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Monograph:

Using Ideas Derived from Historical Institutionalism to Illuminate the Long-term Impacts on Crime of 'Thatcherite' Social and Economic Policies: A Working Paper

Introduction

In what ways do changes in economic and social policies result in changes in patterns of crime, victimisation and anxieties about crime? How do shifts in social values affect national-level experiences and beliefs about crime and appropriate responses to it (such as support for punitive punishments like the death penalty)? What roles might political institutions and the processes associated with them play in unpacking these changes? What have been the long-term consequences of neo-conservative and neo-liberal social and economic policies for the UK's criminal justice system and the general experience of crime amongst its citizens? What lessons might we be able to extract from an analysis of the recent past? These are some of the key motivating questions behind a recently-commenced ESRC-funded research project.

The goals of this paper (and the project from which it is drawn more generally) are first and foremost to understand the long-term trajectory of crime rates alongside relevant political, social and economic developments and interventions. In so doing we will need to pay particular attention to both neo-liberal and neo-conservative strands of thinking and to their ideational and institutional instantiation in criminal justice policy since the 1980s (Hay, 1996, Hay and Farrall 2014). We hope to chart the development of crime and criminal justice policy generally as well as exploring the impact of the growing existence and tolerance of economic inequalities since the 1970s on a range of key processes related to crime (such as unemployment or growing levels of economic inequality). In this way we will be able to throw light on to the long term impact of the reorientation of social and economic policies on experiences of crime and associated phenomena. Such an examination will be crucial in developing a wider understanding of what drives changes in crime rates. Might they be due to the results of dramatically breaking with a previous political consensus and embracing a new, radically different one (in this case thinking inspired by 'New Right' political philosophies), or to changes in, for example, the composition of the population or the adoption of crime prevention measures? Or some combination of all of these (and other factors)?

This paper outlines our initial thinking on the matters which we will need to grapple with, and describes some of our thoughts as to how best to approach the research and writing projects associated with it. We commence with some background from research into the roles which recent social and political transformations have played in changing crime rates. We then devote a not inconsiderable section of our paper to outlining and reviewing some critiques of historical institutionalism, before outlining constructivist institutionalism. We then briefly outline the methodological matters which these approaches suggest before starting to outline how this thinking may develop our position with regards to the impact of Thatcherite social and economic policies on

crime rates. Such a discussion raises further important issues (about the levels and speeds of explanation most appropriate) which we then explore before we bring our paper to a close.

The Criminological Background

Over the past couple of decades, a number of seminal criminological works have started to explore the nature of the relationship between the cultural and social changes which have taken place since the end of the Second World War and the experience of crime since the 1970s. Key amongst such contributions has been Jock Young's *The Exclusive Society* (1999), David Garland's *The Culture of Control* (2001) and Loic Wacquant's *Punishing the Poor* (2009). Whilst all have substantial merit, each has a tendency:

- To make little reference to specific policies or how these may have shaped crime and experiences of it (thus making it hard to extract policy messages);
- To say little about specific administrations (to quote Loader & Sparks, 2004:17 on Garland "rather too top down" and in Feeley's words insufficiently "anchored in politics", 2003:117);
- To focus on macro-level analyses of the UK (and the USA) in such a way that important details are often overlooked and the subtle differences between administrations and countries are downplayed;
- To highlight the role and experiences of the middle class, without fully appreciating that working class people were also affected by these changes (perhaps even to a greater extent); and, finally,
- To give primacy to theoretical rather than empirical considerations to the extent that few claims are subjected to rigorous data analyses.

An additional aim of our project, therefore, is to produce a more accurate and *empirically-grounded* assessment of the effects of political conflict and policy formulation, thereby moving forward debates in criminology on the relationship between macro-level social and economic changes. Policy responses to these and experiences of crime and victimisation. Additionally, the approach we take embeds transformations in crime in wider historical processes, responding to Rock's observation that criminology is often chronocentric (2005). In order to fully explore the key processes under consideration, we draw upon literature from political science and especially that relating to historical institutionalism.

Historical Institutionalism: An Outline

Historical Institutionalism is concerned with illuminating how institutions and institutional settings mediate the ways in which processes unfold over time (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992: 2). Peter Hall defines an institution as: "... the formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and economy" (1986: 19). For others, the focus of historical institutionalism is on the state, government institutions and social norms (Ikenberry, 1988: 222-223). Sanders, in keeping with the above, asserts that "If [historical institutionalism] teaches us anything, it is that the place to look for answers to big questions … is in institutions, not personalities and over the longer landscapes of history, not the here and now" (2006: 53). Historical institutionalism, then, is an attempt to develop understanding of how political and policy processes and relationships play out over time coupled with an appreciation that prior events, procedures and processes will have consequences for subsequent events. Sanders writes that "the central assumption of historical institutionalism is that it is more enlightening to study human political interactions: a) in the context of rule structures that are themselves human creations; and b) sequential, as life is lived, rather than to take a snapshot of those interactions at only one point in time, and in isolation from the rule structures that (institutions) in which they occur" (2006: 39). For Sanders, then, historical institutionalists are mainly interested in how institutions are constructed, maintained and adapted over time (2006: 42). Since the initial flurry of activity establishing the theoretical and analytical and methodological distinctiveness of historical institutionalism (and which took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s), some have criticised historical institutionalists for focussing on the 'institutionalist' aspects of their research at the expense of the 'historical' dimensions (Pierson, 2004: 8). In a series of highly-stimulating publications, Pierson has pushed historical institutionalism towards a greater acceptance of not just the role of institutions in shaping society, but also that played by particular individuals and groups of individuals (Pierson, 1996, 2000, 2004). Thelen (1999: 375) argues that historical institutionalists' approach is premised on the idea that institutions do more than just channel policy and structure political and policy conflict and formulation, rather they define the interests and create the objects of the policies themselves. As such, who articulates which interests, how and under which circumstances is a consequence not just of political desires and imperatives, but is itself a consequences of the sorts of institutions which are created and the contexts which they give rise to. Time (and the taking of time seriously) is clearly a central variable in the work of historical institutionalists. As one of the leading proponents of historical institutionalism argues, "many of the implications of political decisions … only play out in the long term" (Pierson, 2004: 41). Yet politicians are often only interested in the short term, creating the possibility of a series of unintended and

unplanned consequences which unfold and are realised only with the passage of time. Historical institutionalism is key for us due to its focus on politics and the longue duree. Let us now explore in a little more detail the building blocks of historical institutionalism.

Key Concepts

Before going on to exam both the main methodologies employed by historical institutionalists and how these ideas and methodologies can be employed and adapted in our own study of the long-term impacts of Thatcherite social and economic policies on crime in the UK, an outline of the key concepts of historical institutionalism is required. We focus on seven of these, namely, path dependencies, positive feedback Loops, the timing and sequence of events and processes, the role of 'slow-moving' causal processes and 'slow-moving' outcomes, the relationship between historical institutionalism and the assumptions of theories of human agency (including rational choice), the role of critical junctures and the concept of punctuated equilibrium. Let us take each in turn.

Path Dependencies

Various definitions of this term exist. For Sewell (1996: 232-233) the term implies that "what happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time". Levi provides a rather longer (and more thorough) definition which is worth quoting at length:

> "Path dependence has to mean ... that once a country has started down a track, the costs, of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice, perhaps the better metaphor is a tree, rather than a path. From the same trunk, there are many different branches and smaller branches. Although it is possible to turn around or to clamber from one to the other – and essential if the chosen branch dies – the branch on which a climber begins is the one she tends to follow" (1997: 28).

This, indeed, is the definition used by Pierson (2004: 20), who adds that path dependence refers to a dynamic process which involves a positive feedback and which generates a series of further outcomes depending on the sequence in which these events and processes occur. (See also Stinchcombe, 1968: 103-18 on 'historical causes'). As such, once a path has been selected and embarked upon, decisions, events and processes tend to reinforce this path, making the change to

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an alternative path harder with each step. Over time the paths not taken become harder and harder to navigate back towards and the chosen path becomes more dominant. The order in which specific decisions are taken, and processes and events unfold will also shape the sorts of subsequent adaptions to the path taken. This approach has tended to make historical institutionalism rather conservative, in that it focuses on how paths are *maintained*, rather than changed – an issue which we will have case to return to presently[1].

However, as Thelen rightly notes, even the 'losers' (those who wanted a different path to be adopted, or a different sets of institutions to be created or developed) in a path dependent system do not somehow 'disappear' (1999, see also Green, 1999: 23 on the liberal-market position within the Conservative Party during the period from 1945 to 1951). Those same actors and interest groups still exist (if in a less powerful or less influential state of being) and as such, can adapt their own stated policies or actual procedures to any emerging configuration of institutions. Such adaption(s) may mean waiting for more opportune moments to arise and/or assist in the reproduction of path dependencies as the 'losers' move to either embrace or reject any emerging set of institutions. Even the rejection of a position in some ways provides it with legitimacy, since to reject is at some level to recognise it (even only temporarily). Naturally, as Bulmer cautions us, the idea of path dependency does not mean that all policy areas will be affected (or, by extension, affected at the same time or in the same ways, Bulmer 2009: 310). Similarly, whilst a particular historical moment may create a critical juncture (see below) for one institution, it does not mean that *all* institutions will be similarly effected (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007: 349). Even though an entire political system may face periods of widespread change, some institutions will remain surprisingly unaffected. Similarly, an unrecognised problem with the approach adopted by historical institutionalism is the consideration that a path dependency may become cumulatively destabilising over time. That is to say that continuing along a path may initially produce beneficial outcomes, but these may reach a critical threshold at which the benefits start to become outweighed by the negatives or lead to dramatic change (an analogy might be blowing air into a deflated balloon; this inflates the balloon, but continuing to inflate it will lead it to burst at some point). The closet one gets is Pierson's observation that pressures for change may build for sometime before leading to rapid change (2004: 85). Nevertheless, such a discussion leads us on to another of the key concepts associated with historical institutionalism, namely that of positive feedback loops.

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[1] In this respect, historical institutionalism has exhibited a similar problem to some theories of the middle range (such as Giddens' structuration theory, 1984) in that it tends to be able to explain *reproduction* of existing forms of institutions, but finds it harder to account for changes to institutions (see Johnson, 1990). Thelen (1999: 373) notes that historical institutionalism works – in a theoretical sense - at the level of the middle range, although does not expand on the problems associated with working at this level of explanation.

Positive Feedback Loops

Positive Feedback Loops are the phenomenon whereby each successive step along a particular path produces consequences which help to sustain the path in question. The example of the Polya Urn is often invoked to help outline the concept. Imagine a large urn which contain just two balls, one of which is red and the other black. One puts one hand into the urn and randomly picks one of the two balls (each of which has an equal probability of selection). Noting its colour, one then returns this ball and an identical ball of the *same* colour to the urn. Let us imagine that one picked the red ball on the first occasion a ball was selected, and hence returned two red balls to the urn. The urn now contains three balls, two of which are red and the other black. The chances of picking a black ball have now dropped to 1 in 3. Again, one selects a ball at random, again it is a red ball and again a further red ball is added to the urn. The urn now contains four balls, three of which are red and the fourth black. The probability of selecting a black ball has fallen further to 1 in 4. The experiment can be repeated endlessly, of course. Let us assume that one repeated this process, say, 100 times. What might the composition of the urn be? A number of key things can be said. First of all, no one has, at the outset of the selection process, any idea which ball will end up being dominant. It might be that had the black ball been drawn against the odds when it was one of three (and hence a further black ball placed in the urn) that when we got to the 50th round, both balls were roughly equal. Or it might be that, over time, one ball became dominant. What can be said therefore is that, over time, a stable outcome will start to emerge (either the vast majority of the balls will be of one colour, or roughly equal proportions will emerge). Secondly, the sequence of balls drawn early on is hugely important in determining which (if any) colour will dominate. Imagine a situation in which 10 balls were in the urn, eight of which were red; the ball chosen is more likely to be red than black simply because there are six more red balls then black. On the other hand, if there were six more red balls than black ones but the numbers of each balls were 42 red and 34 black, it is much harder to be certain which colour ball will be chosen.

In this respect, as Pierson (2004: 45 notes), "History is remembered" (Pierson, 2004: 45). Thelen (1999: 392-96) provides an insightful discussion of the ways in which feedback loops operate. Summarising the work of Ikenberry (1994) she points to two mechanisms by which feedback occurs. The first is referred to by Ikenberry as functional, although as Thelen notes, it could also be described as providing incentive structures or initiating coordination effects (1999: 392). The basic premise is that, once a set of institutions are in place, social actors and other institutions adapt their repertoire of activities in ways which reflect (and hence reinforce) the logic of the system (even if such systems do not operate in terribly efficient or 'logical' ways). One example which Thelen cites

to illustrate this mode of feedback loop concerns those welfare systems identified by Epsing-Anderson (1990) as being conservative-corporativist, and which are based on the notion of a single (typically therefore, male) family breadwinner and which encourages low levels of engagement in the labour market of female members of society. The second feedback mechanism identified by Ikenberry relates to the distributional effects of institutions. The central premise behind this idea is that institutions are not 'neutral' coordinating mechanisms, but are designed or evolve to reflect and reproduce certain forms of power distribution in society. It is via this mechanism that some sections of society find that power and influence accumulates to them, whilst others find that their stocks of these resources are diminished over time. As one group accumulates power and influence, so it is able to influence institutions in such a way as to reproduce power inequalities and accumulate still more power.

Timing and Sequence

As Pierson writes, "sequence matters because there are irreversibilities" (2004: 64). That is to say that in some instances one cannot completely 'undo' earlier decisions and their consequences. Similarly, "when a particular event or process occurs in a sequence will make a big difference" (Pierson, 2004: 64). Pierson outlines three ways of treating sequencing and feedback loops (2004: 64-65). The first of these is to approach them as self-reinforcing processes (where by a set of relationships becomes increasingly embedded over time). The second is to explore how earlier events trigger feedbacks (for example whereby particular arrangements established at a critical juncture become consolidated). The last of these is to develop a focus on long-term effects (for example whereby A causes B, B causes C and so on), (see Pierson 2004: 65-68). A further consideration is what is known as event sequences (Pierson 2004: 68), which are instances in which an outcome is determined not simply by what happened, but by the order in which these events took place. Whilst some changes may emerge quite quickly, some changes, for example those involving social capabilities may be very slow (Pierson 2004: 75) since such changes may involve inter-generational replacement or over time shifting a sufficient proportion of a population's attitudes in a particular direction. All of these are the sorts of processes which we may need to be conscious of for our project.

'Slow-moving' causal processes and outcomes

One things which unites almost all branches of the social sciences is the search for causality. Historical institutionalists are, in this at least, no different from other social scientists. However, the approach adopted (due to the emphasis on taking time seriously) radically alters the time-frames which analysts influenced by this body of work are prepared to consider. In sum, the position of historical institutionalists can be encapsulated by the idea that "events of equivalent causal importance just don't always take the same amount of time to happen" (Abbott, 1988: 174 quoted in Pierson 2004: 82). As Pierson additionally notes, "the fact that something happens slowly does not make it unimportant" (2004: 13). This perspectives acts as a corrective to those accounts of change (or stability) which focus upon the immediate causes of things. Pierson outlines how four differing time horizons for exploring and explaining causal processes can be identified by sampling thinking in terms of fast and slow causes and outcomes (Pierson 2004: 81). These four he suggests are:

1) Short-term causes with immediate outcomes (e.g. a tornado)
2) Short-term causes with long-term outcomes (e.g. a meteorite which causes mass extinction)
3) Long-term causes with immediate outcomes (e.g. an earthquake)
4) Long-term causes with long-term outcomes (e.g. global warming).

Which of these an analyst wishes to invoke will partly be a consequence of how the relevant research questions are framed. Of course, the illustrations which Pierson chooses are not quite as distinct as he may wish them to be. For example, meteorites do not appear out of nowhere, they are part of a much larger (and longer) sequence of events, similarly an earthquake is often the result of a build-up of pressure which has accumulated over several years, decades or millennia (and may of course have consequences which endure for several years or decades). But these points need not detract us from the fact that this schema is nevertheless an extremely valuable one. Of central interest in our research (since we are primarily concerned with historical causal processes and the production of a set of processes and outcomes which may be described as a 'legacy') is the focus on a) slow-moving causal processes and b) slow-moving consequences. Let us take each in turn.

A process may be slow-moving in a causal sense because these causes may be cumulative, whereby an outcome is caused by a continuous but extremely gradual process. An example of this form of slow-moving causal process might include a slow attitudinal shift amongst a section of society (or perhaps a whole society) which may take several decades to emerge (indeed, Figure 3 below provides an example of one such form of change). As Pierson notes (2004: 82) changes of this nature

are most likely to be identified by and of most interest to sociologists (and especially those interested in period and/or cohort effects). Slowly rising support for, for example, female emancipation is the sort of processes which spring to mind. Feminists arguing for women to be given the right to vote (for example) needed to embark on a prolonged fight in order to them to win (often incrementally) suffrage. Another form of slow-moving causal process may involve threshold effects. In this form of causal process incremental change does not, per se, lead to any tangible outcome. However, when a particular threshold is reached it then triggers a change. (The idea is similar to that of the tipping point or 'take off' point). An example of these sorts of processes may be the impact of demographic changes and subtly changing aspirations of a younger generation of voters or the politically-engaged and which leads to an uprising, either delivered via the ballot box or via direct action against the ruling (and generationally older) political class[2]. The key is that the pressure for change will accumulate over some period of time without generating any outward signs of impending change (until the threshold is reached). Finally, slow-moving causal processes maybe produced by long-term causal influences. It is common, of course, to think of short causal chains, such as A causes B. But in some cases it may be the case that A causes B, which causes C, which causes D (and so on). Given that few of these causal chains will produce immediate outcomes (since some may themselves be based on threshold effects or cumulative causes) then the causal chain may well be an extremely long one (in terms of the elapsed time). Of course, such effects are also likely to be indirect, since causal process A may relate to the economy, causal process B to social values, causal process C to political participation and causal process D to outcomes in the make-up of governing institutions such as parliaments (for example). In identifying and articulating such causal processes one needs to establish that they are 'tightly coupled' (Pierson, 2004: 88), and the longer the causal chain and/or the temporal processes involved the harder this will be. Of course, a further problem will emerge in deciding the appropriate 'starting point' for the causal chain (since there will always be some prior processes which 'led' – at least in theory – to the 'initial' causal process identified by the analyst). Pierson offers three rules of thumb with regards to the left-hand censoring: break the chain at key critical junctures (see our discussions above and below); break the chain when it becomes hard to establish the prior causal connections; or break the chain according to either the substantive or theoretical interests of the analyst.

'Slow-moving' outcomes are those outcomes which have long time horizons, that is, where detectable and meaningful change in the outcome in question emerges slowly (Pierson 2004: 90-92). Examples of such slow-moving outcomes (as cited by Pierson, 2004: 90-92) include situations in which a group of people are replaced over time (such as at a societal level when new generations

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[2] An example of this might be the 'Arab Spring' of 2011.

replace older ones, or in an elected body where a certain number of elected officials may leave office at the end of a term of administration). Alternatively it might be that the outcome being shaped lays some way off in the future. This may be the case with reforms to pension schemes, for example, in which changes to new members' terms may not reap any changes to the experiences of retirement since it may be 40 or so years before those contributing under the changed scheme will retire.

Rational Choice and Agency

Thelen and Steinmo (1992) argue that historical institutionalism grew out of a critique of rational choice models (which rose to prominence in US sociology during the 1980s) and their neglect of institutional contexts (see also Mouzelis, 2008: 20). Accordingly, several of the key proponents in this field are critical of rational choice theorising (for example, Thelen and Steinmo argue that rational choice theories are "narrow" and that historical institutionalists wish to "go further and argue that institutions play a much greater role in shaping politics, and political history", 1992: 15). Thelen notes that historical insitutionalists and rational choice theorists start from different places (1999: 379). Rational choice theorists start with a focus on individuals and ask where institutions 'come from', whilst historical insitutionalists are more inclined to start with institutions and ask how these alter people's behaviours. Although he retains an interest in rational choice (2004: 177), Pierson is probably the author who goes furthest in articulating the full range of limitations of rational choice models (2004: 108-122). In all, Pierson cites six limitations with rational choice models:

1) Institutions have multiple effects (and motivations). Because institutions are made up of various (at times competing groups, at times collaborating groups) there are both multiple motivations for adopting particular courses of action, and, naturally, multiple outcomes of many courses of action and processes. In some instances, as Pieron notes, institutions become what he refers to as 'common carriers' for coalitions of reformers who may support a particular innovation for a multitude of reasons (2004: 109). As such rational choice models are inadequate explanations of the causes of institutional processes since no one individual can control the entire process.

2) Even if this were not the case, actors may not always act in either their long-term interests or the most effective ways (Pierson, 2004: 110). People may be motivated by what they feel to be 'appropriate' rather than what they feel to be efficient. To support

this observation Pierson quotes Hall and Taylor (1996: 946-947) who write that "institutional forms and procedures ... were not adopted simply because they were the most efficient for the tasks at hand ... instead they ... should be seen as culturally-specific practices, akin to the myths and ceremonies devised by many societies, and assimilated into organisations ...". As such, actors may not always be purely rational, but may be guided by wider social and cultural norms.

3) As argued above, the outcomes of some processes can be viewed as long-term. Does this mean that actors adopt such long-term perspectives in their thinking? It may not do so, in fact there are many instances in which politicians and policy makers are encouraged to focus more on short-term outcomes than on long-term ones. As such, the long-term outcomes of insititutional processes may be the result of actions taken with only (or predominantly) short-term goals in mind. In this way, many actors, who often will have short time horizons, end up ignoring the long-term outcomes of the processes or policies which they pursue (Pierson, 2004: 112). However, many of the outcomes of changes in institutional procedures will play out over the long-term. Rational choice models which centre on the actor(s) may inadvertently look past the long-term outcomes of short-term decision making. Of course, this does not mean that historical institutionalists only believe that actors have short-term perspectives; but rather it is to acknowledge that they commonly do have short-term perspectives.

4) A further criticism of rational choice models is that some outcomes will (inevitably) be unintended by those designing the policies or procedures under consideration. As such, the outcomes may include many which were not intended (or perhaps, even recognised) by those who initiated them. Or, to add even more complexity, some courses of action may have been pursued by coalitions of interest, some of the members of which may have been aware of the unintended consequences and others unaware. As societies and the institutions which they develop become more complex, such unintended consequences may be a) harder to spot before they start to emerge and b) more widespread in occurrence and effect.

5) In addition to the above, Pierson (2004: 119-120) notes that even after an institutional arrangement has been selected, over time, and with wider environmental change (i.e. in terms of the political culture, social processes, demography and so on) gaps between what some actors want and what some institutions can deliver will emerge. This may prompt political elites to try to change the political institutional forms in order to

produce new outcomes or to avoid possible future outcomes. As such, it is hard to ascertain exactly which institutional arrangement is the most efficient.

6) Similarly, not all actors will remain active in a particular institutional form (some will retire from office, die or move on to other roles), and hence rational choice assumptions of actor continuity may be unfounded (Pierson, 2004: 120). However, the problems of actor discontinuity are far less pressing for historical insitutionalists, who would expect that key actors will change over time and that the actors who inherit a set of institutional arrangements may not be those who designed them.

Hay and Wincott (1998: 951), in critiquing Hall and Taylor's contribution (1996), argue that "... if institutionalism is to develop to its full potential, it must consider the relationship between structure and agency ...". This observation we incorporate into our thinking along the ways in which Hay and Wincott originally expressed them (1998: 956-7), i.e. that groups and individuals are knowledgeable (although the limits of their knowledge may be constrained in various ways and to various degrees) and are reflexive (in that they often monitor the consequences of their endeavours partly to assess the extent to which these produced the desired outcomes and partly in order to learn more about how to effect similar sorts of outcomes again). In these ways groups and individuals assess both the immediate outcomes of their actions and the longer term outcomes (and, it can be reasonably assumed, monitor the outcomes of the actions of others too). This provides them with insights about both how and how well the intended outcomes were produced via their actions and the extent to which these were opposed, distorted or adapted by opponents (for example). Such analyses (on the part of individuals and groups) yields two key processes (Hay and Wincott, 1998: 956):

"(1) *direct effects* upon the institutional and institutionalised contexts within which it takes place and within which future action occurs – producing a partial transformation of that institutional environment (though not necessarily as anticipated) and altering the course of its temporal unfolding (however marginally);

(2) *strategic learning* on the part of the actors involved – as they revise their perceptions of what is feasible, possible and indeed desirable in the light of their assessments of their own ability to realise prior goals (and that of others), as they assimilate new 'information' (from whatever external source), and as they reorient future strategies in the light of such 'empirical' and mediated knowledge of the context as a structured terrain of opportunity and constraint."

In this way, and in keeping with the spirit of Pierson's own work, we aim to retain both a focus on institutions and how these develop over time, but also acknowledge and develop the idea that key actors and groups of actors can shape (sometimes quite considerably) the courses of action taken and the sorts of outcomes both desired for and achieved. In keeping with this, Pierson himself prefers to refer to institutional development (rather than change), since the word 'development', he argues, keeps us attuned to the notion that prior institutional arrangements and outcomes 'stay with us' (Pierson, 2004: 133).

Critical junctures and the concept of punctuated equilibrium

Pierson describes 'critical junctures' as moments when institutional arrangements are placed on particular pathways which are difficult to subsequently alter or change. For Capoccia and Kelemen (2007: 341) such moments are rare and represent "brief phases of institutional flux … during which more dramatic change is possible" (and presumably signals the end of other institutions). They add that critical junctures are often the starting points for path dependent processes. Such moments are considered to be relatively short periods of time (2007: 348) and that during these episodes there is an increased chance that agents will be able to affect significant change. In this way agents are freer than during periods of equilibrium to act in ways which may initiate new policies or procedures. Sometimes critical junctures may emerge slowly, being produced over time by the accumulation of related events (2007: 350). Of course, if a number of outcomes are possible from a critical juncture, it is possible that one of these may be the return to an earlier 'pre-critical' arrangements (2007: 352). Wuthnow (1989) shows how new schools of thought, once they reach a critical mass, are able to extend their reach by the generation of institutions and organisations which reproduce their ideological position (Pierson 2004: 39). Thelen, rather critically, notes that many authors do not articulate sufficiently how the outcomes of critical junctures become translated into lasting legacies (1999: 390). Such theorising has obvious similarities with another branch of political science, name the theory of punctuated equilibrium (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992: 15).

Although not formally an element of the work on historical institutionalism, both Thelen and Steinmo (1992) and Zehavi (2012) argue that work on punctuated equilibrium could, at least in theory, operate alongside historical instituionalism (see also Bulmer, 2009: 308). The theory of punctuated equilibrium in public policy suggests that long-run stability in policy-making is subject to occasional seismic shifts when existing institutions and issue definitions break down and pressure for change accumulates to the point where is cannot be ignored (Krasner, 1984 and Baumgartner and

Jones, 2009). As Zehavi describes it, "at some point the growing inadequacy of [a particular] policy [is] sufficient enough to merit media and public attention, and policy makers, due to public criticism, would react – perhaps even overreact – with a major reform that would shift the policy point of equilibrium" (2012: 736). As such, the widespread recognition, over time, that some policy or approach is 'failing' and that change is required brings about the end of a period of equilibrium, and starts the processes by which a new equilibrium is reached. In Krasner's model the impetus for this change is external (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992: 15). Hence punctuated equilibrium – a moment or period during which the current equilibrium is 'punctured' and a new one is given the chance to emerge.

Constructivist Institutionalism: Recognising that Ideas Shape Pathways

More recently another body of 'institutionalist' thinking has emerged out of a dialogue with historical institutionalism, inspired by Hall's more ideationally sensitive institutionalist approach (very much manifest in his work on Keynesianism as an economic paradigm institutionalised differently in Britain and France and his influential work on paradigm shifts, see Hall, 1992). Going under the name of 'constructivist' institutionalism, this argues, in essence, that historical institutionalism overlooks the role which ideas play in shaping political outcomes (Ross, 2011, Hay, 2011). The basic observations of constructivist institutionalism (as summarised by Bell, 2011) is that historical institutionalism is too 'sticky' (Bell, 2011: 883) in that it cannot easily allow for individual agency (a point, it ought to be noted he argues against, having noted that constructivist institutionalism may, in privileging agency, inadvertently 'take out' the role of institutions, 2011: 884).

This form of institutionalism focuses on the ways in which *ideas,* rather than solely agents, can change or mould institutions and processes. In short ideas can also influence such processes. Pierson's observations that "institutional arrangements in politics are typically hard to change" (2000: 490) and that "actors find the dead weight of previous institutional choices seriously limits their room to manoeuvre" (2000: 493) are taken as suggesting that agency is seriously hampered. Indeed, and as Hay notes, within the auspices of historical institutionalism, change is seen as the outcome of path dependent processes or from shocks from outwith (Hay 2011: 66). This overlooks what Hay refers to as 'path-shaping' (as opposed to path-dependent) possibilities (Hay, 2011: 66). Hay's critique of much current historical institutionalism stresses that whilst it continues to focus on path dependencies, it will remain unable to fully account for institutional changes. In short, historical

institutionalism can account for the genesis of institutional forms, but is unable to copy easily with *radical* change in institutional forms or processes (Hay 2011). Constructivist institutionalism, as Hay portrays it, is less concerned than historical or rational choice institutionalism with the 'functional' uses of institutions for dealing with uncertainty (Hay 2011: 68), instead viewing institutions as the focus and subject of political struggles. By bringing a focus on ideas into play, constructivist institutionalism forces us to grapple with the concept of *ideational* path-dependence (as well as *institutional* path-dependence, Hay 2011: 68-69). As Blyth suggests, "institutional change only makes sense by reference to the ideas that inform agents' responses to moments of uncertainty and change" (2002: 251). Through these lenses, ideas become codified and start to serve as the cognitive filters through which actors are able to conceive of their interests (Hay 2011: 69), and presumably also their 'location' in any process, possible room for influence, and the likely outcomes of any course of action. Similarly, Blyth (2002: 15) argues that "ideas give substance to interests and determine the form and content of new institutions". As such, constructivist institutionalism allows one to develop explanations which include novel developments, and counterbalances historical institutionalism's tendency to focus on institutional inertia (Hay 2011: 69). In this way, and akin to theories of the middle range in sociology (see, for example, Giddens, 1984, Bourdieu, 1977, Mouzelis, 2008), actors are viewed as being active (Hay 2011: 71) in that they make decisions, have interests, goals and aims. However, and as Hay notes, "The more ideas mediate material interests, the more indeterminate social and political systems become" (2011: 73), implying that simply recognising that actors have 'interests' is an insufficient step. Actors also have ideas and develop and draw up meanings in line with such ideas and values; as such what is desired and why it is so desired is as much about how it is thought of and conceptualised as it is about the simple achievement of an 'interest'. In this way, one might argue, as Hay does, that interests do not really exist. Rather social and political constructions of interests are what 'exists' (Hay 2011: 79) and it is these constructions which motivate political actors. Extending this, if an idea supports the construction of a set of interests which motivates actors towards finding ways of shaping institutional arrangements such that path trajectories are altered, then those actors positioned to exert influence on such arrangements will seek institutional change.

Methodological Concerns

Given the need to explain in detail the processes involved in how policies are constructed and the role of various institutions in these, numerous research methods have been developed in order to explore the subject matter at hand. Of course, historical institutionalists have developed their

methodological approaches over time. The first wave of historical institutionalism focused on those holders of power who shaped and steered political processes, and tended, in general, to ignore 'ordinary people' (who were treated as the objects of governance rather than subjects whose ideas and demands might have shaped institutional develop and provoked institutional change, Sanders, 2006: 45). And of course, and like all fields of study, but perhaps at greater risk of falling into this trap, historical institutionalists need to make sure that the analyses of the processes they are interested in do not become merely *descriptions* of what happened rather than *explanations* for why it happened (Pierson, 2004: 49). Nevertheless, at least some element of description is required; as Sanders notes, "… most [historical insitutionalist] analysis is founded on dense, empirical description and inductive reasoning." (2006: 43). Accordingly, and as she goes on to note "… interest in the construction, maintenance, and outcomes of institutions draws [historical institutionalism] towards history and philosophy" (2006: 43). And, naturally, the choice of substantive focus "... has methodological implications, because at the top there are few actors and one is likely to proceed by analysing documents, decisions, speeches, memoirs and press reports of actions/events" (Sanders 2006: 43). For these reasons, historical institutionalism is "undeniably, a messily eclectic genre, and the lack of agreement on foci and approaches does distinguish [historical institutionalism] from rational choice and conventional, cross-sectional political science." (Sanders, 2006: 43). Similarly, and as Sanders notes, "… the marshalling of sufficient empirical evidence to make one's case will inevitably limit the time period covered, and the fullest understanding of policy paths and policy change can probably be gained by studies that concentrate on single-country experiences …" (Sanders, 2006: 52). Nevertheless, several studies of limited comparisons of countries undergoing similar processes of change do exist (e.g. Pierson, 1996, King, 1992)

Pierson helpfully touches on methodological matters towards the end of his book (2004: 169-175). The first and foremost adoption is to make time and temporal change explicit in one's thinking about the processes at hand (2004: 169), and naturally that is something we have endeavoured to do with our project (and Pierson gives a cautious nod towards time series modelling itself, 2004: 170, although notes that analysts must be alert to changes in the relationships between variables themselves, so not only might there be a relationship between, say, unemployment and the economy, but it might strengthen or weaken over time). As he notes, such analyses retain an interest in 'the variable' and as such require extensive longitudinal data sets which allow analysts to explore the temporal sequencing of events and processes (2004: 173).Pierson also suggests that theories need to be well integrated and matched with the methodologies employed, such that the latter allows for a full exploration of the issue at hand. So, if a theory suggests that a policy adopted at T1 will create reinforcing feedback loops (such as changes in political organisation, the political

agenda, voting preferences and so on) then we ought to expect not only just the reinforcement of the policy a T+1, but also changes in the attendant political organisations, agendas and voting preferences in line with the policy). Capoccia and Kelemen (2007: 355) suggest that analysts ask 'what happened in the context of what could have happened?' and argue for the use of process tracing, systematic process analyses and narratives of analysis.

Applying this to Thatcherism

In a number of publications we have sketched an outline of how one might approach a conceptualisation and subsequent analysis of the long-term impacts of Thatcherite social and economic policies. In Hay and Farrall (2011), for example, we identified Thatcherism as a "potential path-shaping project" (2011: 441), and argued generally that we saw Thatcherism as operating not just at the policy-level, but also at the ideational level. In this section we explore how some of the ideas outlined above may be incorporated more formally into our approach. In the remainder of this essay we wish to focus principally on two issues. The first of these is the importance of ideas to a full appreciation of the changes initiated by the Thatcher governments. The second is an attempt to chart the ways in which some of the policies which were enacted during this period altered behaviours of the population, and also the ways in which the population reacted to these in turn altered the approach adopted by politicians and policy-makers. We will also touch on out thinking with regards to the levels (and speeds) of explanation. So, whilst politics makes policies, and policies make politics (a quote frequently attributed to Theda Skocpol), so policies shape behaviours and behaviours shape policy responses and political ideas. Let us start with the ideational foundations of the Thatcher administrations.

The Ideational Basis of Thatcher: 'If at first you don't succeed …'

Thelen notes how "Institutions rest on a set of ideational and material foundations that, if shaken, open possibilities for change" (1999: 397). It is not hard to see how the period in the run up to the election of the first Thatcher government (in 1979) was one in which a new set of ideas about how best to deal with the mounting crises which the UK faced were starting to emerge (Hay 2011: 67). In this respect, this period represents a critical juncture. Alfred Sherman (one of Thatcher's initial advisors) suggests that Keith Joseph's speeches in 1969-1970 started to articulate Sherman's own views that market forces needed to be taken into account more readily (Sherman, 2005: 45). Hall (1992: 90) notes how Ted Heath's government (1970-1974) started to take steps towards the sorts

of policies later pursued by Thatcher (as does Caincross, 1996: 124), but retreated from these after the rises in unemployment and inflation in 1971-72[3]. Heath's plan had been to change the mind-set of the British people (a taste of Thatcher's own 'mission', Dale, 2010: 143), Taylor, 1996a: 141. As Green notes (1999: 34) some of the ideas which emerged from the Selsdon Park conference in early 1970 also invigorated the liberal-market wing of the Conservative Party. In this respect Heath can be seen as a 'transitional' figure in British politics (Taylor, 1996b: 189). After the election of a Labour government (in 1974) the economic policies pursued were still Keynesian, but following 1976 and Callaghan's replacing of Wilson and Prime Minister, the policies took a monetarist turn (Hall, 1992: 93; see Ranelagh, 1991: 226 on the similarity between Callaghan and Thatcher's policies, and Hall 1992: 97 on the similarities between Heath's and Thatcher's). This was prompted by a dramatic increase in inflation in 1975 and the stagnation of the UK economy coupled with high levels of unemployment, which drove policy makers to search for new ideas in the early 1970s[4]. These ideas were to fail to gain traction immediately, however. This was partly due to Callaghan and Healy's uncertainly about taking monetarist ideas forward in 1976-1978 and, in part, due to the simple fact that radical ideas take time to gain popularity and hence become the basis for action. As Hall (1992: 99) notes, Keynesianism was so firmly embedded in thinking at the Treasury that the stagnation of the mid-1970s was seen as a 'normal' recession which could be responded to within Keynesian a framework. People with new ideas to promote need time to create institutional structures around them in order to cement the appeal of their ideas to wider audiences. In part Thatcher's success was due to the efforts made in the direction of promoting monetarism by both the Callaghan and Heath governments (who initiated such policies). By the time which Thatcher took office the ideas were better developed and there was wider support for them amongst the City, Universities and the media. When her policies encountered difficulties, Thatcher was able to draw on these institutions and the wider, more established monetarist framework in order press on with them. There was also a sense that a change of direction was needed. In part too Thatcher was keen not to repeat Heath's U-turn (Thatcher, 1993: 13-14). In short, monetarism before 1979 was an idea whose time had not yet come (Cairncross, 1996: 125, a sentiment echoed by Taylor, 1996a: 147-157).

In addition to this, and unlike the Labour government of 1974-1979, Thatcher's 1979 government had a good working majority in the House of Commons (44 MPs to compared Callaghan's minority government from September 1978 when the Lib-Lab pact came to an end). In addition, because of

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[3] For example, Heath referred to 'disengagement' whereas Thatcher later referred to 'privatisation', Cairncross, 1996: 138.

[4] And, of course, away from the Phillips Curve. The Phillips Curve described the inverse relationship between unemployment and inflation (such that when unemployment is high inflation is low, and vice versa). The validity of the Phillips Curve diminished after the 1970s, when several prominent economies experienced both high levels of unemployment and high levels of inflation.

Labour's historically close links with the Trade Union movement, Callaghan found it hard to reduce the public sector wage bill (Hall, 1992: 99). For these reasons the initial forays into monetarism by the Labour government in 1976-77 were piecemeal and driven by a concern to move *away from* Keynesianism rather than a more positive move *towards* monetarism. Some of these changes were due, as Green (1999: 39-40) notes, to an intergenerational shift in the ranks of Tory MPs, who increasingly were drawn from the salaried, middle class and less and less from the 'knights of the shires'.

However, for a full explanation of why monetarism was adopted following Thatcher's election victory in 1979 one needs to weave into this account the demands of the International Monetary Fund in 1976 and other, more subtle factors. Some of the economic decisions taken in 1976-77 were forced upon the government by the financial markets, whilst similarly rank and file union members started to become disillusioned with their leadership (Hall, 1992: 100, Bogdanor, 1996: 378), especially following the 'Winter of Discontent'. The financial markets had been strengthened by Heath in 1971 and ultimately resulted in increasing numbers of economists being hired to monitor government economic policy, which in turn resulted in an increase in circulars being published for the clients of brokerage houses (Hall, 1992: 102). These developments increased the speed and cohesiveness with which the City responded to government policy – meaning that governments were forced into increasing interest rates on gilts in or to raise capital. They also meant that the money supply became a concern within the City.

In addition to these factors, Young (1991:102-103) notes how it was that during the mid-1970s Keith Joseph started to articulate ideas about inflation, levels of taxation, unemployment, the money supply, trade unions and the limits of what the government could (and ought to) do (John Hoskyns – another early advisor to Thatcher - notes that Joseph was keen on the notion of political innovation, 2000: 26). Such topics became the bedrock of what was later known as Thatcherism and were being introduced and promoted by Sherman at the Centre for Policy Studies (Hoskyns, 2000: xii). Ranelagh notes that monetarist ideas started to embed themselves in the thinking of Thatcher's private office in the mid-1970s, and started to be aired during PMQs and during television interviews with Thatcher (1991: 176). Many of these ideas came from outwith the Conservative Party, such as Hoskyn's 'wiring diagrams' of how economic policies created various outcomes (see Hoskyns, 2000: 18 and 405). In 1975, immediately after Thatcher's election as party leader, the Conservative Philosophy Group was formed, and provided a forum in which ideas developed in academia could be discussed with the party leader (Ranelagh, 1991: 187). Similarly the Centre for Policy Studies played a key role in facilitating the exchange of ideas between academics and policy makers (Ranelagh,

1991: 214). As Hugh Thomas noted in 1976, "new ideas have a much greater chance of being heard" amongst the conservatives than they had done previously (cited in Ranelagh, 1991: 169)[5]. Even so, there was still much 'thinking through' and developing of ideas to be done (Hoskyns, 2000: 41, 60). This period one commentator described as "an intellectual revolution", noting how Heath had not enjoyed the backing of such a revolution in the way Thatcher had (Blake, 1985 cited in Young, 1991:79). Such ideas quickly became condensed into rather more easily digestible 'sound bites' which could be packed for the electorate, and revolved around tax cuts, 'good housekeeping', the control of public spending, individual freedom, national revival and 'self reliance' (see Ranelagh, 1991: 34, Young, 1991: 147). Over time, concepts such as 'free enterprise' (Ranelagh, 1991: 47) started to emerge and become incorporated into the discourse of 'Thatcherism'. In this respect there was what Hall (1992: 104) has described as a market place of economic ideas. This development went hand-in-hand with the rise and proliferation of independent think tanks, which in turn lead to a rise in newspaper coverage of such ideas (Sherman also started writing for *The Telegraph*, Young, 1991: 113).

As such we view the advent, emergence and political dominance of the set of ideas now known as 'Thatcherism' to be best approached within the framework sketched above using concepts from both historical and constructivist institutionalisms. Thatcherism did not appear out of nowhere, but was a response to a series of largely (but not exclusively) economic problems with emerged in the early 1970s. Scepticism with the post-war consensus had never left the Tories, but had been suppressed following their surprise defeat in the 1945 general election and what it was seen to represent. In this respect, one might argue that the combined weakening of the faith in Keynesianism, the economic crisis which engulfed the UK and the questioning of the viability of the post-war settlement were the initiators of Thatcherism. However, those who tried to initiate what we now see as Thatcherism in the early to late 1970s were hampered by both the architecture of state at that time and the difficulties associated with launching any new idea. Such path dependencies can be seen in the initial attempts amongst the Treasury to persist with Keynesianism, since these were seen as the mechanism through which the economy was managed. The ideas which the likes of Heath and later Callaghan tried (with varying degrees of commitment, it ought to be noted) simply did not have sufficient popular or institutional support in the period from around 1970 to 1978. Such a bedrock of support is now seen as key for the promulgation of new ideas (Wuthnow, 1989, Pierson, 2004:39). However, this period of uncertainty (which one might see as a critical

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[5] This is not to suggest that Thatcherism should be simply or most accurately presented as a series of interlinked ideas – for as both academic commentators and some of those involved in the events themselves have noted, Thatcherism is as much about mood, beliefs, values and instincts (Sherman, quoted in Ranelagh, 1991: 71; Hay 1996).

juncture or as a period of equilibrium readjustment) provided an opportunity for nascent ideas which had been starting to circulate in the late 1960s to be drawn upon to provide possible solutions to the problems faced – and this tendency grew as the problems persisted and the new ideas spread. Such ideas had a rational element in that actors took decisions to explore and promote such ideas, but, naturally they were not in total control of how these ideas were used by others or the ends to which they were put (Hoskyns, 2000). In this respect Thatcher had a path-shaping influence which others before had not enjoyed; the ideas she promoted coincided with a widespread thirst for new ideas within policy-making circles (although this took time to take hold, of course) and the voicing of a set of popular desires which resonated with these emerging thoughts (see Fieldhouse, 1995: 9).

*Bringing Public Behaviours into Focus and Engaging with Crime*

One of the key foundational statements associated with historical institutionalism is that 'politics makes policies, and policies make politics'. As Sanders (2006: 45) notes, the first wave of historical institutionalism tended to devote little consideration to the role of 'ordinary people' in political and social change. In some of our earlier publications on this topic we provided evidence that what 'ordinary people' think, feel and do can have huge consequences for political processes. In Farrall and Jennings (2012) and Jennings et al (2012), for example, we outline how various government policies (chiefly relating to the economy, housing, education and social security) pursued from the 1980s onwards were associated with rises in crime rates during this and the period up to 2006. Crime (see Figure 1 below) had been rising steadily during the 1960s, albeit it from a very low base (having not exceeded 1 million recorded crimes per annum until the 1960s). Total recorded crime increased from 2.5 million in 1979 to 4.5 million in 1990 (an increase of 179%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, not all offences saw the same rates of increase (as summarised in Farrall and Jennings, 2014). For example, burglary and theft saw dramatic increases, whilst violent and sexual offences rose more slowly, but continued to increase into the early 2000s. Notwithstanding these subtleties, there is no denying that there was an overall rise in crime throughout the 1980s and into the first half of the 1990s. So whilst crime was rising before 1979, the rate of increase picked up after the early 1980s and further accelerated in the early 1990s. The steepest rises were in property offences and occurred during the 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with sharp increases in the level of unemployment and inequality.

Figure 1. Property Crime Per Capita (Home Office Recorded Statistics, England & Wales and the *British Crime Survey*)
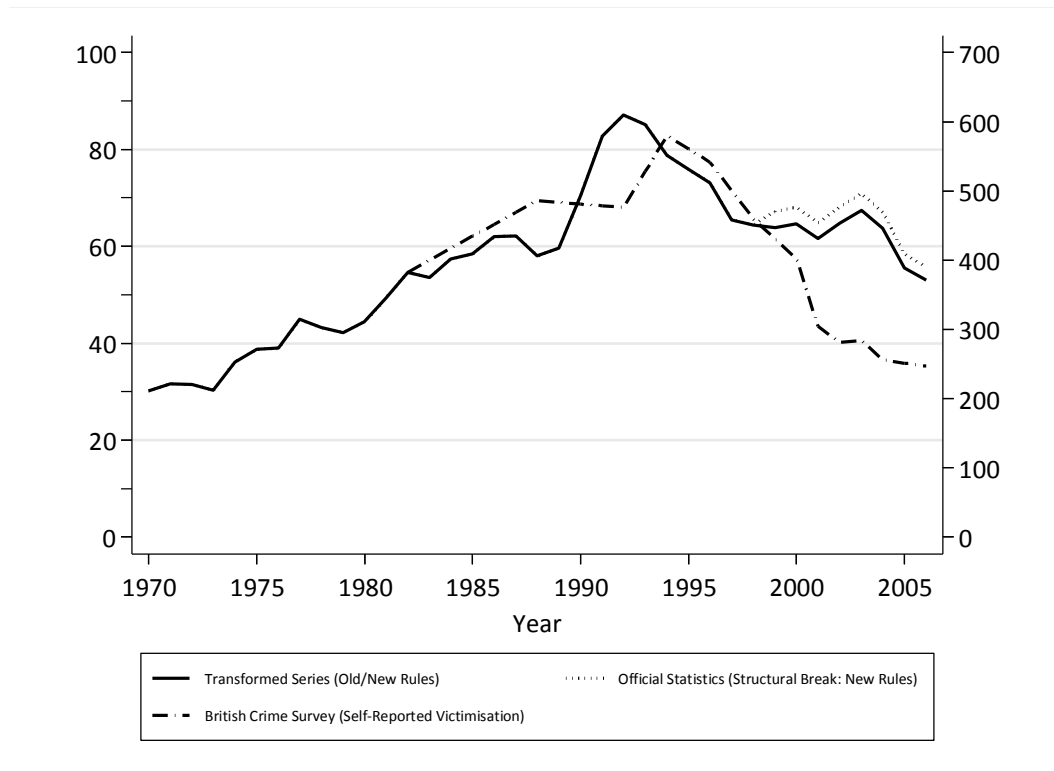
Such a dramatic change in crime rates did not go unnoticed by the public. Quite understandably, levels of public anxiety about crime (derived from the British Crime Survey) rose. These are plotted below in Figure 2. We can detect steady increases in worry about crime throughout the 1980s, peaking in 1994 and declining since that point. These mirror the trends outlined above in Figure 1.

Figure 2. Percentage worried about crime (*British Crime Survey* 1982-2009)
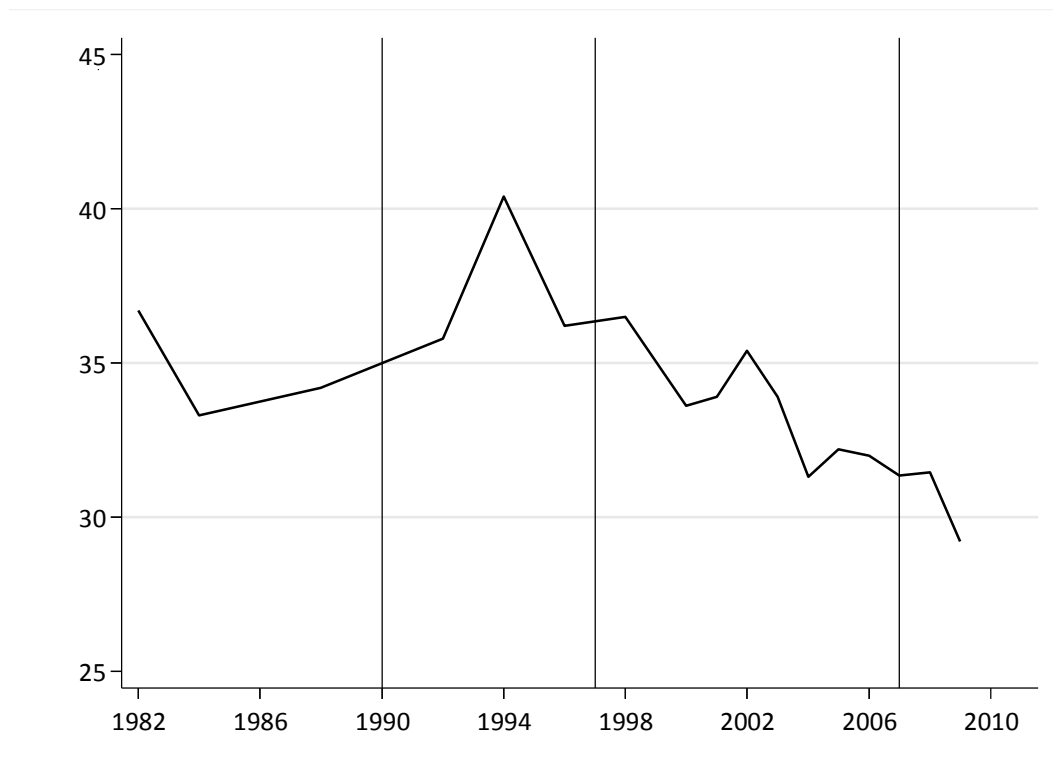
The increase in crime appeared to have a number of consequences for some other public attitudes too. First there was an increase in the proportion of people wanting increased spending on the police and prisons, combined with a decrease in public preferences for spending on social security (see Figure 3).[6] It also appeared to 'harden' attitudes towards offenders, as measured by the proportion of people prepared to see the harsher treatment of suspects.

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[6] Since 1983, the British Social Attitudes Survey has asked a regular question about the spending priorities of the public: "About items of government spending. Which of these would be your highest priority for extra spending?"

Figure 3. Priorities for extra spending (*British Social Attitudes Survey* 1983-2010)
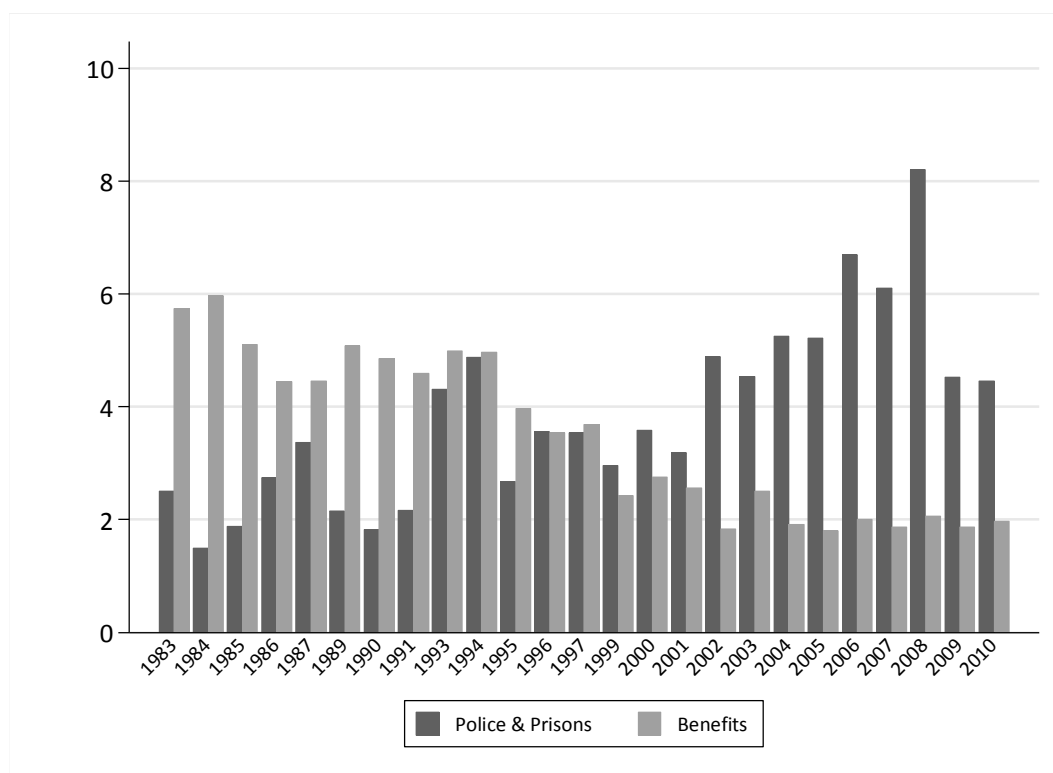

So as the consequences of Thatcherite social and economic policies unfolded over time, so public attitudes shifted along fairly predictable lines. To what extent did these shifts in public attitudes occupy the attention of British government during this period? The proportion of the policy agenda presented at the start of each session of parliament in the Queen's Speech referring to criminal justice is plotted in Figure 4. Here we focus on the period between 1970 and 2010. Over this period, there was a low level of government attention to criminal justice between the 1970s and early-1990s, with between 1 and 8 per cent of the content of the policy agenda dedicated to the issue of law and order. There was a short-lived upturn in attention (to 10 per cent) in 1979 (the first programme of the Thatcher government). However, the most sizeable escalation in concern occurred in the Major Government's programme of October 1996 in which there was a jump to 15 per cent of the total of the Queen's Speech. After a brief lull in attention during the period between 1997 and 2000, the amount of policy content in the speech dedicated to crime rose to almost a fifth. Through plotting a LOWESS[7] line of best fit through the data points, it becomes evident that while there was an upward trend during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a more pronounced escalation of political attention to crime *after* 1990, which only started to subside in 2005. The period between 1995 and 2005 therefore observed a greater proportion of the annual government agenda dedicated

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[7] Locally Weighted Scatterplot Smoothing.

to the issue of crime than at any other point since the 1970s (and indeed since the start of the post-war period).

Figure 4. Proportion of attention to law and crime in Queen's Speech (with LOWESS line of best fit)
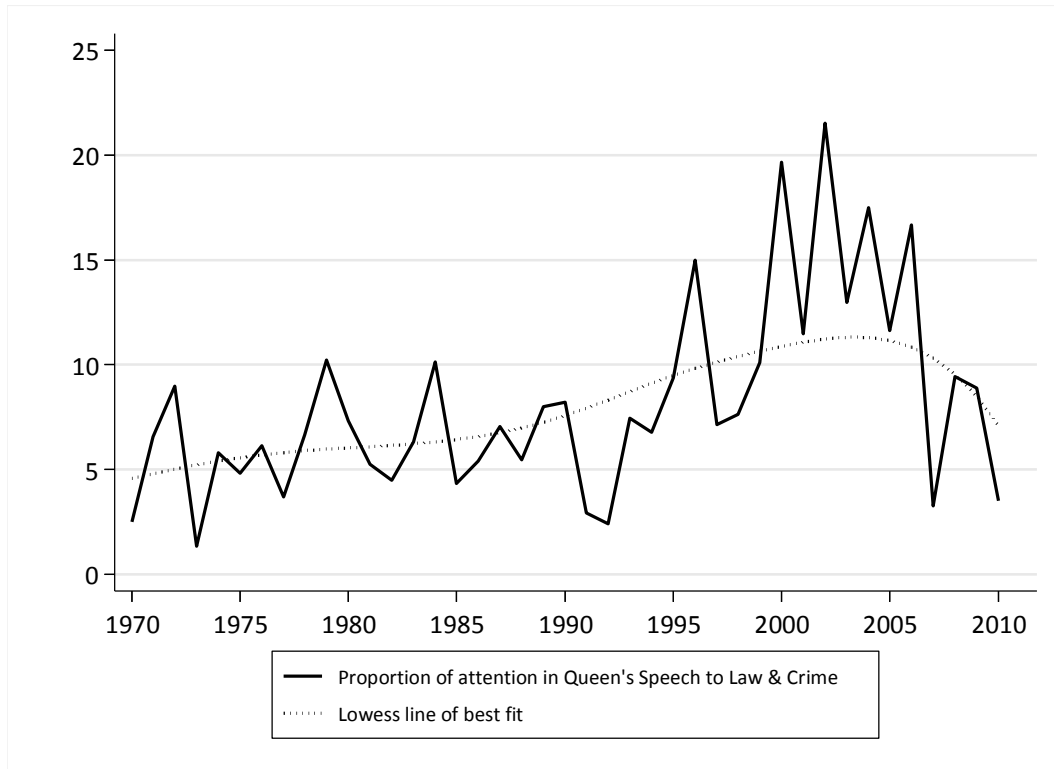
Our time series modelling (see Farrall and Jennings, 2012) shows that changes in the national rate of crime were associated with changes in the attention of British government to the issue of crime, while public concern about the issue also influenced the policy agenda. From the mid-1990s, just as anxiety about crime had reached a peak and as crime started to challenge the economy as the issue that public considered to be the 'most important problem' facing the country, government—hardly unsurprisingly—became more active in attending to the issue in their annual programme of executive and legislative proposals. In summary, there are dynamic and lagged effects at work; over time the population responds to rising crime levels (with heightened anxiety) which, in turn, leads to government's attention on crime. In this case, the attention afforded to crime was lagged so much that crime was actually on the *decrease* just as government ratcheted up its own attention on crime.

A number of observations follow from this discussion:

1) The above, taken *in toto*, suggests that there are long-term causal processes which we need to consider in thinking about crime rates in England and Wales (and, perhaps more crucially,

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when thinking about *changes* in crime rates). As such, crime rates can be seen as the long – term outcomes of other processes which were initiated several years before.

2) Public attitudes feed back into political decision making processes, such that what the public 'feels' about a particular topic (in our case crime) can and does feed back into the thinking of politicians and policy makers. This processes is likely to be recursive, as Lee (2001: 480-481) suggests when he refers to a fear of crime 'feed-back loop', which

"…operate[s] symbiotically to produce and intensify crime fear and the research related to it; that research into victims produces and maintains the criminological concept of 'fear of crime' quantitatively and discursively; that this information operates to identify fear as a legitimate object of governance or governmental regulation; that the techniques of regulation imagine particular types of citizens – *fearing subjects*; that these attempts to govern 'fear of crime' actually inform the citizenry that they are indeed fearful; that this sensitises the citizenry to 'fear of crime'; that the law and order lobby and populist politicians use this supposed fearing population to justify a tougher approach on crime, a point on which they grandstand, and in doing so sensitise citizens to fear once again; and that this spurs more research into 'fear of crime' and so on".

As such, 'ordinary people' shape political processes in ways which, we think, have not fully been recognised by either historical institutionalists or constructivist institutionalists, who, for very good reasons, have tended to focus on political actors as either the initiators of change (in that they promote ideas, for example) or as people who respond to institutional arrangements conceptualised as political parties, accepted ways of thinking and doing things, civil servants, and so on. Or, to quote Hall, "… formal rules, compliance procedures and customary practices that structure the relationships between individuals in the polity and economy" (Hall, 1992: 96).

3) A key observation to emerge from our work is that path-shaping periods can firstly alter path dependencies (which is commonly accepted, we think) and secondly (and less immediately recognised) not just with regards to the specific arena in which they are promoted, but, over time, can have unpredictable cascading effects into both other policy domains and hence

back to government actions (via changes in public attitudes), Hay and Farrall, 2001, Farrall
and Jennings, 2012, Jennings et al 2012.

Given that levels of crime are, in part, the consequence of wider social, economic and political
structures, the model suggests that, consistent with a wide field of empirical inquiry, changes in
social and economic structures contribute to changes in levels, forms and experiences of crime and
victimization. In response, such socio-economic forces can lead, over extended periods of time, to
calls (from the public and politicians) for new ways of tackling and dealing with crime and its
perceived causes. In this respect, changes in social and economic policies (even those not directly
related to crime) may result in underlying changes in behaviour which create further pressure for
governmental action. There is a complex feedback process where the consequences of public
policies in one domain can have subsequent effects on society and policy in another. Such policy
feedback processes can occur in isolation from social change – such as between the political and
public agenda, and, say, between media, public and legislative attention. For the issue of crime,
however, social and economic conditions also prescribe the limits of the sorts of policy responses
available. Our model, grounded in theories of institutionalism, agenda-setting and policy change,
provides a means for explaining the rise in crime and of the criminal justice agenda under the 1979–
97 Conservative governments. It informs representation of the complex interaction between society,
the economy, policy and politics along the following lines: taking office in 1979, the Conservatives
responded to growing pressures for economic and social reforms that had emerged in Britain during
the 1970s through adoption of neo-liberal macro-economic policies as well as embarking on
widespread privatization of council housing. However, some aspects of their policies only served to
prolong the economic hardship and augment earlier processes of deindustrialization. Later, neo-
liberal and neo-conservative social policies cascaded through other branches of state activity
between 1981 and 1989 (Hay and Farrall, 2011) falling most heavily on social security, education and
local government. This programme of government policies resulted in a shift in the underlying social
and economic conditions of Britain, in particular in terms of unemployment and inequality. However,
these policies also had impacts on actual crime levels, contributing to production of a further policy
problem (rising crime) which was manifested in surveys of the public's fear of crime and its
identification of crime as an important issue facing the country.

Thinking About Levels (and Speeds) of Explanation

When trying to explain social and economic phenomena, analysts must make decisions about the level (or levels) of explanation at which they wish to work. In some cases the individual level is sufficient; the decision making of burglars (which house is the more attractive proposition, and why so?) is arguable best approached by asking burglars themselves why they chose one house over another. Alternatively, if explaining why it is that some parts of a particular city are good places to 'score' heroin, for example, one might wish to work at a meso-level, and to explore the recent economic fortunes of that part of the city, which jobs have ceased to exist and so on, and how the local residents responded to such losses. If one were instead thinking about the causes of, for example, a nation-wide policy of decarceration (whereby a large proportion of serving prison inmates were released from prison and fewer new ones 'recruited' into prison) one may wish to look at national-level sentencing policies, acts of parliament and so on. But of course, this trichotomy is in many respects a false one. Burglars 'don't come from nowhere'; there are reasons why some decide to start breaking into other people's home and which can be associated with levels of unemployment and the economic needs that brings, or the responses of some communities when jobs disappear (such as increased rates of drug addiction). Hence how a burglar decides to select which house to steal from is partly a function (albeit a more removed one) of economic conditions in their immediate locale. Similarly, the number of people prepared to sell heroin in an area is partly a function of how many people want to buy such drugs in that area, and the much wider availability of alternative forms of income (be they either legal or illegal). Given that periods of imprisonment disrupt legitimate employment careers, the number of those who have little option but to deal in drugs is partly also a function of economic processes (driving them and others out of the local economy) and penal policies (which may operate to make some individuals less likely to be recruited by employers looking for those with reputable pasts and the requisite skills). So these different 'levels' collapse down on each other when we start to think about both causes and the causes of causes. Nevertheless, they provide a useful way of structuring one's enquiries and are an aid to interpretation, we would argue.

All of this begs the question, 'when thinking and analysing a project as complex as the one which we have set ourselves, which level (or levels) of explanation are the most appropriate?' Our answer is that, in order to understand to its fullest extent both Thatcherism and its impact on crime in England and Wales, we need to think about all of these levels, and some additional ones too. The swing towards that thing which we now think of as 'Thatcherism' by the Conservative Party was something which has been detected as starting in the 1950s (Green, 1999). Thus we need to acknowledge the

role of individuals and small collections of individuals from the 1950s through to the 1970s and beyond in the build up to the policies of the 1980s. Similarly, we cannot for one moment ignore the global crisis of the early 1970s (often referred to as the oil crisis) which if not 'starting' the discussion of the deficiencies of the 'post-war consensus' (itself another construct, since some never accepted its basic premise, Green 1999) certainly focused minds on it more than they may have been before. In addition to these 'levels', we need to locate and understand Thatcherism as both the product of specific challenges to the UK, and part of a wider swing towards neo-liberal and neo-conservative governments in the late 1970s and early 1980s (in the US and Canada most obviously, but also in West Germany, Australia and New Zealand, see Taylor, 1990). Within each of these countries particular individuals played key roles developing critiques (see above) and later policies which were pursued (to varying degrees) by the likes of Thatcher, Reagan and Kohl. Key interests groups emerged during these periods and they too played roles in shaping policies and reflecting and moulding public sentiments. Of course, that thing called 'the public' also played a huge role in these matters too; they voted for such parties and their opinions started to feedback (via surveys) into thinking by politicians in government and in opposition. As such, our project has had to grapple with various and varying levels of explanation. At times public opinions are crucial in our story; at other times what key individuals in positions of political power did (or did not do) was key; at other points we can see the legacy of previous ideas and systems of thought working they way through how current problems were approached, thought about and responded to.

Another consideration needs to be given attention too, however. Ours is a project which could be approached with a focus on just the period between 1979 and 1990 (or 1997). However, to do this would be to fail to locate crime, policies about crime, other social and economic policies, the Conservative Party, 'Thatcherism' and a whole raft of other key issues in their proper connect. Whilst this project is a heady mix of a criminological focal point seen (partly) through the lenses of political science, it is also a project which is steeped in historical insight. This, for us, means not just thinking about *levels* of explanation, but also about *speeds* of explanations too. 'Speeds' is deliberately plural here, for no two processes run at exactly the same speed. Let us take, as an example, the 1988 Education Reform Act. This act first came into being in the mid to late 1980s, as the Conservative Party started to look ahead (in 1986) to an anticipated third electoral victory (which came in 1987). Previously, little had been said about education by Thatcher's education secretaries (despite her having been secretary for education in the 1970 government). In 1986, there was a marked shift in thinking, as new right approaches came to dominate the government's approach to education and schooling (Tomlinson 1989: 183). Indications of this shift in thinking came during the 1987 Election, when it was announced that if the Tories were re-elected, schools would be allowed to 'opt out' of

Local Education Authority (LEA) control (Whitty and Menter 1989: 47). The resulting 1988 Education Reform Act was radically to change secondary education in the United Kingdom. The 1988 Education Reform Act fully came into power on the 1st of April, 1990. This act allowed schools to opt out of LEA control, transferred the management of schools from LEAs to school governors, allowed for 'open enrolment' (in which parents were offered choice of schools for their children) and introduced the National Curriculum (Dorey 1999: 146). Whilst, previously, education had been a low priority for the government (McVicar 1990: 138), the aim of the 1988 act was to make a radical break with the earlier philosophy (Tomlinson 1989: 185–6). Staff–student ratios rose throughout the 1980s and 1990s, arguably leading to greater disruption in classes, more exclusions and greater levels of staff absenteeism. In 1992, the first league tables of school exams were published (Timmins 2001: 519). These had the unfortunate side effect of encouraging schools to exclude unruly children (school exclusions rose throughout the 1990s until reaching a peak of 12,668 in 1996–97; DFeS 2001). Dumped on the streets, excluded children only served to cause further problems for local residents and the police (Timmins 2001: 566). Interestingly, Bynner and Parsons (2003: 287) show that those in school between 1975 and 1986 had twice the rate of temporary suspensions (15 per cent for males and 6 per cent for females) as the generation of children before them (7 per cent for males and 3 per for females). So one of the upshots of this act was that an increasing number of children were excluded from schools, and this was associated with increases in low level but persistent anti-social behaviour in the mid-1990s. Thus decisions taken in the mid-1980s took a decade or so to produce outcomes which were related to crime. Alternatively, as Thompson (2014) shows, Conservative economic policies (inspired by monetarism) had much more immediate effects on businesses (so much so that monetarism ceased to be pursued as a policy from around March 1981, due to its negative impacts on businesses, Thompson, 2014: 39).

In this respect, when thinking about why Thatcherism emerged when it did and the impacts which it might have had on crime in England and Wales, several different processes were unfolding at different times and at different speeds. Some of the slowest moving and longest processes relate to the sentiments of sections of the Tory Party after the 1945 general election defeat and the eventual resurfacing of these in the early 1970s. This set of instincts and beliefs took time to be shaped into political ideas and still longer to develop an institutional basis from which they could be articulated and (if and when needed) defended. Nevertheless, these eventually started to form sufficient critical mass to make electoral change a possibility and, once the ideas had been fully worked though into policy proposals, to start to make decisive in-roads into the foundations of the post-war consensus. Some of the changes undertaken by the early Thatcher governments (as these worked their ways through various sections of government policy-making, see Hay and Farrall, 2011) initially

altered, for example, the ownership of housing and the sorts of economic environments people lived in. Over time, these started to alter the landscape of crime in England and Wales, and we started to see dramatic increases in crime throughout the 1980s and into the early-1990s. As we have argued elsewhere, and in the context of New Right thinking, so rises in crime started to be registered with members of the public and hence, eventually politicians and then started to form the basis of policy-formulation. Thus shifts in crime policies in the mid-1990s were the outcomes of changes which can be traced in various ways back to seemingly unrelated policy domains and the changes in these in turn related to changes in thinking within the Tory Party. The causes appear to have operated in causal chains, been long-term, very slow-moving, and incremental.

One of the central aims of our project is, therefore, to explain how it might be that what happens in the policy arena relating to, for example, housing policies, or social security, or unemployment might impact on crime rates. This initially sounds rather straightforward; we know there are strong relationships between, for example, unemployment and engagement in crime (see Farrington et al 1986). But our task is slightly more complex, since are not using individual level which allows us to relate an individual's engagement in the labour market with their engagement in offending. Our data sets are collected at the individual level (for example via the British Crime Survey, British Social Attitudes Survey, Labour Force Survey and so on), but we analyse them as repeated cross-sectional data at the social group and regional levels. Thus ours is a project which seeks to explore macro-level policies processes at the regional and social subgroup level using data collected from many individuals at different points in time. Hence our need to have thought carefully about different levels of explanation and the data used to make these assessments.

Our thinking on this builds on our initial outline of how a Thatcherite influence on crime emerged slowly and via changes in other key social and economic institutions. Whilst much of Thatcher's initial attention was devoted to changes in the economic sphere of government influence (namely fiscal policy, monetary policy, and changes to legislation relating to industrial relations) these changes increased substantially the numbers of those unemployed in the UK (from an already high base it ought to be noted). Changes in housing policies (also an early target of policy activity for Thatcher's administrations) also slowly changed the nature of 'who' lived where and the levels of social and economic needs which such people (and hence, communities) experienced. All in all, changes in the broad tenor of housing policy, coupled with increases in unemployment and the concentrating of social and economic disadvantages associated with deindustrialisation, slowly started to have dramatic and enduring impacts on the sorts of crimes which people living in such communities started to experience. Such crimes were driven by economic want and were also

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expressive of frustration and desperation in what may be described in Durkheimian terms (Durkheim, 1897). But crime 'spills over' from one neighbourhood into others. It does this via the exploitation in terms of what is stealable in any one community and hence crime radiates out in a number of ways. Those in need of things to steal may start to target other communities where they do not live and/or may start to target those commuting around the cities in which they live and of course start to form the basis of a serious of (sometimes overtly racist) media and political discourses about 'the problem of law and order', Hall et al, 1978. Such discourses start to enter (along with direct experiences) the consciousness of those not immediately affected by high levels of unemployment, poverty and need. And so, unemployment whilst fuelling crime directly in some neighbourhoods may start to fuel anxiety about crime both in these neighbourhoods and other ones less directly affected.

But England and Wales is not simply one place with just one economic or one social history; our work therefore needs to take seriously not just time but also geography. Not all communities were equally affected by the changes brought about to British society by the turbulence of the period since the early 1970s. The 'traditional' industrial heartlands of Britain will have had quite different experiences in this regard when compared to those parts of the country which relied less on coal-mining, steal working or heavy manufacturing. In this respect, ours is a project which explores changes over time and between places – where places refer to large regions. Many of these regions were well into a period of deindustrialisation long before 1979 (or even 1973). Crafts and Tomlinson (Crafts, 1991, Tomlinson, 1990) have documented the history of economic decline, tracing it back to the late-1960s. As such, deindustrialisation already had a hold on the coal-mining regions of Scotland, south Wales, the English midlands and northern England. Yet, even so, these regions and the communities within them bore the brunt of the economic changes wrought by some Thatcherite economic policies, and especially so after the miners lost their year-long strike of 1983-1984 and faced the closure of many mines and the loss of many jobs associated with this line of work. The southeast of England (with London as its hub) saw changes, but these tended to be in the opposite direction, with a booming economy and also a dramatic increase in residents (many of whom had left the de-industrialising heartlands of Wales, Scotland and the north of England, Dorling, 2014).

So how individuals respond to various loses (of identity, community, employment and livelihood) will produce outcomes which are felt by other individuals in other communities and regions. In this way our use of data which is collected at the individual level but is not longitudinal at the individual level becomes less problematic. Similarly, those runs of data which we use (such as inflation or the Gini co-efficient) which are processes which are not collected at the individual level are easily embedded within our model. Inflation is something which, to some extent, everyone feels. But the degree to

which one feels (and indeed is negatively affected by) it is not the same for all individuals. Those with more savings, higher salaries and lower outgoings will notice the impacts of inflation less than those with little or no savings on which to fall back, lower salaries which are being asked to 'do more' or outgoings which cannot easily be reduced at all or without effecting the quality of one's life. So again, we have to rely on making the assumption that macro-level processes such as inflation will come to bear more heavily on some people in some communities and that some of these people will respond in ways which are not totally in keeping with the law.

We therefore rely on officially recorded data in some instances (especially when these were not open to influence by the governments of the day, who might have good reason to alter the measurement of some issues, such as the number of people claiming unemployment benefit), and, wherever we are able to, seek to augment these with data from people living in the UK during the period under question (and collected from surveys both those undertaken by independent bodies and those commissioned by governmental agencies). Our modelling strategy relies upon time series techniques. We argue that long-term persistence, trends and fluctuations both in crime rates and attitudes towards crime and criminal justice are critical for understanding underlying processes of social, economic and political change – with respect to the past and the future. Through understanding longitudinal patterns in aggregate-level variables it becomes possible to understand how certain social, political and economic forces interact.

Often, debate in the criminological literature has focused upon the degree to which crime rates measured at the aggregate-level exhibit persistence (i.e. whether or not they are 'nonstationary' processes). Notably, however, there has been little discussion of theoretical assumptions relating to the time series properties of crime rates (see Jennings et al. 2012). One of the contributions of this project will therefore be to theorise the data-generating processes for such aggregate-level measures from heterogeneous individual-level behaviour as well as undertaking further diagnostic analysis of the characteristics of our time series data. For example, this analysis might seek to determine if fear of crime or victimisation are more stable for certain social groups than others. Such an approach might use tests for stationarity/non-stationarity or tests for fractional integration. In addition, time series methods include multivariate regressions; for example, using autoregressive distributed lag (ADL) models to control for the persistence of the dependent variable, or error-correction models (ECMs) to test whether a pair of variables remain in a long-run equilibrium and move together over time (such as the relationship between crime and unemployment). This will build on earlier work that has used a variety of time series models to test the dynamic relationship between crime, the economy and politics. The creation of aggregate datasets for different groups is

important, since it means that models can be estimated as panels (i.e. as discrete relationships), and we can explore whether there is co-variation or a lot of unique variance for each group. An example of a time series model with fear of crime as the dependent variable might therefore be estimated as:

ADL

$$FEAR_t = a_0 + B_1 FEAR_{t-1} + CRIME_{t-1} + INEQUALITY_{t-1} + EVENT_t$$

(Meaning that crime levels and inequality are independent variables and $EVENT_t$ is a dummy variable indicating the start of a new policy). This strategy allows us to model both macro-level processes (such as growing levels of inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient) and regional-level and subgroup-level experiences of phenomena such as victimisation (measured by such surveys as the BCS and GHS) and worry about crime (measured by similar surveys) and relate these to the experiences of people living in various regions in the UK during the period of change we are interested in. At no point are we able to model processes at the individual level, but we get as close as we can to this by employing data collected at the individual level wherever we can.

Thus our model of change is a complex one; it needs to be since we are theorising various types of change working at different levels and at varying speeds (both varying between one another and varying at different points of time). Our model starts with acknowledging the importance of ideas in processes of dramatic and far-reaching change. Many of the ideas which Thatcher pursued had been developed over a long period of time, and several had been pursued previously by both Ted Heath's government (1970-1974) and the Labour governments from 1974 to 1979. Such ideas started to be developed by various thinkers on the right in and around the Conservative Party, and slowly started to be given increasing attention by key actors in the news media and amongst various right-leaning think tanks and academics (Hall, 1992). Whilst it would be wrong to say that these ideas became 'locked in' (in a path dependent way), these ideas would attract an increasing number of people both opinion-shapers and amongst the population. These ideas reflected various popular sentiments concerning the economic and social problems facing the country at that time, and were equally to mould some of these in particular directions. After Thatcher won the 1979 general election these ideas started to be promulgated in more depth and yet more institutions started to pay heed to them. As Thatcher outlined her policies and made statements on various topics, so public opinion was further shaped (either recoiling from in some instances or moving to embrace in others). As the effects of the initial policies being pursued started to become seen, so public opinion was shifted in

various ways again. The effects of the policies on some sections of society were recognised by both members of the public and those in government and in Whitehall. This brought about modifications to the policies in order for the party to remain in power. Over time the policies being pursued started to 'bed down' and started to impact (both positively and negatively) on the lives of citizens. Large scale confrontations with key power blocs (such as the trade union movement) served to provide further institutional support for Thatcher's project – which was also starting to win admirers both at home and overseas (certainly support from US President Reagan did nothing to harm her). Likeminded individuals and pressure groups (such as Mary Whitehouse's National Listeners and Viewers Association) provided further institutional support for Thatcherite ideas and sentiments. As the outcomes of the policies started to emerge, and as the Conservatives got better at controlling and influencing the machinery of government, so new policy areas were initiated (often with help from thinkers in pressure groups). Institutions were discarded, embraced, modified and promoted in various degrees and to various effects. One of the eventual outcomes for crime rates was that they started to rise. These had been rising anyway since the 1960s, but with the advent of new research techniques and ways of gauging popular opinion (such as the BCS, BSAS and their adoption into the institutional culture of valid sources of 'things we know about crime') such instruments were to increasingly play a part in government thinking about crime. Crime rates, as we have shown previously, are the result of numerous processes (unemployment, economic need and the such like) and various institutions started to reflect on what these meant. The media (always on the lookout for bad news, since this sells) started to report stories about the general crime rate rather than specific crimes or groups of possible offenders (Hall et al 1978) and slowly the problem of crime became something about which it was no longer enough simply for Conservative politicians to talk about – something had to be done since the opinion polls and the popular press had spotted this rising trend in crime. This meant legislation and shifts in sentencing policies (since up-tariffing was closer to Conservative instincts than were models of intervention based on social work, for example). This created a re-moulding of the criminal justice system after the early 1990s; prior to that point with crime rising but hardly a major issue, the Labour Party in disarray generally and seen as 'weak' on crime, and Thatcher's attention focused on first the economy and housing, then industrial relations, social security reform and then educational reform there was little time to be devoted to crime and Home Secretaries were left alone to get on with it (Hurd, 2003). The institutions which were affected were many and varied. 'Imprisonment' was clearly one institution which was affected by this as more prisons were built. Our earlier analyses have suggested that whilst imprisonment did play a part in the decline in crime rates (see Farrall and Jennings, 2012, Jennings et al 2012) so too did the improvement in the economy. However, it has been (at least in popular discourse) the idea

of imprisonment which has been institutionalised as the 'cure' for high crime rates. The Labour Party shifted its position on crime after Tony Blair become shadow Home Secretary in 1992 and the party started to articulate a much more 'tough-minded' position on crime (which was to be even more strongly promoted after Blair become party leader in 1994). Since that point, no serious politician in the UK has ever allowed an opponent to be further to the right than they are when it comes to the issue of crime (Skogan, 2009: viii).

Conclusion

We have sought to outline our thinking on a very large and complex undertaking; namely the assessment of the ways in which the Thatcher governments of the 1980s may have had quite unintended consequences on crime via some of the policies which they set about pursuing for quite separate reasons, but which, nevertheless contributed to amongst other things, the upswing in crime in the 1980s. Our thinking is not heavily informed by theories commonly examined by criminologists; instead our thinking about both the causal antecedents of these governments and their approach to re-engineering society, and the causal antecedents of crime are informed by thinking inspired by historical institutionalist scholars writing within political science, and sociological and economic theories of crime causation.

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About the project

This project explores trends in crime and key social and economic processes, following an earlier scoping study of the social, economic and cultural impacts of Thatcherite public policy on contemporary UK society. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. You can find out more about the project at:

http://www.shef.ac.uk/law/research/projects/crimetrajectories

About the authors

Stephen Farrall trained as a sociologist before focusing more closely on criminology. In addition to the current project, his research interests include the measurement of the fear of crime, why people stop offending and the impact of probation supervision on the lives of former probationers. With Colin Hay he has recently completed the editing of a collection of essays assessing the impact of 'Thatcherite' social and economic policies on the UK – this resulted from a British Academy seminar on this topic in July 2011. The book, *Thatcher's Legacy: Exploring and Theorising the Long-term Consequences of Thatcherite Social and Economic Policies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, will be published in 2014.

Emily Gray began her academic career began in social policy before later specialising in criminology. In 1999 she started work as a research assistant exploring young men's participation in general practice healthcare at the University of Edinburgh. She later moved to the University of Oxford to join a large team of researchers investigating the effect of intensive community supervision on persistent and serious young offenders in England and Wales. It was this subject that eventually became the focus of her doctoral thesis, which sought to identify the long-term impact (ten years on) of the respective disposal with the same cohort of young people as they entered adulthood. The study combined macro-level longitudinal statistical analyses of a national data-set with micro-level biographical interviews with a discreet regional sample. It was intended to represent a departure from the original evaluation, although its inception was directly informed by the marked limitations of conducting high-profile, short-term public policy research.

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