall *attitudinal* structure" (1987:47, our emphasis). In short, initial shifts in attitudes which might become, in time, a legacy were simply not identified in the early literature on attitudinal change.

From this point onwards the analyses started to become more sophisticated, with analysts starting to explore regional shifts, the notion of 'political generations' and to explore longer term trends in the data available by exploring the British Election Studies back to 1963. Johnston and Pattie (1990) were characteristic of this growing sophistication. Although they

conclude by arguing that “the Thatcherite project has failed, in that the majority of the electorate ... did not embrace its core values to any significant extent” (1990:492) they were able to show (using the 1983 and 1987 British Election Study surveys) that there were significant changes in some values at the level of the region (consistent with the idea of the opening of a political north-south cleavage). More recent studies, using longer term data series and more nuanced analytical techniques (such as age, period and cohort analyses, Grasso et al, 2019) have suggested that attitudinal effects can more readily be detected for those who grew up during Thatcher’s period in office. These more recent studies provide evidence that the attitudinal legacy of Thatcherism may have taken several decades to emerge.

### *Thatcherism as a Policy and Legislative Project*

Chief amongst the early work which approached Thatcherism as a policy and legislative agenda is Marsh and Rhodes’ seminal edited collection (1992). Its innovation was to deal not simply with legislative activity, but with the much more complex and difficult work of implementation. The approach forced its contributors to consider the extent to which legislation and the policies which flowed from it was in keeping with Thatcherite ideals (rather than simply being passed or developed between 1979 and 1990). Their approach to the operationalisation of the concept of Thatcherism embraces ideas, legislation and crucially the *implementation* of legislation. Theirs, however, is very much a study of institutions and policies, rather than the impact upon individual citizens. It stops short of considering the potential behavioural implications of the (partial) implementation of Thatcherite ideas in policies.

The more recent literature in this strand of research tends to approach Thatcherism as something which existed (demonstratively) and which can be traced and its impact assessed. Farrall and Hay’s edited collection *The Legacy of Thatcherism* (2014) contains a number of chapters which detail the operationalisation of Thatcherite ideas in distinct policy domains. Its contributors deal with the economy, the social security system, schooling, housing family policy, and the criminal justice system, setting each in the context of data on widening social and economic inequality. Overall the approach maps the sequencing of policy outcomes, ideological positions, political ‘machinery’, organisational structures, the policy positions of other parties, the relative standing of some professions, and access to and/or the distribution of resources, whilst attending throughout to the uneven spatial distribution of each.

Nunn (2014), taking a still broader approach, identifies four long-term outcomes of Thatcherism. The first of these is the transformation of mainstream party competition and the creation of the New Labour project (see also Hay 1999; Heffernan 2000). The second is the creation of the neo-liberal individual – part-citizen, part-consumer. In this version of the project of the self, advancement is made via the possession of material goods as part of a

wider possessive individualism.<sup>2</sup> ‘Social mobility’ therefore before becomes an individual, rather than a collective, goal. The third legacy which Nunn identifies is the de-industrialisation experienced by the UK during the 1980s and the increased dependence on the financial sector (although as Nunn notes, de-industrialisation can be traced back to the 1950s). The final long-term outcome is the fracturing of the working class. Nunn’s work in this field is one of the few to explicitly identify the creation of a ‘neo-liberal individual’ as a consequence of Thatcherism, and to assess the implication of the Thatcherite vision for society on the behaviour of the individuals in that society.

A recent special edition of this journal (10/1) has helped push forward recent debates about Thatcher’s impact and the legacies which flow from this period. In it, Jessop (2015) notes a number of diverse legacies of Thatcherism, including the rise of the conviction politician, the promotion of the free market, deregulation, privatisation of state-owned utilities and the introduction of market proxies in the state sector, reductions in direct taxation and the growth of internationalisation. Each of these he sees as a product of the application of a Thatcherite disposition informing policy and legislative activity (p24). Marsh and Akram (2015:55) point to changes in fiscal policies and legislative constraints on trade unions, but question the extent to which the Thatcher governments can be seen to have changed social values (citing Crewe’s work) and the extent to which there was an ‘economic miracle’ attributable to Thatcher’s policies (p57). Smith (2015) highlights Thatcher’s role in undermining the broad policy framework and politically institutionalised rules which emphasised the need for conciliation and consensus (p65). While being careful not to accept uncritically the idea of a post-war consensus, Smith argues that the Thatcher administrations started the process of re-visioning the responsibilities of the state and the interests it ought to serve (p69). Similarly, he emphasises, subsequent governments have been able to change employment and welfare policies without having to enter into negotiations with the most directly affected parties (p76). As such, the idea that concessions needed to be made to various sections of society was removed from the political calculus. In a similar fashion, Green (2010:193-4) has argued that Thatcher transformed the institutional terrain of politics such that trade unions and local governments saw their powers reduced, a phobia of paying taxes emerged, and the state withdrew from any meaningful management of the economy. Dorey (2015) focuses on levels of economic inequality as the main legacy of Thatcherism. This was legitimised ideationally by re-casting wealth as a reward for effort (p81) and a series of policies and supporting legislation (such as income tax reductions, curbing trade union power and various efforts to reduce the effective economic value of social security payments), driving up levels of inequality. New Labour, he points out, focused on tackling poverty and social exclusion, rather than tackling *inequality*, which he cites as the principal enduring legacy of Thatcherism.

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<sup>2</sup> On the concept of possessive individualism more generally, see Billing, 2018.

### *Thatcherism as political (electoral) behaviour*

Another, mainly contemporaneous, set of studies focused on the socio-economic determinants of the vote for the Conservative Party during the 1980s. Prime examples of this literature include (but are by no means limited to) Heath et al.'s classic study *How Britain Votes* (1985), which argued that Labour's electoral base was withering as a result of deindustrialisation. Riddell (1991:212) made a similar argument, noting that those living in the north, council tenants, union members and public sector employees had been declining at the expense of southern, owner occupiers in non-unionised, private sector occupations. McAllister and Mugahh (1987) is typical of much of this literature, in which various socio-demographic factors are cross-tabulated with voting preferences (1987:51). Norris (1990) makes a particularly sophisticated contribution to the literature, exploring the ownership of shares, private healthcare and council house purchasing and voting using data from the 1987 British Election Survey. Johnson and Pattie's work stands out as another exemplar of this type of work. Their 1990 paper reports that 30% of the working class voted Conservative in the 1983 and 1987 general elections, whilst also noting emerging regional differences in voting preferences. Similarly, Edgell and Duke (1991:67) claim that the social bases of Thatcherism were relatively narrow, and were to be found amongst employers, the petit bourgeoisie, public sector managers and private consumption only households (that is, those households who owned cars and their own homes).

### *Critiquing Current Approaches to Thatcherism*

Whilst the question of who voted Conservative during Thatcher's tenure as party leader, Thatcherite attitudes, and the legacies of Thatcherite policies are common elements in the exploration of Thatcherism. Few authors, with the exception of Nunn (2014), refer to (let alone trace empirically) the behavioural consequences at the level of the individual citizen. Thatcherism's moral and moralising discourse was very much about behaviour and, indeed, the ethical evaluation of that behaviour. It is neatly summed up in a much quoted aphorism from an interview reported in *The Times* on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1988: "Economics are the method; the object is to change the soul". In changing what she referred to as 'the soul', the aim was of course to change not just the soul, but the ways in which people behaved – and to judge the soul on the basis of the behaviour exhibited. Yet, aside from studies of voters' reactions to the tenets of Thatcherism in the polling booths, there has been little or no attempt to study the ways in which Thatcherite ideologies, thinking and policies may have affected the *day-to-day behaviours* of people living in the UK. The closest we get in the current literature which touches upon the behavioural elements of Thatcherism are to be found in Gamble's discussion of increases in unemployment and the weakening of the Union in Scotland (both of which undoubtedly affected daily routines and voting patterns), and Nunn's use of the concept of 'possessive individualism' and its consequences. Most of the remaining literature on the legacy of Thatcherism deals with broad social attitudes and the changes in these, institutional and policy legacies (net of their impact on individual's lives) and/or discursive legacies (on which see Phillips 1998).

## The Thatcherite Subject

The basis for our thinking about the legacy of Thatcherism as having a strongly behavioural element (as well, of course, as attitudinal, institutional and policy legacies) is inspired by the literature on Thatcherite and neo-liberal individualism. Leadbeater (1989:141-144) is an early exponent of such a view, noting how Thatcherite individualism shaped people's desires and actions. This body of work extends to other critiques of neo-liberalism more generally, such as Rose's work on individual existence (1996) or Foucault's on the self (2005), and Mitchell's work on unemployed Australians (1995). However, we rely, in particular, on the more recent work of French scholars Dardot and Laval (2013), and US political scientist Paul Pierson (1993). Dardot and Laval's work is an attempt to understand the ways in which what might be termed 'the neoliberal project' has shaped society and the key social actors within it. They note that neoliberalism is:

*"productive of certain kinds of social relations, certain ways of living, certain subjectivities. In other words, at stake in neo-liberalism is nothing more, nor less, than the form of our existence – the way in which we are led to conduct ourselves, to relate to others and ourselves"* (2013:3).

They go on to identify, as the principal characteristic of neo-liberalism, what they term 'competitive behaviouralism' (p4). Drawing upon the work of Foucault, they argue that neoliberalism is a form of 'government of life' (p4-5). For this reason, they approach neoliberalism not simply as a set of prescriptions about economics or economic policy, but also as a societal form (p11). Their sensitivity to politically-induced behavioural change is premised on the idea that neoliberalism has produced a new human condition (p255). Key to this is the production of an individually-focussed spirit of competitiveness (p257), which involves not just the 'training of bodies' but the 'management of minds' (p258). This conditions subjects to take personal responsibility for the making and taking of choices which are advantageous to them. This new entrepreneurial subject is produced over time via various institutional forms and the fostering of competitive individualism in such new institutional environments (p259-260). They argue that:

*"neoliberal rationality produces the subject it requires by deploying the means of governing him [sic.] so that he really does conduct himself as an entity in a competition, who must maximise his results by exposing himself to risks and taking full responsibility for possible failures"* (p261).

They go on to suggest that this is a departure from earlier conditions since it:

*"consists [of] the moulding whereby individuals are rendered more capable of tolerating the new conditions created for them – and this even though they help to make these conditions increasingly harsh and abiding through their own conduct. In a word, the novelty consists in triggering a 'chain reaction' by producing 'enterprising subjects' who in turn will reproduce, expand and reinforce competitive relations between themselves"* (p262).

Part of the discourse of competitive individualism is the production and reproduction of the self as an economic vehicle; one which needs to be continually updating and upgrading itself in readiness to meet the needs and requirements of the market place. To this end, education and training, life-long learning and ensuring employability are the watchwords of the competitive individual. This 'care of the self' extends to one's loved ones too; children's education and helping one's partner retrain (if needed), alongside managing one's employability portfolio, and responding to 'choices', 'opportunities' and 'possibilities', becomes part of the lifeworld of the competitive individual. Choices are made on the basis of information made available about the successes associated with each provider; how many patients are happy with the treatment outcomes; how many learners go on to secure relevant employment or the starting salaries of recent alumnae, and so forth. This human capital (and the continual reinvestment in it) become associated with outcomes at the individual-level. The positions which one achieves, the economic resources which one accumulates and the status one enjoys are seen as the consequences of decisions which individual makes and the trajectories of personal self-realisation (p275). As such the distribution of resources is seen as the results of individual choices and actions, rather than the outcome of inter-generational or class-based processes. Alongside this, argue Dardot and Laval, private insurance replaces socialised health care, pension and welfare schemes – as the field of action of the responsible choosing neoliberal subject grows and competitive individualism becomes institutionally embedded (p277).

Writing 20 years before them, Pierson argues in a similar vein that:

“Policies may encourage individuals to develop particular skills, make certain kinds of investments, purchase certain kinds of goods, or devote time and money to certain kinds of organizations” (1993:609).

His central insight is that, “public policies also provide resources and create incentives for mass publics” (1993:605). In line with Dardot and Laval, Pierson is pointing to the fact that social and economic policies shape what people want and are capable of doing in their everyday lives. In part, this updates for an era of austerity earlier work by Esping-Andersen, who notes that:

“The welfare state is becoming deeply embedded in the everyday experience of virtually every citizen. Our personal life is structured by the welfare state, and so is the entire political economy” (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 141 cited in Pierson, 1993:605-6).

Thus, just as Pierson argues that:

“Welfare states provide resources and incentives to individuals that profoundly influence crucial life choices: what kind of job to take, when to retire or take time off from the paid labour force, how to organize and divide household tasks such as child rearing.” (1993:606)

so we suggest that the shift to a more marketised society, and indeed the *process of making* that change to a marketised society, provides people with resources, incentives and the

motivations to embrace new possibilities. Whilst the tenor of this is optimistic, the flipside is that it also forces people to confront the new realities facing them, and to cease to confront the institutional and organisational structures which had previously been presented to them. These new realities and the institutions and organisations which are part of them, to quote Pierson again, “create powerful packages of resources and incentives that influence the positions of interest groups, government elites, and individual social actors in politically consequential ways” (1993:610).

Our aim in what follows is to explore the ways in which the attitudinal structure of what we will term Thatcherite values shapes the sorts of behaviours which ordinary British citizens exhibit some 40 years after she was first elected Prime Minister. However, in order to understand Thatcherite values, we argue, one also needs to locate these within wider ideas about nostalgia (which we explore below) and the sense that something valued (in a mythic or real past) has been ‘lost’.

### **Analytic and Methodological Strategy**

Our data comes from an online survey commissioned to assess the contemporary relevance of Thatcherite values and ideology on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1979 General Election. It gathered responses from a representative sample of citizens aged over 16 living in Britain, and was conducted in January and February 2019 by BMG Research.<sup>3</sup> The survey had a non-completion rate of 34%.<sup>4</sup> Many (although not all) survey items were designed by the authors, following two rounds of cognitive interviewing, two field experiments and a pilot survey during 2018. These were undertaken to refine key aspects of the items used and to facilitate a reflective discussion of potential question wordings.

Our modelling strategy was to undertake factor analyses of variables in the batteries measuring key concepts (such as neoliberal values, or social nostalgia, all of which are outlined below). These were then used in, first, multiple linear regression analyses (with suitable socio-demographic control variables) before moving to a structural equation model to assess the structural properties of the model being tested. Below we outline the measurement of the key variables selected for analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> The interview schedule was subject to rigorous pre-testing, with two rounds of cognitive interviews and online pilots. This included fielding the questions to young people who would not have been alive during Thatcher’s administrations, in order to test their approach to the historic nature of the survey. Most reported some knowledge of Thatcher via their family, media or education, and some question wordings were modified to make them more accessible. Moreover, all questions included a ‘don’t know’ option.

<sup>4</sup> The figure of 34% includes those who did not participate following the invitation (29%), those who started but dropped out prior to completing the survey (4%), and those who were removed for completing survey at excessive speed (1%). Of the remaining 66%, 14% were willing to complete the survey, but were unable to as regional targets had been met, whilst 51% were able to complete the survey in full.

*Measuring and Exploring Behavioural Thatcherism*

Central to the analysis is the attempt to capture empirically the concept of ‘Behavioural Thatcherism’. The items selected for this are listed in Figure One, and relate to a series of (behavioural) practices or to the direct consequences of those (behavioural) practices: owning one’s own business; owning stocks and shares; being covered by private health care schemes; attending oneself and/or sending one’s children to a private school; paying for additional tutoring for one’s children at school; owning ‘second homes’; and making use of league tables relating to educational and/or health care providers.<sup>5</sup>

**FIGURE ONE: MEASURING BEHAVIOURAL THATCHERISM**

<b>Item Wording</b>
<p><i>Do you or a member of your household own (or co-own) a business?</i> [tick all that apply]</p> <p>[Yes, myself, Yes, someone I live with, yes, no, Don’t know]</p>
<p><i>Do you or a member of your household own stocks or shares?</i></p> <p>[Yes, no, Don’t know]</p>
<p><i>Are you yourself covered by a private health insurance scheme, that is, an insurance scheme that allows you to get private medical treatment?</i> [tick all that apply]</p> <p>[Yes, paid for by my employer (or my partner’s); Yes, paid for by myself or my family; Yes, partly paid for by my employer and partly paid for by myself; Yes, other; No, I am not covered by private medical insurance].</p>
<p><i>Have you, or any of your children, <b>ever</b> attended a fee-paying school?</i></p> <p>[yes, just myself; yes, just my children; yes, both myself and my children; no neither of us].</p>
<p><i>Excluding music lessons, have you ever paid for additional tutoring outside of school for any of your children for any of their school subjects?</i> [tick all that apply]</p> <p>[Yes, for children still at school; Yes, for children who have now left school; No, but I would consider doing this; No; Not applicable]</p>
<p><i>Do you, or anyone in your household, own any residential property in the UK or abroad which you do not permanently live in?</i> [tick all that apply]</p> <p><i>Include properties that are let out to others, second homes, or which are co-owned with others. Exclude caravans, park homes and timeshares.</i></p>

<sup>5</sup> It is possible that one might have access to some of these products as a result of others purchasing them on their behalf. However this remains a tangible activity that an individual is in receipt of.

[Yes, rented out to someone as their home; Yes, used as a holiday home/weekend cottage; Yes, rented to others as a holiday home; Yes, for occupation while working away from home; Yes, other; No]

*Have you ever used this sort of information [relating to making decisions about health care and schools based on league tables<sup>6</sup>] to make choices about which hospital or school to use?*

[tick all that apply]

[Yes, schools, Yes, hospitals, Yes another public service, No].

Respondents' responses to items were summed (with each equally-weighted) and produced a further variable ranging from 0 (having done none of these) to 15 (since many items allow for multiple responses, even although there are only seven items the potential scale extends to 15). See Table 1.

**TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF BEHAVIOURAL THATCHERISM SCORES**

Score	N of Cases	Percentage of Cases
0	2308	40
1	1556	27
2	881	15
3	484	8
4	237	4
5	139	2
6	73	1
7	56	1
8	18	-
9	14	-
10	8	-
11	2	-
12	3	-
13	1	-
14	0	-
15	1	-
TOTAL	5781	100

'-' Indicates a percentage less than 1.

<sup>6</sup> Two questions immediately preceded this one, and were: 1: *Some say that certain kinds of information should be made available to help people make informed choices about public services such as schools and hospitals. Others think that this information is irrelevant or cannot be trusted. How useful do you think it would be for someone choosing which surgeon to see to be given league tables that show the number of patients who have died under the care of different surgeons?* and 2: *How useful do you think it would be for someone choosing which school to send their child to to be given league tables that compare the exam results of secondary schools in their area?* Both questions had the same response set: *Very useful, quite useful, Not very useful, Not at all useful.*

On average, men scored slightly higher than women (1.38 vs. 1.28,  $p = .020$ ). Similarly, the young scored higher than the elderly (16-24 year olds had an average of 1.68, which fell steady with age to 1.06 for those aged over 75,  $p = .000$ ). This is already intriguing, suggestive as it is of the increasing adoption of what we have termed Behavioural Thatcherism over time (see also Grasso et al 2019, forthcoming). Behavioural Thatcherism, in other words, might be thought of as an incrementally-adopted cohort effect (Grasso et al 2019). There was no significant difference observed between those living in rural and urban areas ( $p = .843$ ).

### Relating Behavioural Thatcherism to wider Thatcherite Values and Beliefs

What might explain Thatcherite Behaviouralism? We developed a model based on the differentiation between two key streams in contemporary new right thinking – namely neo-liberalism (Figure Two) and neo-conservatism (Figure Three). Questions relating to both sets of items were asked as part of the same battery of questions, and all questions shared the same set of response codes.<sup>7</sup>

**FIGURE TWO: NEO-LIBERAL ‘THATCHERITE’ VALUES**

Item Wording	Loadings
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
<i>Ordinary working people get their fair share of the nation’s wealth.</i>	.599
<i>There is no need for strong trade unions to protect employees’ working conditions and wages.</i>	.667
<i>Private enterprise is the best way to solve Britain’s economic problems.</i>	.644
<i>Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership.</i>	-.322
<i>It would be better for everyone if we all paid less tax.</i>	.356
<i>Welfare benefits should be reserved for only the extremely needy.</i>	.418

These items were factor analysed to form one battery of items measuring neo-liberal values. The KMO was .757, and the eigenvalue was 2.288.<sup>8</sup> The factor magnitude of loadings ranged from -.322<sup>9</sup> to .667 and were all in the anticipated direction.

<sup>7</sup> Respondents were invited to use the following scale: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree. This scale was used for all questions unless otherwise noted. The items themselves were chosen following a close reading of the literature (e.g. Hayes, 1994, Hay, 1996) to measure neo-liberalism and (see Figure Three) neo-conservatism, and were then analysed using exploratory factor analysis (which confirmed that these items loaded together).

<sup>8</sup> The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) Test is a measure of how suited the data is for Factor Analysis. The test measures sampling adequacy for each variable in the model and for the complete model. KMO values range between 0 and 1. A rule of thumb for interpreting the statistic is that KMO values between 0.8 and 1 indicate the sampling is adequate, whilst those below 0.6 indicate the sampling is not adequate and that remedial action should be taken. The lowest KMO for our factor analyses was .722, suggesting that all of these had reached an acceptable level.

<sup>9</sup> This item was reverse coded, hence the negative value.

**FIGURE THREE: NEO-CONSERVATIVE ‘THATCHERITE’ VALUES**

<b>Item Wording</b>	<b>Loadings</b>
<i>Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional values.</i>	.666
<i>For some crimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence.</i>	.604
<i>People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences.</i>	.753
<i>Schools should teach children to obey authority</i>	.681

These items were factor analysed to form one battery of neo-conservative items. The KMO was .760, and the eigenvalue was 2.369. The factor loadings ranged from .604 to .753. In addition to these two aggregate indices, we measured four other factors (Beliefs about Thatcherism; Social Nostalgia, Economic Nostalgia and Political Nostalgia), all of which are outlined below.

The Beliefs about Thatcherism battery (Figure Four) assessed the extent to which respondents felt that Thatcher reversed the decline of the country, was right to sell council houses (a flagship policy), helped to ensure better lives for all people, made decisions which were needed (even if there were some people who lost out), was right to tackle trade unions (another major policy area), looked after the interests of only the rich (a criticism of her governments, then and now), and left a legacy of housing shortages. The battery also assesses the extent to which respondents believe that private companies are better able to run utilities than state-owned enterprises (another major policy development pursued by Thatcher's government). These items were factor analysed to form one battery of items. The KMO was .890, and the eigenvalue was 4.465. The magnitude of factor loadings ranged from -.467<sup>10</sup> to .894.

**FIGURE FOUR: BELIEFS ABOUT THATCHER/THATCHERISM**

<b>Item Wording</b>	<b>Loadings</b>
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister?	
<i>Margaret Thatcher made Britain Great again.</i>	.869
<i>Margaret Thatcher was right to sell council houses to tenants.</i>	.576
<i>Private companies run utilities like gas, electricity and water better than the government ever could.</i>	.481
<i>The social and economic changes since the 1980s have ensured a brighter future for all.</i>	.715
<i>Although there were some losers, overall the changes Margaret Thatcher's governments made were necessary.</i>	.894
<i>Margaret Thatcher was right to take on trade unions.</i>	.805
<i>Margaret Thatcher only looked after the interests of the rich.</i>	-.716

<sup>10</sup> Again, negatively loading items were reverse coded.

<i>Today's housing crisis is a result of selling off so many council homes in the 1980s.</i>	-.467
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We asked a further thirteen questions designed to gauge the degree of expressed nostalgia of respondents, differentiating in the process between social, economic and political dimensions of nostalgia (see Figures Five to Seven).

**FIGURE FIVE: SOCIAL NOSTALGIA BATTERY**

Item Wording	Loadings
<i>The country's best days are behind it.</i>	.466
<i>I would like my country to be the way it used to be.</i>	.711
<i>More and more, I don't like with what my country has become.</i>	.609
<i>These days I feel like a stranger in my own country.</i>	.704
<i>I feel sad when I think about how areas like the ... one I <b>grew up in</b> have changed.</i>	.837
<i>... one I <b>now live in</b> have changed.</i>	.813

The Social Nostalgia battery (Figure Five) asked respondents the extent to which they felt the country's best days were behind it, if they preferred their country to be 'the way it used to be', the extent to which they liked 'what their country had become', and felt like a stranger in their own country. They were also asked about their feelings of remorse and/or regret about changes in the area in which they currently lived, and that in which they had grown up. These items were factor analysed to form one battery of items. The KMO was .837, and the eigenvalue was 3.450. The factor loadings ranged from .609 to .711.

The Economic Nostalgia battery (Figure Six) asked four questions, all of which contained an element of change or transformation to them. These items focused on the extent to which the profit motive now dominates social life, the extent to which market forces are responsible for growing economic inequalities, feelings of loss when some of the major employers of the 1920s-1960s declined (often coming to a head most visibly in the 1970s and 1980s) and the feeling of a loss of community spirit since the 1980s. These items were factor analysed to form one battery of items. The KMO was .722, and the eigenvalue was 2.105. The factor loadings ranged from .585 to .632.

**FIGURE SIX: ECONOMIC NOSTALGIA BATTERY**

Item Wording	Loadings
<i>The profit motive has come to dominate all aspects of our society.</i>	.607
<i>The reliance on market forces has increased the gap between rich and poor.</i>	.632
<i>It feels to me like the country lost something when coal mines, steel mills and shipyards closed.</i>	.585
<i>I feel that there has been a loss of community spirit around here since the 1980s.</i>	.609

The Political Nostalgia battery (Figure Seven) focused more directly on the Thatcher governments and the record, asking items about their impact on the quality of life, the extent to which they did ‘damage to communities around here’ and were responsible for the problems faced by the UK in the present (2019). These items were factor analysed to form one battery of items. The KMO was .765, and the eigenvalue was 2.612. The factor loadings ranged from .889 to .908.

**FIGURE SEVEN: POLITICAL NOSTALGIA BATTERY**

Item Wording	Loadings
<i>Margaret Thatcher’s governments decreased the quality of life for many ordinary people.</i>	.908
<i>Margaret Thatcher’s governments did a lot of damage to communities around here.</i>	.889
<i>Many of the problems we now face started in the 1980s with Margaret Thatcher.</i>	.897

#### *Modelling ‘Behavioural Thatcherism’*

Recall that our modelling strategy had two stages to it. First, we ran multiple linear regressions (controlling for a range of appropriate socio-demographic variables), before then moving to explore the relationships between the main concepts using a structural equation model.<sup>11</sup> This allowed us to model the processual relationships between these variables. Table Two summarises the results of the first stage of this modelling procedure.

<sup>11</sup> Skewed data can often produce heteroskedasticity, which in turn can result in unreliable confidence intervals (although it does not impact the estimators, Kaufman, 2013). Typically, unless heteroskedasticity is pronounced, significance tests remain virtually unaffected, and thus OLS estimation can be used without concern of serious distortion. Nevertheless, in light of the skewness in our data (see Table 1), we also ran a version of the final model (model IV) with the dependent variable transformed into a log. This required us to add 1 to each score since log10 transformations cannot be calculated on 0 scores. The final model using the log10 transformed dependent variable was not substantively different from the untransformed dependent variable. We have reported the untransformed model in Table 2.

## [TABLE 2 HERE]

We ran four models, starting with a very basic model which contained only demographic variables.<sup>12</sup> As is clearly seen, gender and urban/rural dwelling were not statistically significantly related to Behavioural Thatcherism (and this did not change as the modelling progressed). Age, however, was found to be statistically significant (with younger people reporting *greater* levels of Behavioural Thatcherism). We found similarly significant results for: self-identified religiosity (with those identifying as religious reporting greater levels of Behavioural Thatcherism); household income (with wealthier households exhibiting more Behavioural Thatcherism); and higher education (with those with a University degree also exhibiting more Behavioural Thatcherism). Not being the chief income earner was also found to be associated with Behavioural Thatcherism in Model I, but did not reach statistical significance thereafter.

The next model introduced neo-liberal and neo-conservative values into the model. The first of these was always statistically significantly associated with Behavioural Thatcherism, whilst the second became progressively more statistically significantly associated with Behavioural Thatcherism as the modelling progressed. The key thing to note about these two variables is the direction of their relationship with Behavioural Thatcherism. Perhaps unremarkably, neo-liberalism was positively associated with behavioural Thatcherism. More intriguingly, the relationship was negative for neo-conservatism (the more neo-conservative one's value-set the *less* likely one was to report Behavioural Thatcherite practices). Model III introduced one further variable: general Thatcherite Beliefs. This, too, proved statistically significant and was associated positively with Behavioural Thatcherism. Finally, Model IV introduced the three measures of nostalgia. Of these, only one, Political Nostalgia was (positively) associated with Behavioural Thatcherism.

Further modelling, using first neo-liberalism and then neo-conservatism as the dependent variables, found that Thatcherite Beliefs, Social Nostalgia, Economic Nostalgia and Political Nostalgia were all positively and significantly associated with these two measures. Since these models replicate some of what we discuss below (when describing the results of the structural equation modelling) we do not present these findings in full here.

### *Developing a structural equation model of Behavioural Thatcherism*

Let us turn now to the structural equation modelling. Here we drop the socio-demographic variables (since they are not all suitable for linear modelling) and focus on the main conceptual variables outlined above. Our model is summarised in Figure Eight. Following the multiple linear regression modelling reported above, we specify regression paths from

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<sup>12</sup> These were coded as follows: Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; Urban/Rural: 1 = urban, 2 = rural; Religiosity: 1 = Extremely Religious, 7 = Extremely Non-religious; Chief Earner: 1 = yes, 2 = no; Household Income: 1 = Below £5,000pa, 15 = Above £100,000pa; Degree Educated: 1 = yes, 2 = no. Age was continuously recorded.

Thatcherite Beliefs, Social Nostalgia, Economic Nostalgia and Political Nostalgia to both neo-liberal and neo-conservative value-sets. We also specify regression paths from Thatcherite Beliefs and both neo-liberal and neo-conservatism values to Behavioural Thatcherism. Error terms for the four variables (indicated by e1 to e7 in circles in Figure Eight) dealing with Thatcherite Beliefs and the various forms of nostalgia were allowed to co-vary, as were those for neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism.<sup>13</sup>

### [FIGURE EIGHT HERE]

Our model reveals statistically significant paths at  $p < .000$  between all of the variables we include (with the exception of the Political Nostalgia to neo-conservatism path). The model fits the data well (with a CFI of .995, and a RMSEA of .064). It suggests that Thatcherite Beliefs are directly related to Behavioural Thatcherism (with a coefficient of .11), neoliberal values (.69) and neo-conservatism (.27). Our three measures of nostalgia operate in interesting ways. Social Nostalgia is positively associated with both neo-liberal values and (more strongly) neo-conservative values (with coefficients of, respectively, .18 and .46). Economic Nostalgia, however, is negatively associated with neo-liberalism (-.23) and yet positively associated with neo-conservatism (.14). This suggests that those with higher levels of Economic Nostalgia (those reporting themselves uncomfortable with increases in the dominance of the market and the loss of heavy industry and some of those things associated with it) were less likely to support the 'neo-liberal project' – yet, intriguingly, more likely to support authoritarian attitudes (see Figure Three). Conversely, and very much as expected, those reporting higher levels of Political Nostalgia also expressed neo-liberal values (.22, so those who disagreed that, for example, *Margaret Thatcher's governments did a lot of damage to communities around here*, were also more likely to score highly on the neo-liberal values measure). This mirrored the relationship with neo-conservatism (-.05) – agreeing that Thatcher's governments had damaged local communities was associated with lower levels of neo-conservatism.

Turning now to the relationship between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, we again see a bifurcation – with Behavioural Thatcherism positively associated with neo-liberalism (.18) and yet negatively associated with neo-conservatism (-.12).

#### *Interactions with Voting Patterns*

One obvious further extension of the modelling concerns the extent to which Economic Nostalgia and neo-liberal/neo-conservative dispositions interact to shape voting patterns at the 2017 General Election and, perhaps more interestingly, the 2016 EU Referendum. Here

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<sup>13</sup> Allowing error terms to co-vary is common practice for items (or, as in our case) groups of items which are asked in blocks of survey questions, and where respondents might have wrongly interpreted the direction of the answer scale (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999:150).

we find that those who scored highly on neo-conservatism and Economic Nostalgia (in the top 50% of each scale), and yet low on neo-liberalism (in the bottom 50% of the scale) – a category arguably very close to those typically referred to as ‘left behind’ in the literature on Brexit<sup>14</sup> – were significantly more likely to vote for Brexit (64%) than those who did not (49%,  $p < .000$ ). Yet they were also more likely than the rest of the sample to vote for parties of the left or centre-left<sup>15</sup> (61%, as opposed to 52% for the rest of the sample,  $p < .000$ ). Brexit, on this reading, would appear to be a behavioural consequence of neo-conservatism and economic nostalgia.

## Discussion and Conclusion

What are we to make of these intriguing and illuminating results?

Let us deal, first, with the finding that neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism have very different relationships to Behavioural Thatcherism. One might argue that this is a consequence of our empirical operationalisation of the concept of Behavioural Thatcherism, which relates principally to market-conforming or embracing behaviour (see Figure One). That might suggest that neo-conservative aspects of Behavioural Thatcherism have been underplayed in our analysis. There is something to this. However, in the end, we do not support this interpretation; it is hard to imagine how one might treat as individual *behaviours* those aspects most commonly associated with neo-conservatism (such as authoritarianism and respect for tradition and the rule of law). And that, in turn, suggests an alternative interpretation: namely, that neo-conservatism is less about one’s *own* behaviours and rather more about underlying attitudes to (and moral evaluations of) the behaviours *of others*. It is *other* people (or perhaps *all* people) who ought to obey the law, respect ‘traditional values’, refrain from under-age or out of wedlock sexual relations, avoid divorce, believe in ‘Christian values’ or ‘support our troops’. Neo-conservatism is then perhaps rather more inherently *attitudinal* than it is *behavioural* (or at least demonstrably behavioural).

Neo-liberal value-sets, on the other hand, do lend themselves rather more easily to operationalisation in both social science surveys and the everyday lives of people. Neoliberalism, as we have argued before, promotes self-reliance and individual choice-making and privileges the market as the site in and through which to ‘solve’ day-to-day problems such as choices over schooling (whether by using league tables, or relying on private providers), healthcare, business ownership and the acquisition of private assets (stocks, shares, investment vehicles and, indeed, second homes).

This potentially provides us with clues as to why it is that neo-liberalism (and not neo-conservatism) has become perhaps the key organising concept in the critique of contemporary society. Neo-liberalism is much easier to ‘see’ empirically (recall that Dardot

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<sup>14</sup> In our survey, this categorisation amounted to 897 respondents, or 15.5% of the whole sample.

<sup>15</sup> Left-leaning parties were defined as Labour, The Liberal Democrats, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Greens. The opposite (right-leaning parties) were defined as the Conservative Party and UKIP.

and Laval's (2013) critique is about neo-liberal society and the people it creates) than are the 'hidden', less visible, 'internal' attitudes of neo-conservatism.

Finally, our results point to an intriguing observation which we intend to explore in much greater empirical depth in future research drawing on this data set. For they suggest the presence in Britain, since the Thatcher governments, of a small but significant body of opinion that is both staunchly neo-conservative in its value-set and economically nostalgic (in decrying the long standing process of deindustrialisation and the community decay it associates with that, Gest, 2016) on the one hand and yet also profoundly resistant to neo-liberalism on the other. This combination of attitudinal factors is very close to that which many commentators see as underpinning the vote for Brexit – the famous 'left behind' of neo-liberal globalisation and global neoliberalism (Goodwin & Milazzo 2017; Hopkin 2017; see also Hay 2019). Our analysis shows that economic nostalgia allied with neo-conservative values and opposition to neo-liberalism are a powerful predictor of support for Brexit, lending a further empirical credence to the 'left behind' thesis (in a small but nonetheless significant part of the electorate). They also suggest that Thatcherism's success was, in effect, to manage to prise a portion of the economically nostalgic post-industrial working class from Labour on the basis of its neo-conservatism. The result, to some extent and for now, at least, is the rise of a new populism and the fracturing of the British party system. That is a most intriguing, if perhaps rather unexpected, potential legacy of Thatcherism.

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