

Highlights

From Convergence to Corbyn: Explaining Support for the UK's Radical Left

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- Corbyn-led Labour Party as radical left within UK context of political convergence.
- Analysing extent spatial theory or populism explain support for Corbyn-led Labour.
- Dealing with endogenous 'persuasion effects' with use of panel data.
- Partial explanation of support based on voter/actor proximity on policy dimensions.
- No strong evidence that support for Corbyn-led Labour based on populist attitudes.

From Convergence to Corbyn: Explaining Support for the UK's Radical Left

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ABSTRACT

Against many predictions, the 2017 UK General Election saw the Labour Party increasing its representation under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn shifted the Labour Party away from its past convergence, becoming more radically left-wing in its policies. Following this unexpected success of Labour in 2017, this article examines the individual-level motivations of voters to see how far support for this radically-shifting party is explained by populist attitudes amongst voters, or by policy-proximity (spatial) considerations of these voters - analysing the latter based on economic, cultural (personal rights and values), and migration policy dimensions. Looking at how Labour evaluations changed between the 2015 and 2017 elections, from BES panel data, the article finds that levels of populism amongst voters do not explain support for Labour. The article also finds policy-proximity to offer a limited explanation of support for Labour, but also finds unexpectedly high support for this party from spatially-distant voters.

1. Introduction

The UK Labour Party is an established party, and firmly a part of the UK's political mainstream. However, the party went on an ideological journey in the latter half of the 2010s, defined by the election of Jeremy Corbyn as the party's leader in 2015. Between 2015 and 2019, under Corbyn's tenure as Labour leader, this mainstream centre left political party shifted and began to promote more radically left-wing policies, relative to the UK context. This shift ended a period of convergence towards the centre ground by Labour before Corbyn's leadership. Between Corbyn's rise to become the party's leader in September 2015, and until his departure in 2020, Labour professed a more radically left-wing message relative both to Labour prior to Corbyn's leadership, and to the prevailing economic norms of the UK.

To examine support for this party, I look at two theories: the populism-based account, and the policy-proximity account. Under the former, I examine how far support for Labour between 2015 and 2017, under Corbyn, is explained by drawing populist voters. Under the policy-proximity account, I explore how far support for Labour is explained by voter proximity with this party on an economic policy dimension, cultural policy dimension, and migration policy dimension. Both of these are established accounts, and I draw on previous literature to operationalise these in this article, and see how far they explain support for this radical left actor. I test both theories from British Election Study (BES) panel data, with which I conduct descriptive analysis and multiple regression analysis. These two theories come with a prominent context of applications to the radical right. For example, explanation of radical right support based

on economic and authoritarian/libertarian policy-proximity (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995), and a pan-European connection of the radical right's support with populism (Mudde, 2007). Taking these established theories, previously cited to explain support for the radical right, and seeing how far they explain support for the radical left in the UK, is one of the core contributions of this article.

Supporting that is the fact I am looking at a less conventional instance of the radical left, arising from an intra-party faction. Not only does this bring analysis of radical left support outside of long-running parties (e.g. *Die Linke*), it also brings the fundamental advantage whereby I may draw out political support separate from the issue of 'Persuasion Effects'. These effects, identified in previous spatial theory research (Brody & Page, 1972), encapsulate a broad range of possibly endogenous factors - for example, partisan attachments - where there may be pre-existing support which subsequently shift voters' policy preferences. These are potentially problematic, because they may reverse the causal direction of the policy-proximity account. However, without dealing with these effects, I may incorrectly observe findings which support this account, when in reality that radical left support preceded policy-proximity. In that situation, findings would appear to support the policy-proximity account, but not genuinely be a product of policy-proximity (Brody & Page, 1972, p. 457). Therefore, dealing with persuasion effects is an important contribution. By using panel data, I separate voters' policy preferences from potential persuasion effects arising from the radical left Corbyn-led Labour Party. I do this by drawing these policy preferences from pre-Corbyn waves of BES panel data. Consequently, I clarify the causal pathway of the policy-proximity theory. Unfortunately, owing to a lack of pre-Corbyn populism measures, I am not able to replicate this mitigation of persuasion with the populism-based account.

* This article is an adaptation of a case study which formed part of a PhD thesis, submitted in January 2021



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This leaves three key contributions from this article. Firstly, by applying theories which have previously explained support for the radical right to one of their left-wing counterparts. Secondly, by looking at support for a less-conventional instance of the radical left: specifically, a mainstream political party shifting to the left following a change in leadership. Thirdly, when examining the possibility of support based on policy-proximity, I also address the issue of 'persuasion effects', with the purpose of clarifying the role of this account and more accurately understanding how far it explains support for this radical left actor.

This article proceeds as follows: I first offer brief context of the UK Labour Party, and how this party shifted to become a radical left actor under Jeremy Corbyn. Following that, I give an outline of both theories which I explore. I then come to set up a research design, including explaining the BES panel data. This is followed by the analysis part of this article, including multiple linear regression of Labour evaluation changes between 2015 and 2017, and tabled analysis of Labour evaluation levels in both pre-Corbyn and post-Corbyn waves. This leads finally to my conclusions, where I find little support for the populism-based account, and conditional support for policy-proximity.

2. Contextualising Corbyn

Although uncommon for such a shift to take place, the UK Labour Party changed under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. The party shifted from a converged, centre-left, mainstream party to adopt more radically left-wing ideological stances. I will illustrate this shift here.

In the early 1980s, UK politics was in a period of divergence, with the Conservative Party shifting to the right under Margaret Thatcher, and the Labour Party adopting radical opposing stances under leading figures Michael Foot and Tony Benn. As an example of these radical policies, Labour proposed re-nationalisation of then recently privatised services and industries, unilateral nuclear disarmament, and the abolition of the House of Lords. Following defeat in the 1983 election, the Labour Party began a moderating shift. UK politics then moved from a period of divergence to one of convergence. This culminated in the rise of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to Labour's leadership, with both serving as Prime Ministers between 1997 and 2010. Following defeat of Gordon Brown's Labour government in 2010, the party remained converged under its new leader - Ed Miliband.

Ed Miliband did not explicitly challenge this economic consensus. His Shadow Chancellor, Ed Balls, announced he would not reverse Conservative spending cuts (Prince, 2015). Deputy Leader Harriet Harman encouraged Labour to abstain on a vote cutting government spending on welfare (Wintour, 2015). Ed Miliband continued to describe austerity as going 'too far and too fast' – critically not rejecting austerity itself (Doran, 2017). Furthermore, the Labour manifesto of 2015 did not pledge to take key utilities or services back into public ownership (The Labour Party, 2015).

Following defeat in the 2015 general election, Miliband resigned, opening a contest for Labour's next leader. Corbyn entered this as an outsider, barely managing to get onto the ballot, having just minutes to spare whilst receiving the necessary nominations from MPs intending to 'broaden the conversation' rather than out of genuine support for Corbyn (Wintour & Mason, 2015; Page, 2019). The longshot status of the Corbyn campaign was also recognised in betting odds, as his chances of winning the leadership election initially stood at 980-1 (Odell, 2015). Nevertheless, Corbyn's leadership campaign was ultimately successful, and the previously little-known backbench MP took up the Labour leadership in September 2015.

Following his surprise election to the party's leadership, Labour again shifted ideologically, this time breaking from convergence to become challengers to the now long accepted economic norms prevailing within the UK. I can see Labour's shift by looking at the party's manifesto for the UK's 2017 general election. The policies in that manifesto diverge markedly from their proposals in the 2015 general election. Labour's 2017 manifesto proposed an agenda which explicitly opposed the long-running economic consensus which had persisted since the early 1980s. This included promises to increase taxes on the rich and on corporations (The Labour Party, 2017, p. 9), to increase funding for multiple public services (The Labour Party, 2017, pp. 37, 69, 73, 80, 86, 93, 104), and to end public sector pay freezes (The Labour Party, 2017, p. 38). Labour also proposed a broad agenda of public ownership, promising nationalisation of rail, Royal Mail, water, and energy (The Labour Party, 2017, p. 19). All of this represents a radical shift in Labour's ideology, from convergence and acceptance of the so-called 'neoliberal' norms of lower state spending and lower taxes, to challenge these policies and diverge from these long-standing norms with stances which were opposed to austerity, anti-corporate, pro-state, and pro-redistribution.

Relative to the UK's context, the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn became a radical left political actor. The mainstream nature of this party, galvanised by its status as an ex-governing party and current position as the UK's main opposition party, makes comparing this radical left actor to parties such as Die Linke, Podemos, and La France Insoumise difficult. Those parties have never formed part of the political mainstream in their respective countries, or formed a government, unlike the Labour Party in the UK. Therefore, when I describe Labour under Corbyn as 'radical left', this is purely relative to the UK's context through this actor's challenge to long-standing economic norms in this country. Crucially, I am not claiming *equivalence* between the UK's Labour Party with the wider, cross-national radical left. However, a common factor across this wider radical left, including the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn, is their challenge towards the economic norms of their particular context. It is upon this that I label the Labour Party under Corbyn as a radical left actor.

Commentary during Corbyn's leadership assumed the party had moved too far to the left to obtain enough support

to lead in opinion polling or challenge the incumbent Conservative Party (Cowley, 2017; Jones, 2016; Jones, 2017; Freedland, 2017; Cohen, 2017). This idea has some support from the Downsian model (Downs, 1957; Rowley, 1984), under which Labour under Corbyn may have shifted too far from median voters in the UK. In this case, Labour is too distant from the bulk of British voters for the party to be electorally competitive. Some polling prior to the UK's 2017 election, which Corbyn led Labour into, suggested this may have been the case, with the party polling at just 25% - half the support then recorded for the Conservatives (ComRes, April 2017). Ultimately this low support did not materialise, in spite of the Downsian wisdom of the median voter. Instead, Labour under Corbyn managed to secure 40% of the vote in the 2017 election. This was Labour's best performance by vote-share since 2001. That raises the question: what explains this substantial support?

3. Theory

To answer this question, I test two well-established accounts of voting behaviour: the policy-proximity account, and the populism-based account. This is by no means exclusive - a multitude of other theories are potentially important here, and may explain support for the UK Labour Party under Corbyn - but the established nature of both these theories combined with their potential to explain this support justifies their inclusion here. Supporting that, there is also the fact both of these theories have been notably applied to explain support for the radical right previously (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Mudde, 2007; Akkerman et al., 2017), which raises the prospect of seeing how far they explain support for the radical left here.

3.1: Policy-Proximity Account

The Downsian model of electoral support is at the heart of this account (Downs, 1957), which has commonly come to be known as the 'Spatial Theory of Voting'. As I said before, this is an established account of electoral support, with previous applications in many contexts, including in the UK (Cho & Endersby, 2003; Endersby & Galatas) and voting behaviour in the US (Jessee, 2009; 2010; 2012). I will explain the mechanism of support, the key assumptions, and the causal pathway of this account.

Two elements are critical to understanding this account: *proximity* and *utility*. Proximity refers to the degrees of closeness between the views of voters and the policies offered by competing political actors. Under the spatial theory, this proximity is what predicts voters' electoral support. Proximity may be viewed on a single policy dimension relating to one issue, or this space may consist of multiple policy dimensions each relating to different issues. Voters associate utility with different policy positions, and vote for the candidate whose policy position maximises this utility.

Under this theory, voters strive to maximise their utility, and do this by supporting political actors whose policies are most in line with their own policy preferences (their 'ideal

point'). By extension of this, a political actor that proposes policies which are not in line with voters most preferred policy position would receive less support from these voters.

To tie this in with the UK case study in this article, one of my two key research questions is whether support for the Corbyn is explained by policy-proximity. Potentially the unexpectedly high support for the Corbyn-led Labour Party is a product of voters holding more radical views on various issues; for example, economics, cultural policy, and immigration. Under this account, I would be able to see whether this is the case. More specifically, if this is the case, I would find increased support for Labour from voters who are radically left-wing on economics, liberal on cultural policy, and inclusive towards migrants. Additionally, under this account I would also find decreased Labour support from voters at the opposing ends of these dimensions.

To explain those three policy dimensions a little more, by economics I am referring to preferences regarding taxation and government spending. Cultural policy refers to conceptions of broad rights and liberties, including to abortion, LGBT+ rights, free expression, and attitudes relating to draconian law and order policies versus rehabilitative justice. Migration refers to attitudes towards immigration and migrant communities.

As for justification of these three particular dimensions, these have featured in previous research into radical right support (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014) and in research into support for both right-wing and left-wing radicals (Akkerman et al., 2017). Furthermore, and in defence of the cultural and migration dimensions, I would raise Inglehart's post-materialism thesis (1971) which suggests voters are more concerned by 'post-material' issues; for example, relating to identity and self-expression. Thus, cultural and migration preferences may have guided responses to the Corbyn-led Labour Party.

Additionally, these three dimensions are also suited to the UK context in the 2015-2017 period. During that period, the seismic Brexit referendum took place, returning a majority vote to leave the European Union. That may lead to calls for a specific Brexit policy dimension; however, it is conceivable that underlying Brexit views are economic, cultural, and migration-policy concerns. Consequently, the forces which drive a Brexit policy dimension are conceivably already picked up by the three dimensions in my analysis. Residual effects of Brexit views may remain, which I will address by including a control variable to separate the impacts of these preferences on Labour Party support in this period. I will detail control variables later in this article.

There is strong basis to believe the economic, cultural, and migration policy dimensions can explain support for the Corbyn-led Labour Party, based on policy-proximity. I have found this based, in particular, on previous research. But I do not also believe these three dimensions *exclusively* explain support, with it possible that other dimensions may also serve this purpose. For example, the issue of the environment and climate change may also explain support in my case

study. I have not included further dimensions, to avoid over-complicating my analysis.

The causal pathway of this theory is relatively simple. Voters first have policy preferences, then identify their own position relative to competing political actors, and subsequently support the political actor which is in closest proximity with their own position. The persuasion effects issue challenges this pathway, and that is why I make an important contribution by addressing these effects. With persuasion effects, the pathway is potentially reversed: voters first support a political actor, and that support causes voters to shift their policy preferences into proximity with that actor's policies. In this situation, I would find results which conform with the policy-proximity account, however that would not actually be the case - that electoral support would instead be a consequence of that pre-existing support, rather than policy-proximity (Brody & Page, 1972, p. 457). Therefore, to clarify how far policy-proximity explains support for the Corbyn-led Labour Party, it is important to take persuasion effects into account.

3.2: Populism-based Account

Summing up populism is not a simple task, as exemplified by Canovan describing populism as 'notoriously vague' (Canovan, 1999). Previous research describes populism as a 'broader challenge to liberalism' (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. xxix), feeding off appeals to politics based on popular wishes rather than elite-dominated institutions, fears at the erosion of the nation state in the wake of new economic and migration challenges. Eatwell and Goodwin identify four elements of populism, called their 'Four Ds': Distrust (of politicians), Destruction (of the nation's culture and traditions), Deprivation (economic inequality and lack of opportunity), and De-alignment (people moving away from mainstream political parties). In other research, populism has been defined by a 'Manichaeian' zero-sum divide between 'the people' opposing the 'corrupt elites' (Taggart, 2000; Mudde, 2007; 2010; Berman, 2020); a 'thin-centred' ideology,¹ which takes on characteristics of a host-ideology. For example, left-wing populism constructs its divide on the basis of economic inequality and opposition towards austerity (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016), where the 'people' are distinguished by non-elite economic status and 'generalised political disempowerment' (Roberts, 2019, p. 646; Vachudova, 2021). Meanwhile, right-populism is based on culturally-conservative and migrant-exclusive lines (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2007; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013).

Distilling this literature down to draw out the key elements of populism, Eatwell and Goodwin's 'Four Ds' help identify populism at the demand-side: voters (i.e. 'the people') oppose established political institutions and parties. These voters may also be concerned with the influx of migrants, potentially wanting to preserve their national culture and traditions. At the supply-side, right-wing populist parties

would appeal to these voters, potentially making a case against mainstream parties and political elites which have allowed immigration and degradation of national sovereignty. Alternately, these voters may be concerned with rising inequality, lack of economic opportunities, and with austerity policies. At the supply-side, left-wing populist parties would appeal to these voters, perhaps saying how mainstream parties have built a rigged economy, promising to tax and regulate economic elites, and end policies of fiscal austerity. Across both right and left, populist political actors make the common 'people' versus 'elite' appeals.

The first of my two research questions related to the policy-proximity account. The second research question is whether populist sentiments, defined by anti-elite attitudes, explain support for the Corbyn-led Labour Party. It is possible that support for Labour under Corbyn came from populist voters who were attracted by the anti-elite economic policies of his party. I discussed these policies earlier, including greater regulation of big businesses, and increased taxation on wealth and high earnings (The Labour Party, 2017, p. 9). This targeting of economic 'elites' potentially draws support from anti-elite populist voters.

Consequently, the notion of populism-based support for Labour under Corbyn, based on this political actor's anti-elitism at the economic level, is a plausible one. Accompanying that justification for considering this theory is the established nature of this account, where it has been successfully deployed in previous research to provide explanation of political support. For example, research identifying populism-based support in Scandinavia (Rydgren, 2010), in the Netherlands (Akkerman et al., 2014; 2017), and a great deal of party-level literature offering populist appeals as the reason for success of the radical right (Mudde, 2007; 2017; Arzheimer, 2015; Kioupkiolis, 2016; Otjes & Louwerse, 2015; Rooduijn, et al., 2012).

An important element of this theory is a potential populist electorate; voters who are minded, for whatever reason, support political actors which made anti-elite, populist appeals. Eatwell and Goodwin's 'Four Ds' contributes towards this, identifying four defining sentiments: Distrust, Destruction, Deprivation, and De-alignment. A great deal of other research has been done into populism's potential electorate.

Previous research has tied populist sentiments to economic insecurity; for example, economic 'left-behinds' who have suffered in an increasingly globalised world, lack job security, or express anger over inequality (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Existing research has also identified cultural insecurity among this populist electorate, with these voters feeling immigration poses a threat to their national identity and traditions, and oppose the political mainstream's generally positive attitude towards immigration (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1677). Political insecurity is another factor, with the 'mediatisation' of politics leading all parties to look alike, and non-mainstream populists challenge this mainstream political class (Kriesi, 2014). For example, research finding voters for the right-wing populist Lega Nord in Italy motivated by opposing the national government in

¹ 'Thin-centred' was a description originally attached to nationalism, and expressing how an ideology separates itself from broader interpretation of policy and political concepts (Freeden, 1998, p. 750), later applied to populism by Mudde (2007; 2010)

Rome (Betz, 1994). These factors relate to all of these 'Four Ds': economic insecurity with 'Deprivation', cultural insecurity with 'Destruction', and political insecurity leading to a backlash against mainstream political parties and institutions relates to both 'Distrust' and 'De-alignment'.

Potentially imbued with some of these factors motivating a populist electorate are certain policies; for example, left-wing populists offering greater business regulation and higher taxation, and right-wing populists proposing stronger controls on immigration. Reflecting this, it is possible that voters join this potential electorate because they support policies being offered by populist political actors. This potentially melds motivations under my policy-proximity account with those of my populism-based account, which would make it difficult to quantify their respective effects. In response it should be noted that there is no clear-cut evidence that policy-proximity and populism are that closely linked. Previous research has found the majority of 'extreme right' voters did not vote for right-wing populists (Billiet & De Witte, 1995; Eith, 2003), and suggested that support was a consequence of their anti-elitism rather than their policies (Rooduijn, 2018, pp. 356-357). As a result of there not being a clear causative link between policy-proximity and populism, it remains possible that I may observe voters supporting the radical left on the basis of populist sentiments.

Eatwell and Goodwin's 'Four Ds' (2018, p. xxi), along with supporting research, play an important role for this theory, because they demonstrate the existence of a populist 'potential electorate'. Assuming this potential electorate is present in the UK, there is potential that the support for the Corbyn-led Labour Party comes from the voters in this potential electorate. In line with the defining characteristics of populism identified in existing literature, I predict that this potential electorate of populist voters are identified by anti-elite attitudes, support for popular sovereignty, cynicism of mainstream politicians, and have a Manichaean 'people' versus 'elite' perspective of society and politics. In terms of broad expectations, it is these voters who I would expect to have been more supportive of the Corbyn-led Labour Party, under the populism-based account.

4. Data and Research Design

I examine how far support for the Corbyn-led Labour Party in the UK is explained by policy-proximity and populist attitudes. Crucial to carrying out this analysis is survey data, which I draw from the British Election Study. Three elements are crucial in this survey data: first, questions measuring support for the Labour Party in this time period; second, questions which gauge voter economic, cultural, and migration policy preferences; and third, questions which measure how far voters adhere with populism. All three of these elements are provided by the BES panel survey.²

²All measures used from the BES panel data are included under Appendix 1.

Panel data is a critical advantage of my analysis. It allows me to measure policy preferences of voters from a pre-Corbyn wave of data. Consequently, the radical left nature of the Labour Party under Corbyn would not have impacted on voter policy preferences in this case study, as I draw these preferences from the pre-Corbyn wave of BES data and Labour was not radical left in that wave. This leaves separation between voter policy preferences and any possible effects upon these arising from Labour's radical leftism. However, there are no pre-Corbyn measures of populism in the BES, so while I can separate policy preferences over time from radical left attachments, it is not possible to also separate populist attitudes of voters from radical left attachments.

For my analysis, I draw levels of Labour Party support from evaluation questions for this party. Similar research has often opted for measures of vote choice, rather than evaluations, however vote choices are more restricted for respondents and subject to numerous background factors. For example, in terms of the policy-proximity account, when a voter casts a single vote they consider not only their proximity with Labour, but also where they perceive other competing parties to be located relative to their own position. One of the difficulties with this account is identifying where political actors are positioned. It can be easy to misjudge these positions, which can then generate misleading results. However, with evaluation questions, the effect of this background factor is mitigated. Respondents are not as restricted in their expressed political support when expressing this via evaluation questions (van der Eijk et al., 2006), nor is their support as conditional on background factors - for example, the electoral system, party competitiveness, and positions relative to all competing parties. Consequently, I opt to measure radical left support in this article with questions of voter evaluations for the Labour Party. I observe these evaluations both in terms of levels of evaluation, in both the 2015 and 2017 election data, and how these evaluations changed from the BES panel survey sample.

I draw economic policy preferences from the five-item 'Values1' battery. This comes as a 1-5 Likert-type scale, asking how far respondents agree or disagree with five statements. These five statements relate to redistribution of wealth and attitudes towards big businesses, among other economics-related subjects. Previous research has identified this economic attitude scale as providing a reliable and stable measure of preferences over time (Evans, et al., 1996; Carmines & Zeller, 1979).

I identify cultural policy preferences from another five-item battery of questions, called 'Values2' in the BES. The 'Values2' battery again asks voters how far they agree or disagree with five statements. These statements relate to criminal justice and attitudes towards traditional values.

I determine migration policy preferences with two questions, pertaining to views of the impacts of migrants on the British economy and culture. Specifically, whether respondents believe immigration undermines or enhances the UK's economy and culture. These questions have history

in other research to ascertain attitudes towards migrants (Kappe, 2015; Kawalerowicz, 2017).

Economic and cultural policy preferences are drawn from wave 6 of the BES panel surveys, but migration policy preferences are drawn from wave 4 instead. This is because wave 6 does not include these migration policy questions. Wave 4 was fielded just two months before wave 6, and offers the most recent pre-Corbyn data on this policy dimension.

Economic policy and cultural policy questions were answered with a five-item Likert scale, and migration policy questions with a 1 to 7 scale. Regardless of the difference in response scales, I treat these responses the same: I calculate the average response across the five economic policy questions, the five cultural policy questions, and the two migration policy questions. This leaves me with an indication of overall policy preferences on each of the three dimensions from each respondent.

Looking now to the populism-based account, remember that this suggests the anti-elite messages of the radical left will draw populist voters to support these political actors. Testing this theory requires measurement of the populist attitudes of voters, in order to see how levels of populism are associated with radical left support. The BES panel surveys include measures of populist attitudes of each respondent, with questions relating to popular sovereignty, attitudes towards politicians, and feelings about compromises in politics.³

The BES records responses to their populism battery's questions on a 1–5 Likert scale, with respondents indicating levels of agreement/disagreement. This battery includes an established range of questions which have featured in other research measuring levels of populism amongst voters (Akkerman, et al., 2014; Van Hauwart & Van Kessel, 2018). I use Wave 10 of the BES for these populism measures. This wave took place in November/December 2016 – just over a year after Corbyn became Labour leader.⁴ I calculate the average response to the populism battery questions, gaining an overall impression of the populist attitudes of each respondent.

Under Appendix 2, I have provided a tabled summary of the questions and batteries used from the BES to measure support for the radical left, policy preferences on the three dimensions, and populist attitudes. Also included is the context of the particular wave of panel data. The primary waves I draw this data from are waves 6 and 13, with the retention rate between these waves 52.6% – meaning just over half of wave 6 respondents also answered questions in the 13th wave of BES panel data.⁵

³However, unlike the policy questions, pre-Corbyn BES waves do not include populism questions.

⁴An earlier wave – Wave 7 (April/May, 2016) – included populism measures; however, I have opted for Wave 10 instead as the number of responses to these populism questions is almost four times greater than in Wave 7.

⁵Ideally, I would draw these measures just from waves 6 and 13, thereby plausibly reducing variance in background effects; however, this is not possible given the way the BES has set up their panel surveys. I have also tested both accounts with all policy preference data from wave 4 and

Table 1: Respondent Groups on Policy Dimensions

	Groups				
	Rad-Left	Centre-Left	Centrist	Centre-Right	Rad-Right
Econ	n = 1384	n = 929	n = 1840	n = 1183	n = 1594
Cultural	Rad-Lib n = 1556	Mod-Lib n = 1310	Centrist n = 1813	Mod-Cons n = 1054	Rad-Cons n = 1029
Immig	Rad-Inc n = 1159	Mod-Inc n = 1112	Centrist n = 1650	Mod-Exc n = 1000	Rad-Exc n = 1821

With the averaged responses to economic, cultural, and migration policy questions, I have measures of the policy preferences of respondents on these three dimensions. I also know the populist attitudes of BES respondents. This brings me to the grouping of respondents. My primary reason for grouping respondents is to avoid imposing linear functional form, which would happen if I were to include voters' policy preferences and levels of populism as continuous variables, rather than these discretised groups. Justification for this approach appears in previous research, relating to regression analysis specifically – '[...] *it is appropriate to discretize a continuous variable if a simple monotonic or quadratic relation does not seem appropriate.*' (Gelman & Hill, 2007, pp. 66-67).

I create these groups in a way which accounts for the non-uniform distribution of responses.⁶ The result of this is the groups are more comparably sized than they would have otherwise been. I will discuss the policy groups first, with these included in Table 1.

To clarify, I label these groups relative to their context. This means, for example, the 'Centre-Right' economic policy group contains respondents who, relative to all BES wave 6 respondents, hold moderately right-wing economic policy preferences. I examine Labour evaluations, and how these evaluations change between 2015 and 2017, from each of these policy groups. Having stated these groups, I am able to make more specific expectations under the policy-proximity account.

Prior to those more specific expectations, I will cover populism groups. These groups are also created from the average of respondent's populism answers, and again made in a way which accounts for the non-uniform distribution of the data. I have included these under Table 2.

populism from the earlier wave 7, but did not find marked changes in the pattern of my findings.

⁶Quantile function in R

Table 2: Respondents Grouped by Populism

Populism Groups				
Rad-Populist	Mod-Populist	Centrist	Mod-Non-Populist	Rad-Non-Populist
n = 686	n = 730	n = 841	n = 1226	n = 889

4.1. Control Variables

In my analysis, I control for the effects gender, education levels, and respondent age on stated Labour evaluations. Respondent age in particular has been identified as a defining feature of political preferences in the UK (Curtice, September 2017; Bell, 2019), as opposed to class, which has faded as a directly explanatory factor of electoral support in the UK (Evans & Tilley, 2012). In addition to these, variables relating to respondents' ethnicity and their beliefs about the European Union have also featured in these accounts (Holbolt, 2016; 2018; Kaufmann, 2017; Swales, 2016). I also include controls for both these factors in my analysis.

Furthermore, I control for respondent's party identification. This includes controlling for identification with the Labour Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats, SNP/PC, and UKIP.⁷ In controlling for party ID, my research follows previous examination of UK electoral support which also controlled for party identification (Kaufmann, 2017).

This provides a cumulative total of twelve control variables. Some of these responses are ordinal, for example age and education. Other responses are nominal, including beliefs over EU membership (Remain vs. Leave), ethnicity (white vs. non-white), gender (male vs. female), and party identification, which is split into identifiers vs. non-identifiers for one of the seven specific parties considered. I include the EU beliefs, ethnicity, gender, and party identification controls as dummy variables.

4.2. Expectations

My expectation under the populism-based account is relatively straightforward, and stated under Hypothesis 1 (H1).

H1: Evaluations of Labour will be higher from the 'Radical-Populists' group.

The 'Radical-Populists' group will have the highest evaluation levels for the Labour Party in the 2017 wave of data, and the largest positive change in Labour evaluations between 2015 and 2017. Observing this will demonstrate support for the radically left-wing post-Corbyn Labour Party as a function of populist attitudes amongst voters.

⁷I cumulate SNP and PC identifiers together, as they stand in separate regions of the UK - presenting candidates solely in Scotland and Wales, respectively.

Policy-proximity expectations are more complex, and come in three layers. First, expected evaluation *levels*; second, expected *absolute evaluation changes*; and third, expected *relative evaluation changes*. By expected evaluation levels, I mean the average Labour evaluations from each respondent group in 2015 and 2017. Absolute evaluation changes refers to whether average Labour evaluations from each group increased or decreased between 2015 and 2017. Finally, by relative evaluation changes I am referring to the magnitude of these average changes from each group.

I mentioned earlier that one of the difficult issues with this theory is being able to accurately place political actors on policy dimensions. Accurate placement of Labour pre-Corbyn and post-Corbyn is very important, as that will inform my expectations under this account. Yet it can be very difficult to accurately identify the positions of competing political actors. One helpful source is expert surveys, such as the British Election Study's expert surveys. The BES administers these as online surveys, fielded to political analysts who place Labour (and other parties) on policy dimensions. Previous research has deemed expert surveys to be more accurate gauges of political actor's positions on policy dimensions (Benoit & Laver, 2007), in comparison with manifesto analysis, making them well-suited to their purpose in my research.

To identify Labour's cultural policy position, I draw upon an 11-point scale,⁸ while the economic position of Labour is from another 11-point scale asking how pro-redistribution the party is.⁹ Finally, the migration position of Labour comes from two questions asking how far Labour considers immigration to be an economic benefit/threat,¹⁰ and how far immigration is a cultural benefit/threat.¹¹

I examine expert survey data from two periods: a Pre-Corbyn period,¹² and a Post-Corbyn period¹³. As these expert surveys draw upon the views of multiple analysts, I average the appraisals of Labour's positions on each dimension. In Table 3, I include Labour's pre-Corbyn and post-Corbyn average positions on these dimensions.¹⁴

Looking at Table 3, under Corbyn's leadership Labour shifts to become substantially more pro-redistribution, moderately more culturally-liberal, and marginally more migrant-inclusive compared to their pre-Corbyn positions. These positions, pre-Corbyn and post-Corbyn, and shifts will have ramifications for my expectations under the policy-proximity account. Looking at the confidence intervals, these suggest a decisive shift of Labour on economics, according to these analysts, as the spread of 95% of these

⁸Referred to as the 'Libertarian-Authoritarian scale' - 0 = libertarian, 10 = authoritarian.

⁹'Pro-Con Redistribution' - 0 = pro-redistribution, 10 = not pro-redistribution.

¹⁰'Immigration Good-Bad for Economy' - 1 = immigration is bad for economy, 7 = immigration is good for economy.

¹¹'Immigration Good-Bad for Cultural Life' - 1 = immigration undermines cultural life, 7 = immigration enriches cultural life.

¹²April/May 2015

¹³May 2017

¹⁴'Labour Change 2015-2017' = 'Labour Party 2017' - 'Labour Party 2015'

Table 3: BES Expert Survey: Labour Party Positions 2015 & 2017

	Labour Party 2015	2015 .95 CIs	Labour Party 2017	2017 .95 CIs	Labour Change 2015–2017
Econ	3.86	3.57–4.16	2.67	2.08–3.25	-1.19
Cultural	5.01	4.67–5.35	4.39	3.93–4.85	-0.62
Immig. Econ.	4.73	4.49–4.96	5.00	4.53–5.47	+0.27
Immig. Culture	5.29	5.06–5.51	5.31	4.93–5.68	+0.02

post-Corbyn positions are well to the left of their equivalents in 2015. By the same interpretation, Labour has also seems to have shifted on cultural policy, albeit less clearly. On both metrics of migration policy, Labour's positions and shifts are less clear, although the rightmost column still suggests a small migrant-inclusive shift of Labour on this dimension.¹⁵

In terms of evaluation levels, in 2015 I expect the 'Centre-Left' economic, 'Moderate-Liberal' cultural, and 'Moderate-Inclusive' migration policy groups to be in closest proximity with the Labour Party, as the party was then in a more converged position prior to Corbyn's leadership. Consequently, in the 2015 wave I expect these groups to have the highest Labour evaluation levels. In 2017, I expect Labour to have shifted into closest proximity with the 'Radical-Left' economic, 'Radical-Liberal' cultural, and 'Radical-Inclusive' migration policy groups. As a result of this new proximity, I expect these three groups to have highest Labour evaluation levels in the 2017 wave. However, I also acknowledge the smaller shifts by Labour on the cultural and migration dimensions, according to the expert surveys. These smaller shifts may leave this party in closer proximity with the 'Moderate-Liberal' and 'Moderate-Inclusive' groups. Thus, highest Labour evaluation levels from these two groups would also be conceivable under the policy-proximity account.

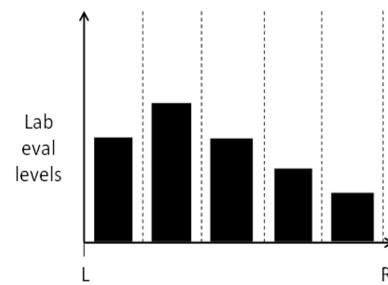
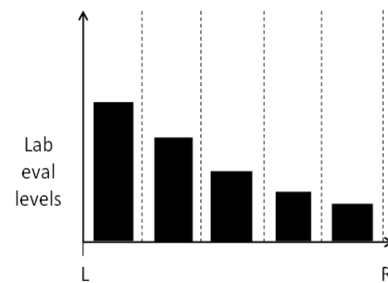
Figure 1 summarises expected Labour evaluation levels in the 2015 wave, and Figure 2 shows these in the 2017 wave.¹⁶

Moving to evaluation *changes*, these are initially summarised in Figure 3.¹⁷ Included in Figure 3 are the rough positions of the Labour Party both prior to and after Corbyn's rise to the party leadership, informed by the expert survey

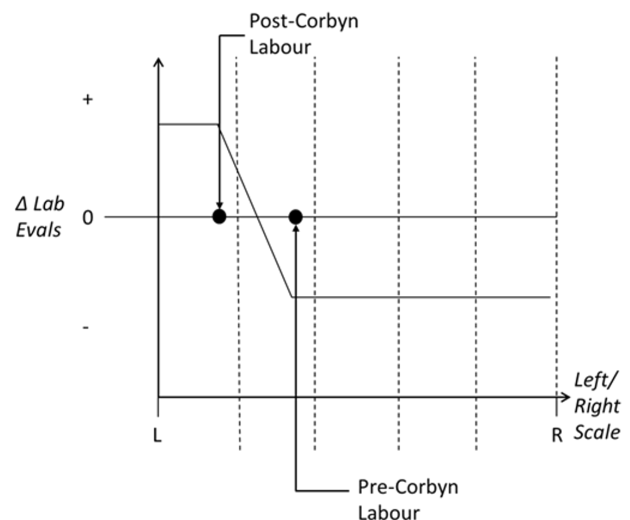
¹⁵The leftward shifts of Labour under Corbyn are also reflected in analysis from the 'Manifesto Project', which placed Labour's pre-Corbyn 2015 manifesto at -18.137 on their left-right ideological scale (furthest left = -100, furthest right = 100), with this shifting to -27.56 in 2017 once Corbyn was leader of the party (Volkens, et al., 2021).

¹⁶Figure 1 & Figure 2 x-axis does not represent any of the three policy dimensions in my analysis, and is instead purely generic and demonstrative of expectations for Labour evaluation levels under the policy-proximity account.

¹⁷As before, the x-axis in this diagram does not pertain to a particular policy dimension. The y-axis represents changes in Labour evaluations.

Figure 1: Pre-Corbyn Labour Evaluation Levels**Figure 2: Post-Corbyn Labour Evaluation Levels**

findings. Pre-Corbyn, Labour is in a centre-left position. Post-Corbyn, Labour has shifted further to the left of this policy dimension.

Figure 3: Expected Changes in Labour Evaluations

The line plotted along the diagram shows how I expect Labour evaluations to change from voters at different points along the x-axis. Voters in the leftmost segment of the x-axis witness Labour move towards their position (their 'ideal point') on this dimension. Consequently, the utility these voters associate with Labour rises as this party's policies shift towards their own 'ideal point'. Thus, post-Corbyn

Labour's policies are associated with greater utility by these leftmost voters, compared to the policies of pre-Corbyn Labour. This leads to the expectation that these voters will have increased Labour evaluations in the 2017 post-Corbyn wave, compared to the 2015 pre-Corbyn wave.

Voters to the right of pre-Corbyn Labour's position witness the Labour Party shifting away from their positions. As a result, utility associated with Labour's policies by these voters declines as the party shifts ideologically, leading to the expectation that Labour evaluations fall between 2015 and 2017 from voters located on the right of this dimension.

For the voters whose 'ideal points' are located between pre-Corbyn and post-Corbyn Labour's respective positions, expectations are less certain. Some of those voters' 'ideal points' are closer to Labour's post-Corbyn position, while others are in less proximity with Labour following the party's leftward shift. Additionally, Labour shifts through the positions of these voters, which theoretically causes Labour evaluations to first rise before falling if Labour continues shifting further away from this voter's 'ideal point' compared to the actor's initial position. As a result, expectations for the voters located between Labour's pre-Corbyn and post-Corbyn positions are less certain.

That explains the underlying logic of evaluation changes. The task now is to apply this to the policy groups that I listed in Table 1. To put these into a series of stated hypothesis, expectations are as follows:

H2 (evaluation levels): Highest Labour evaluation levels in 2015 will come from the 'Centre-Left'/'Moderate-Liberal'/'Moderate-Inclusive' groups, and in 2017 from the 'Radical-Left'/'Radical-Liberal'/'Radical-Inclusive' groups.¹⁸

H3 (absolute changes): Between 2015 and 2017, Labour evaluations will increase from the 'Radical-Left'/'Radical-Liberal'/'Radical-Inclusive' groups. Evaluations will decrease from the 'Centrist' groups on all dimensions, and from the 'Centre-Right'/'Moderate-Conservative'/'Moderate-Exclusive' groups, and from the 'Radical-Right'/'Radical-Conservative'/'Radical-Exclusive' groups.

H4 (relative changes): Between 2015 and 2017, the largest increase in Labour evaluations will be from the 'Radical-Left'/'Radical-Liberal'/'Radical-Inclusive' policy groups. The largest evaluation decreases will be from the 'Radical-Right'/'Radical-Conservative'/'Radical-Exclusive' groups.

5. Analysis

What I am primarily looking at here is how Labour evaluations changed as this party shifted to the left between 2015 and 2017. As such, I lead my results section with

multiple linear regression of policy and populism variables with Labour evaluation changes. I address evaluation level results later in this section.

5.1. Evaluation Changes

This analysis is based on a panel of respondents who have answered Labour Party evaluation questions in both the 2015 (pre-Corbyn) and 2017 (post-Corbyn) waves of the BES survey data. This provides my ultimate test of evaluation changes, as I can see how views of Labour changed from the same respondents over the 2015-2017 period which includes this party's leftward ideological shift.

The multiple regression analysis shows the effects of policy preferences on each of the three dimensions, and populist attitudes, on Labour Party evaluations. To give an idea of what these coefficients represent, relative to the dependent variable in this regression, Labour evaluation changes are on a +10 to -10 scale. Given the size of this regression, I have split this over separate two pages. The first page includes coefficients from economic policy and cultural policy groups, the second includes migration policy and populism groups.¹⁹

¹⁸As I said previously, smaller Labour shifts on cultural and migration policy mean it is conceivable the 'Moderate-Liberal' and 'Moderate-Inclusive' groups have highest Labour evaluations in 2017 as well.

¹⁹Also in this analysis are control variables, from which I clarify the respective roles of these variables of interest. I have included the remaining part of the regression, showing the effect of these control variables, under Appendix 3.

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression of Labour Evaluation Changes (Part 1/2)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
RadLeft	0.706*** (0.132)	0.583*** (0.131)							0.586*** (0.134)	0.537*** (0.133)
CenLeft	0.359*** (0.148)	0.314** (0.145)							0.305** (0.148)	0.298** (0.145)
Centrists	(Baseline)	(Baseline)							(Baseline)	(Baseline)
CenRight	0.121 (0.142)	0.096 (0.141)							0.172 (0.140)	0.084 (0.140)
RadRight	-0.235* (0.126)	-0.188 (0.137)							-0.100 (0.127)	-0.189 (0.138)
RadLib			0.853*** (0.127)	0.634*** (0.136)					0.766*** (0.145)	0.646*** (0.146)
ModLib			0.295** (0.133)	0.244* (0.132)					0.283** (0.134)	0.264** (0.132)
Centrists			(Baseline)	(Baseline)					(Baseline)	(Baseline)
ModCon			-0.059 (0.140)	-0.031 (0.137)					-0.027 (0.141)	-0.006 (0.138)
RadCon			-0.096 (0.146)	-0.089 (0.146)					-0.073 (0.153)	-0.083 (0.151)
Controls			No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Constant	0.256*** (0.090)	0.680** (0.268)	0.171* (0.089)	0.652** (0.272)	0.487*** (0.090)	0.891*** (0.270)	0.555*** (0.102)	1.014*** (0.276)	0.427*** (0.161)	0.787*** (0.294)
N	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558
R2	0.022	0.089	0.027	0.088	0.022	0.086	0.003	0.083	0.061	0.113
AdjR2	0.020	0.083	0.025	0.082	0.020	0.081	0.001	0.077	0.055	0.103
Resid	2.241	2.168	2.236	2.169	2.241	2.171	2.263	2.175	2.201	2.144
Std.Err	(df = 2553)	(df = 2541)	(df = 2553)	(df = 2541)	(df = 2553)	(df = 2541)	(df = 2553)	(df = 2541)	(df = 2541)	(df = 2529)
F Stat	14.303*** (df = 4; 2553)	15.505*** (df = 16; 2541)	17.440*** (df = 4; 2553)	15.369*** (df = 16; 2541)	14.123*** (df = 4; 2553)	15.013*** (df = 16; 2541)	1.716 (df = 4; 2553)	14.363*** (df = 16; 2541)	10.271*** (df = 16; 2541)	11.481*** (df = 28; 2529)

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression of Labour Evaluation Changes (Part 2/2)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
RadInc					0.492*** (0.137)	0.290** (0.140)			0.238 (0.146)	0.179 (0.144)
ModInc					0.032 (0.140)	-0.006 (0.138)			-0.032 (0.140)	-0.022 (0.138)
Centrist ModExc					-0.403*** (0.149)	-0.359** (0.148)			-0.368** (0.149)	-0.346** (0.148)
RadExc					-0.431*** (0.125)	-0.411*** (0.133)			-0.421*** (0.134)	-0.397*** (0.136)
Rad Pop							-0.196 (0.150)	-0.139 (0.148)	-0.144 (0.155)	-0.183 (0.152)
Mod Pop							-0.220 (0.152)	-0.210 (0.147)	-0.138 (0.149)	-0.166 (0.146)
Centrist Mod NonPop							-0.032 (0.135)	-0.074 (0.131)	-0.192 (0.133)	-0.154 (0.130)
Rad NonPop							-0.294** (0.138)	-0.468*** (0.141)	-0.823*** (0.146)	-0.704*** (0.145)
Controls							No	Yes	No	Yes
Constant	0.256*** (0.090)	0.680** (0.268)	0.171* (0.089)	0.652** (0.272)	0.487*** (0.090)	0.891*** (0.270)	0.555*** (0.102)	1.014*** (0.276)	0.427*** (0.161)	0.787*** (0.294)
N	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558
R2	0.022	0.089	0.027	0.088	0.022	0.086	0.003	0.083	0.061	0.113
Adj R2	0.020	0.083	0.025	0.082	0.020	0.081	0.001	0.077	0.055	0.103
Resid	2.241	2.168	2.236	2.169	2.241	2.171	2.263	2.175	2.201	2.144
Std.Err	(df = 2553) 14.303***	(df = 2541) 15.505***	(df = 2553) 17.440***	(df = 2541) 15.369***	(df = 2553) 14.123***	(df = 2541) 15.013***	(df = 2553) 1.716	(df = 2541) 14.363***	(df = 2541) 10.271***	(df = 2529) 11.481***
F Stat	4; 2553	16; 2541	4; 2553	16; 2541	4; 2553	16; 2541	4; 2553	16; 2541	16; 2541	28; 2529

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note:

Columns 1-8 show simpler models, with the effects of groups on one dimension or populism groups by themselves. In brief, these columns show that relative to the baseline group ('Centrists') Labour evaluations increased from respondents across these policy dimensions. This represents a general increase in Labour evaluations between 2015 and 2017. However, more importantly, it challenges expectations under the policy-proximity account, as I see Labour evaluations increased even from policy groups that Labour shifted away from over that period. Additionally, looking at the simple populism models under columns 7 and 8, I do not find the expected significant increase in Labour evaluations from the 'Radical-Populists' group.

However, it is to columns 9 and 10 that I look for the more comprehensive test of these two accounts, as in these columns all policy and populism groups are included together. Thus, I control for the respective impacts of all of these variables.

First, looking at the populism groups in column 10 - which includes the effects of control variables - I do not find that Labour evaluations increased from the 'Radical-Populist' group, as had been expected. Consequently, results do not support **H1**, and suggest populist sentiments among voters do not explain support for this radical left actor.

As for absolute evaluation changes, I do find that Labour evaluations significantly increased from two of the expected groups - the 'Radical-Left' and 'Radical-Liberal' groups. This follows **H3**, although it is also challenged by the lack of significantly increased Labour evaluations from the 'Radical-Inclusive' group, and by the increased evaluations from the groups at the other ends of these dimensions. The general increase in Labour evaluations, irrespective of policy-proximity, is not explained by this account, as these spatially-distant groups should be punishing Labour for offering policies which these voters associate with less utility.

However, in terms of relative evaluation changes, there is some support for the policy-proximity account. Although evaluations increase across the board, looking at the magnitude of these increases shows that these are larger from the proximal groups - the 'Radical-Left'/'Radical-Liberal'/'Radical-Inclusive' groups - than from other groups on these dimensions. If any group would have the largest increases in evaluations, under the policy-proximity account it would be the groups in closest proximity with this actor. Therefore, while not entirely following expectations of this account, I do see a limited proximity effect here, which conforms with **H4**.

I present these results graphically, under Figure 4, which summarises these trends in Labour Party evaluation changes between 2015 and 2017. The upper quadrant shows economic policy groups, followed by cultural policy groups below, then migration policy groups, and in the lowest quadrant are populism groups.

: Figure 4: Graphical Summary of Labour Evaluation Change Trends in Table 4

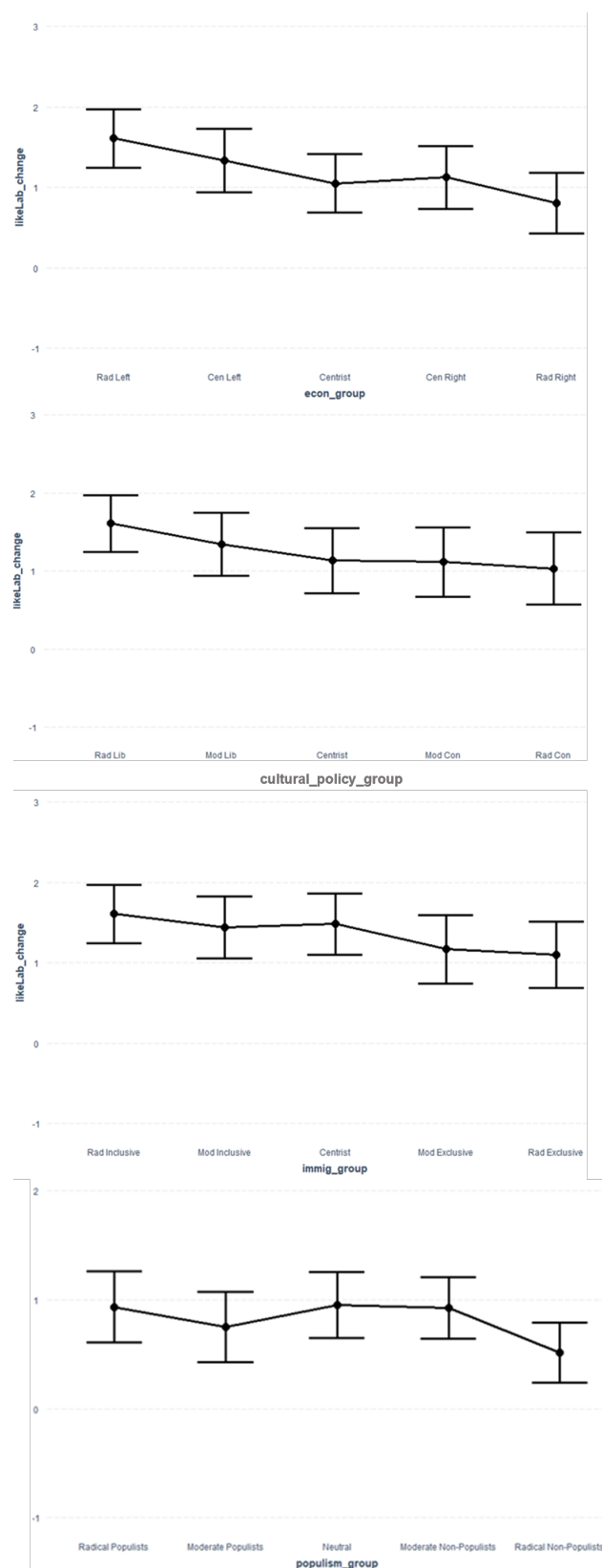


Table 5: Mean Labour Evaluation Levels from Policy and Populism Groups

	2015 mean evals	2017 mean evals	2015 evals – 2017 evals
Economic			
<i>Rad-Left</i>	5.676	6.577	+0.901
<i>Centre-Left</i>	5.167	5.924	+0.757
<i>Centrist</i>	4.879	5.332	+0.453
<i>Centre-Right</i>	3.290	3.768	+0.478
<i>Rad-Right</i>	2.161	2.224	+0.063
Cultural			
<i>Rad-Lib</i>	5.356	6.374	+1.018
<i>Mod-Lib</i>	4.510	5.084	+0.574
<i>Centrist</i>	3.758	4.062	+0.304
<i>Mod-Cons</i>	3.427	3.689	+0.262
<i>Rad-Cons</i>	3.208	3.345	+0.137
Migration			
<i>Rad-Inc</i>	5.579	6.664	+1.085
<i>Mod-Inc</i>	5.019	5.653	+0.634
<i>Centrist</i>	4.142	4.637	+0.495
<i>Mod-Exc</i>	3.559	3.801	+0.242
<i>Rad-Exc</i>	3.089	3.181	+0.092
Populism			
<i>Rad-Pop</i>	3.853	4.036	+0.183
<i>Mod-Pop</i>	4.133	4.419	+0.286
<i>Centrist</i>	4.243	4.473	+0.230
<i>Mod-Non-Pop</i>	4.307	4.637	+0.330
<i>Rad-Non-Pop</i>	4.656	5.274	+0.618

5.2. Evaluation Levels

Although I primarily examine *changes* in Labour evaluations over the 2015-2017 period, a by-product of doing this are evaluation levels at both ends of this period. I can also test both policy-proximity and populism-based accounts by looking at these pre/post-Corbyn evaluation levels. I calculate the mean evaluations for Labour from each policy and populism group, and include these in Table 5.²⁰

Table 5 shows the mean evaluations from each respondent group in 2015 and 2017. In the fourth column, I have also included an informal measure of evaluation changes, drawn from subtracting 2015 means from the 2017 means. This is a simple metric to add to Table 5; however, my primary analysis of Labour evaluation changes is in Table 4, given that regression shows evaluation changes from a single sample of respondents over the 2015-2017 period. Whereas the respondents in Table 5 have not necessarily answered BES questions in both the pre-Corbyn and post-Corbyn waves.

My first impression of Table 5's mean evaluation levels is that, despite Corbyn-led Labour's ideological shift away from many of these respondents, all groups have developed higher impressions of Labour over the 2015-2017 period. This follows what I saw in Table 5, where I found a general increase in Labour Party evaluations between 2015 and

2017. Strictly in terms of evaluation levels, however, results give a mixed picture in relation to the policy-proximity account.

Conforming with that account, I do see higher Labour evaluation levels in 2017 from the proximal groups - the 'Radical-Left'/'Radical-Liberal'/'Radical-Inclusive' policy groups. Given Labour's proximity with these groups post-Corbyn, this follows expectations. Additionally, looking at column four, the largest evaluation increases were from these proximal groups, which clearly suggests some proximity effect on support here.

However, challenging this account I see these same groups had highest evaluations for Labour in 2015 too, despite my assumption of Labour being in proximity with the 'Centre-Left'/'Moderate-Liberal'/'Moderate-Inclusive' groups prior to Corbyn assuming the party's leadership.

Overall, this leaves observation of Labour evaluation levels which only partially follow the policy-proximity account. Consequently, I have found results here which only conform with **H2** to a limited extent.

Finally, looking at the populism groups, I again see in column four that Labour evaluations increased across the board. The largest of these increases is from the least populist group, rather than the most populist. Furthermore, the 'Radical-Populists' group has the lowest overall Labour evaluation levels in 2017 - something which also challenges my expectations in **H1**. Overall, this means I do not find support for the populism-based account in Table 5.

5.3. Labour Leader Evaluations

Supplementing my analysis, it is possible that I may observe radical left support not as evaluation for the Labour Party, but in appraisals of Jeremy Corbyn. It is possible voters favoured Corbyn as a political outsider, conforming with previous research that has identified a 'maverick' effect (Ditto & Mastrorade, 2009). It may also be that voters saw Corbyn as more honest or more trustworthy, which would also have driven up support for Labour from voters across the policy dimensions. Such perceptions of honesty, trust, or independent 'maverick' behaviour are valence issues, which were previously raised by Stokes in his critique of the Downsian model. For example, Stokes raised the issue of corruption as a valence issue, where parties would not be found *favouring* more corruption while others oppose it (Stokes, 1963, p. 372). Instead, voters would have greater trust in one party tackling corruption over others. By having greater trust in Corbyn, voters would plausibly evaluate him more highly, which would also drive up Labour evaluations from voters across the policy dimensions - as I saw from respondent groups earlier.

This brings me to an extra test of both accounts, where I substitute party appraisals for leader appraisals as the dependent variable. To produce this 'LikeLeader' dependent variable, I subtract evaluations for Ed Miliband in 2015 from evaluations of Jeremy Corbyn in 2017.²¹ Looking at changes

²⁰The scale of responses is 0-10, representing low Labour evaluation levels to high levels.

²¹'How much do you like or dislike each of the following party leaders?' - Miliband/Corbyn, 0-10 scale. 0 = 'Strongly Dislike', 10 = 'Strongly Like'

in Labour leader evaluations, instead of party evaluations, acts as a robustness test of my previous conclusions. The previous general increase in Labour evaluations, regardless of policy-proximity, is potentially driven at least partly by impressions of Labour's new leadership, and possible valence effects attached to Corbyn. I want to see if the focus on Corbyn changes my previous conclusions.

Under Appendix 4, I test how policy-proximity and populism are associated with changes in appraisals of Labour Party leaders between 2015 and 2017. I broadly find the same pattern of evaluations as in my analysis of party evaluations - generally increasing evaluations regardless of policy-proximity, larger increases in support from proximal policy groups, and a lack of support for the populism-based account.

Labour leader evaluation changes between 2015 and 2017 broadly follow the pattern of Labour Party evaluation changes. This suggests respondents may have incorporated their increased impressions of Labour's leadership into their evaluations of the Labour Party. This potentially accounts for the unexpected general increases in Labour Party evaluations that I observed in my analysis. Identification of Labour support based on leadership appraisals, which are plausibly susceptible to perceptions of honesty/trustworthiness, are outside of the policy-proximity account. With support for a role of these valence effects, it is perhaps a fruitful angle for future research to pursue, as another potential explanatory factor of radical left support alongside the limited role of policy-proximity I have found.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Firstly, to summarise my findings, these do not support the populism-based account as I do not find higher support for the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn from populist respondents. I did not see this either in terms of evaluation levels or changes. I did not find support for this account despite Labour under Corbyn offering more anti-elite policies, especially targeting the wealthy and corporations, which conceivably could have attracted support from populists. Not finding this support raises some questions about this theory when applied to a radical left actor. Specifically, it may be that populist voters are not perceptive to the populism emanating from radical left actors, seeing this as a right-wing phenomenon. Perhaps this is also a consequence of the governing legacy of the Labour Party, which may then be viewed more sceptically by populist voters who are more prone to opt for political outsiders without that legacy. Finally, perhaps the anti-elite messages emanating from Labour under Corbyn are not perceived as populist enough to attract the expected support. These are a few potential explanations for me not finding support for the populism-based account here.

Moving to the policy-proximity account, results only partially backed up this explanation of radical left support. Challenging this account, I found a general increase in Labour evaluations, including from spatially-distant policy

groups whose evaluations were expected to decrease over the 2015-2017 period. However, in support of this account I found the largest evaluation increases from the spatially-proximal policy groups on each dimension. This all leaves only partial explanation of radical left Labour support based on policy-proximity.

The policy-proximity account does not explain why spatially-distant voters developed higher evaluations of the leftward shifting Labour Party between 2015 and 2017. This raises the question of what could explain this pattern of evaluations. One possibility is that there are valence-type effects here, where impressions of Corbyn as more honest or more of a maverick drew greater support for Labour from voters, regardless of their spatial location. This suggests an insufficiency of the policy-proximity account, at least in this context, as these valence effects provide a whole different set of possible explanations of support completely aside from the role of policy-proximity.

Another possibility is that the radical leftism of Labour under Corbyn has been overestimated. In support of the case of Labour's radical leftism, I cited the BES expert survey analysis, primarily to inform policy-proximity expectations. However, previous research has found evidence of bias against Corbyn and Corbynism amongst political scientists (Maignashca & Dean, 2020), which may have exaggerated the radical left shifts of Labour under Corbyn's leadership. This may have impacted my expectations with Labour potentially not, in the minds of respondents, being as radical as the expert surveys suggested. If this is the case, it is feasible that spatially-distant voters did not feel as fundamentally at odds with post-Corbyn Labour policies, and therefore their ratings of this party did not decline.

Future research should take into consideration the persuasion effects issue which I tried to mitigate here. I explained these effects earlier, and how they may disrupt the causal pathway of either the policy-proximity or populism-based accounts, and the importance of accounting for these to draw a more reliable set of conclusions. Future research should seek to do the same, where possible, and draw on panel data to do so, as suggested when this issue was raised originally (Brody & Page, 1972, p. 458). Furthermore, in my 'likeLeader' supplementary results I found possible evidence of valence-based effects, which are plausibly part of leader appraisals, explaining support for the radical left. Future research could take place to specifically investigate the possible effects of valence issues. Finally, the upward trend in Labour's support under Corbyn between 2015 and 2017 confounded the assumptions around the median voter. However, the median voter theorem may have had a role later on, between 2017 and 2019, when Labour under Corbyn substantially lost support. Therefore, I believe another avenue for future research is investigating why Labour's support declined between 2017 and 2019, having reached surprising heights during the 2015-2017 period.

Finally, a note about what I have done here, because there are a number of important contributions to existing research. The persuasion effects issue is one, which mitigates

the potential for reverse causality with the policy-proximity account, and leaves a more reliable outcome with regard to that theory. Besides this, there is the fact I have examined support not for an established, long-running radical left party (e.g. *Die Linke*), but rather a mainstream political party which has shifted to the radical left. Thus, I have examined support for a less conventional instance of the radical left. Such actors are understudied in existing studies, which have focused on these more well-known and long-established radical left actors. Finally, I have examined the effects of two theories simultaneously - something which enabled me to make conclusions after taking both theories into account. That means I have made conclusions with control on the respective effects of each account. That provides another aspect where I have been able to make clarified conclusions about the roles of both policy-proximity and populism on support.

7. Conflict of Interest

I can confirm there were no conflicts of interest while writing this paper.

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9. Appendix 1: British Election Study - Used Survey Questions)

Dependent Variable:

'How much do you like or dislike each of the following parties?' – Labour

Alternative Dependent Variable:

LikeLeader – 'How much do you like or dislike each of the following party leaders?'

Miliband, Corbyn

0–10 scale. 0 = 'Strongly Dislike', 10 = 'Strongly Like'

Economic Policy Variables:

Values1 – 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?'

lr1: 'Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off'

lr2: 'Big business takes advantage of ordinary people'

lr3: 'Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth'

lr4: 'There is one law for the rich and one for the poor'

lr5: 'Management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance'

Scale:

'Strongly disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neither agree nor disagree', 'Agree', 'Strongly agree'

Cultural policy Variables:

Values2 – 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?'

al1: 'Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values'

al2: 'For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence'

al3: 'Schools should teach children to obey authority'

al4: 'Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards'

al5: 'People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences'

Scale:

'Strongly disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neither agree nor disagree', 'Agree', 'Strongly agree'

Migration Policy Variables:

ImmigEcon – 'Do you think immigration is good or bad for Britain's economy?'

7 (Good for economy) – 1 (Bad for economy)

ImmigCultural – 'And do you think that immigration undermines or enriches Britain's cultural life?'

7 (Enriches cultural life) – 1 (Undermines cultural life)

Populism Variables:

populism1: 'The politicians in the UK Parliament need to follow the will of the people'

populism2: 'The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions'

populism4: 'I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician'

populism5: 'Elected officials talk too much and take too little action'

populism6: 'What people call "compromise" in politics is really just selling out on one's principles'

Scale:

'Strongly disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neither agree nor disagree', 'Agree', 'Strongly agree'

Control Variables:

ageGroup – 'What is your age?'

Under 18, 18–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–55, 56–65, 66+

Education – 'What is the highest educational or work-related qualification you have?'

No formal qualifications, Youth training certificate/skillseekers, Recognised trade apprenticeship completed, Clerical and commercial, City and Guild certificate, City and Guild certificate – advanced, ONC, CSE grades 2–5, CSE grade 1, GCE O level, GCSE, School Certificate, Scottish Ordinary/ Lower Certificate, GCE A level or Higher Certificate, Scottish Higher Certificate, Nursing qualification, Teaching qualification (not degree), University diploma, University or CNAA first degree (eg BA, B.Sc, B.Ed), University or CNAA higher degree (eg M.Sc, Ph.D), Other technical, professional or higher qualification.

euRefVote –

'If you do vote in the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, how do you think you will vote?'

Remain in the EU,

Leave the EU

euRefVotePost –

'Which way did you vote?'

Remain in the EU,

Leave the EU

Gender – 'Are you male or female?'

Male,

Female

Profile_Ethnicity – 'To which of these groups do you consider you belong?'

White British, Any other white background, White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, Any other mixed background, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Any other Asian background, Black Caribbean, Black African, Any other black background,

Chinese, Other ethnic group

(Recoded as dummy variable: 0 = White-British, 1 = Non-White British)

PartyID – ‘Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or what?’

Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, SNP, Plaid Cymru, UKIP, Green Party, BNP, Other

(Recoded as series of dummy variables, 1 representing identifiers with each of the above. SNP and Plaid Cymru cumulated together. ‘BNP’ and ‘Other’ cumulated together also).

11. Appendix 3: Multiple linear regression of Labour evaluation changes from all policy groups and populism groups (Control Variables) - p. 19

12. Appendix 4: Multiple Linear Regression of Labour Leader Evaluation Changes from all Policy and Populism Groups - pp. 20-21

10. Appendix 2: Summary of used BES Panel Waves

Appendix 2: Summary of used BES Panel Survey Waves

BES wave	Dimensions:			Populism Data	Evals
	Econ	Cultural	Immig		
Wave 4 Pre-Corbyn March/ April 2015			✓		
Wave 6 Pre-Corbyn May 2015	✓	✓			✓ (Pre-Corbyn Labour evals)
Wave 10 Post-Corbyn Nov/ Dec 2016				✓	
Wave 13 Post-Corbyn June 2017					✓ (Post-Corbyn Labour evals)

Appendix 3: Multiple Linear Regression of Labour Evaluation Changes (Control Variables)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
<i>Education</i>		0.012 (0.009)		-0.002 (0.009)		0.003 (0.009)		0.012 (0.009)		0.002 (0.009)
<i>EU_Vote</i>		-0.320*** (0.099)		-0.141 (0.105)		-0.079 (0.111)		-0.401*** (0.106)		-0.100 (0.115)
<i>Gender</i>		0.189** (0.088)		0.171* (0.088)		0.155* (0.088)		0.141 (0.089)		0.175** (0.088)
<i>AgeGroup</i>		-0.046 (0.035)		-0.027 (0.035)		-0.030 (0.035)		-0.038 (0.035)		-0.022 (0.035)
<i>Ethnicity</i>		0.112 (0.170)		0.107 (0.170)		0.081 (0.171)		0.134 (0.171)		0.007 (0.169)
<i>Cons_ID</i>		-0.337** (0.149)		-0.474*** (0.141)		-0.541*** (0.141)		-0.553*** (0.141)		-0.236 (0.149)
<i>Lab_ID</i>		-0.774*** (0.142)		-0.725*** (0.140)		-0.722*** (0.140)		-0.652*** (0.140)		-0.821*** (0.141)
<i>LD_ID</i>		-0.133 (0.197)		-0.165 (0.197)		-0.189 (0.197)		-0.097 (0.198)		-0.153 (0.196)
<i>SNP.PC_ID</i>		0.971*** (0.208)		1.077*** (0.206)		1.066*** (0.206)		1.113*** (0.206)		0.863*** (0.206)
<i>UKIP_ID</i>		-0.146 (0.207)		-0.092 (0.208)		-0.061 (0.208)		-0.126 (0.208)		-0.013 (0.207)
<i>Greens_ID</i>		1.318*** (0.298)		1.318*** (0.299)		1.384*** (0.298)		1.533*** (0.297)		1.072*** (0.299)
<i>Other_ID</i>		1.175*** (0.359)		1.264*** (0.358)		1.305*** (0.359)		1.294*** (0.360)		1.074*** (0.357)
Constant	0.256*** (0.090)	0.680** (0.268)	0.171* (0.089)	0.652** (0.272)	0.487*** (0.090)	0.891*** (0.270)	0.555*** (0.102)	1.014*** (0.276)	0.427*** (0.161)	0.787*** (0.294)
N	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558	2,558
R2	0.022	0.089	0.027	0.088	0.022	0.086	0.003	0.083	0.061	0.113
AdjR2	0.020	0.083	0.025	0.082	0.020	0.081	0.001	0.077	0.055	0.103
Resid	2.241	2.168	2.236	2.169	2.241	2.171	2.263	2.175	2.201	2.144
Std.Err	(df = 2553) 14.303*** (df =	(df = 2541) 15.505*** (df =	(df = 2553) 17.440*** (df =	(df = 2541) 15.369*** (df =	(df = 2553) 14.123*** (df =	(df = 2541) 15.013*** (df =	(df = 2553) 1.716 (df =	(df = 2541) 14.363*** (df =	(df = 2541) 10.271*** (df =	(df = 2529) 11.481*** (df =
FStat	4; 2553)	16; 2541)	4; 2553)	16; 2541)	4; 2553)	16; 2541)	4; 2553)	16; 2541)	16; 2541)	28; 2529)

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Appendix 4: Multiple Linear Regression of Labour Leader Evaluation Changes from all Policy and Populism Groups (Part 1/2)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
RadLeft	0.758*** (0.121)				0.613*** (0.122)	0.653*** (0.119)				0.579*** (0.121)
CenLeft	0.593*** (0.138)				0.500*** (0.136)	0.572*** (0.133)				0.526*** (0.133)
Centrist CenRight	(baseline) -0.247* (0.131)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.119 (0.130)	(baseline) -0.165 (0.129)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.129 (0.129)
RadRight	-0.690*** (0.118)				-0.429*** (0.119)	-0.496*** (0.127)				-0.399*** (0.127)
RadLib		1.073*** (0.118)			0.834*** (0.136)		0.567*** (0.125)			0.605*** (0.135)
ModLib		0.397*** (0.126)			0.362*** (0.126)		0.245** (0.123)			0.305** (0.123)
Centrist ModCon	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.124 (0.130)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.018 (0.128)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.071 (0.127)
RadCon		-0.155 (0.136)			-0.297** (0.139)		-0.017 (0.133)			-0.181 (0.136)
RadIncl			0.881*** (0.129)		0.526*** (0.137)			0.480*** (0.130)		0.377*** (0.134)
ModIncl			0.263** (0.133)		0.149 (0.133)			0.117 (0.130)		0.106 (0.129)
Centrist ModExcl	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.387*** (0.138)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.273** (0.136)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.306** (0.135)
RadExcl			-0.404*** (0.139)		-0.517*** (0.123)			-0.308** (0.123)		-0.370*** (0.125)
RadPop			(0.117)		0.028 (0.145)				0.049 (0.139)	0.002 (0.141)
ModPop					0.079 (0.137)				0.062 (0.134)	0.062 (0.133)
Centrist ModNonPop	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.437*** (0.124)	(baseline)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.372*** (0.120)	(baseline)	(baseline) -0.444*** (0.120)
RadNonPop					-1.040*** (0.136)				-0.739*** (0.130)	-0.991*** (0.134)
Constant	0.856*** (0.082)	0.600*** (0.083)	0.876*** (0.086)	1.037*** (0.095)	1.014*** (0.150)	1.613*** (0.246)	1.601*** (0.250)	1.740*** (0.249)	2.016*** (0.254)	1.701*** (0.273)
Obs	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164
R2	0.032	0.025	0.026	0.002	0.070	0.113	0.103	0.105	0.107	0.133
Adj. R2	0.031	0.024	0.025	0.001	0.067	0.111	0.101	0.102	0.105	0.128
Resid. Std. Error	2.968 (df = 5159)	2.978 (df = 5159)	2.977 (df = 5159)	3.014 (df = 5159)	2.912 (df = 5147)	2.844 (df = 5147)	2.859 (df = 5147)	2.857 (df = 5147)	2.853 (df = 5147)	2.816 (df = 5135)
FStat	42.321*** (df = 4; 5159)	33.121*** (df = 4; 5159)	34.618*** (df = 4; 5159)	2.243* (df = 4; 5159)	24.232*** (df = 16; 5147)	41.089*** (df = 16; 5147)	37.115*** (df = 16; 5147)	37.665*** (df = 16; 5147)	38.713*** (df = 16; 5147)	28.094*** (df = 28; 5135)

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Appendix 4: Multiple Linear Regression of Labour Leader Evaluation Changes from all Policy and Populism Groups (Part 2/2)

	Evaluation Change by Group									
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Education						0.016** (0.008)	0.0003 (0.008)	0.003 (0.008)	0.021** (0.008)	0.011 (0.008)
EU_Vote (1=Leave)						-0.495*** (0.092)	-0.333*** (0.098)	-0.236** (0.103)	-0.710*** (0.098)	-0.350*** (0.105)
Gender						0.002 (0.081)	-0.027 (0.082)	-0.032 (0.081)	-0.044 (0.082)	-0.019 (0.081)
(1=Female)						-0.096*** (0.032)	-0.085*** (0.032)	-0.084*** (0.032)	-0.099*** (0.032)	-0.077** (0.032)
ageGroup						0.128 (0.157)	0.173 (0.158)	0.105 (0.158)	0.150 (0.157)	0.040 (0.156)
Ethnicity						-0.467*** (0.136)	-0.757*** (0.130)	-0.795*** (0.129)	-0.802*** (0.129)	-0.314** (0.137)
(1=NonWhite)						-0.960*** (0.130)	-0.793*** (0.129)	-0.806*** (0.129)	-0.744*** (0.128)	-0.967*** (0.129)
Cons_ID						0.001 (0.184)	-0.053 (0.185)	-0.062 (0.184)	0.041 (0.184)	0.010 (0.182)
Lab_ID						1.753*** (0.190)	1.962*** (0.189)	1.941*** (0.189)	1.935*** (0.188)	1.660*** (0.188)
LD_ID						-0.164 (0.194)	-0.114 (0.196)	-0.067 (0.197)	-0.235 (0.196)	-0.069 (0.195)
SNP.PC_ID						1.813*** (0.257)	1.904*** (0.259)	1.908*** (0.258)	2.063*** (0.256)	1.581*** (0.257)
UKIP_ID						1.078*** (0.350)	1.226*** (0.352)	1.234*** (0.351)	1.242*** (0.351)	0.920*** (0.348)
Greens_ID						1.613*** (0.246)	1.601*** (0.250)	1.740*** (0.249)	2.016*** (0.254)	1.701*** (0.273)
Other_ID						1.014*** (0.150)	1.601*** (0.250)	1.740*** (0.249)	2.016*** (0.254)	1.701*** (0.273)
Constant	0.856*** (0.082)	0.600*** (0.083)	0.876*** (0.086)	1.037*** (0.095)	1.014*** (0.150)	1.613*** (0.246)	1.601*** (0.250)	1.740*** (0.249)	2.016*** (0.254)	1.701*** (0.273)
Obs	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164	5,164
R2	0.032	0.025	0.026	0.002	0.070	0.113	0.103	0.105	0.107	0.133
Adj.R2	0.031	0.024	0.025	0.001	0.067	0.111	0.101	0.102	0.105	0.128
Resid.Std.E	2.968 (df = 5159)	2.978 (df = 5159)	2.977 (df = 5159)	3.014 (df = 5159)	2.912 (df = 5147)	2.844 (df = 5147)	2.859 (df = 5147)	2.857 (df = 5147)	2.853 (df = 5147)	2.816 (df = 5135)
FStat	42.321*** (df=4; 5159)	33.121*** (df=4; 5159)	34.618*** (df=4; 5159)	2.243* (df=4; 5159)	24.232*** (df=16; 5147)	41.089*** (df=16; 5147)	37.115*** (df=16; 5147)	37.665*** (df=16; 5147)	38.713*** (df =16; 5147)	28.094*** (df=28;5135)

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Note:

13.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

: <Credit authorship details>.