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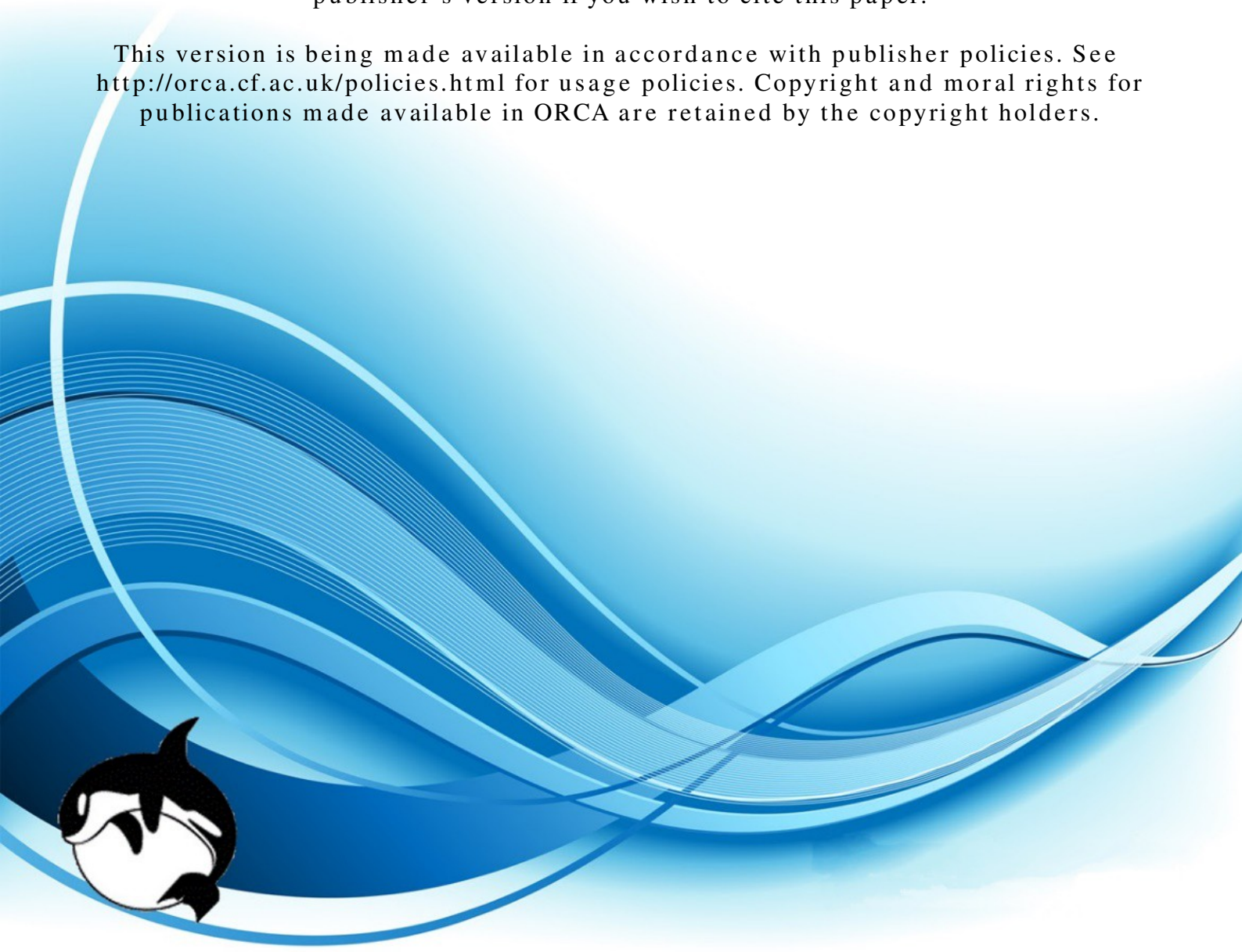

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Electoral Politics and the Party Politicization of Human Rights: The Case of UK Westminster Elections 1945-2010

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Electoral Politics and the Party Politicization of Human Rights: The Case of UK Westminster Elections 1945-2010

Abstract

This exploratory study examines issue-salience and the discourse on human rights in the principal parties' manifestos in UK state-wide elections 1945- 2010. Innovative aspects include the application of combined qualitative and quantitative techniques. These are used to test of a series of hypotheses. The findings reveal the nature and extent of the party politicization of human rights. Analysis confirms a Left-Right political cleavage. Left-of-centre parties attach greatest priority to promoting rights - and frame them in the context of political citizenship, democracy and good governance. In contrast, the Right's position appears conflicted; at once advocating the application of rights in foreign policy yet latterly proposing replacement of the Human Rights Act in domestic law. The present study provides a template for future international comparative work on the political development of rights.

1. Introduction

It is argued that to date insufficient attention has been paid to the party politicization of human rights and the formative, agenda-setting role of election manifestos. The term 'party politicization' refers to the process by which issues or principles develop in electoral salience, thereby rising up the political agenda and becoming the subject of inter-party competition. As Carter (2006, p. 748) observes 'the degree of party politicization… may be a significant indicator of the importance attributed to [… a given] issue in a particular polity'. Thus the approach adopted here provides the basis for future comparative work on rights development.

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Espoused by liberal reformers (Kennedy, 2002), human rights are also subject to entrenched political opposition (Hevener Kaufman and Whiteman, 1988; Gordon-Lauren, 2011). Ignatieff (2001, pp. 2-3) defines them as 'the language that systematically embodies [the] intuition that our species is one, and each of the individuals who compose it is entitled to equal moral consideration'. Yet as Gavrielides (2008, p. 193) notes, they 'are not abstract ideals, but concrete principles… defined through jurisprudence'. A full discussion of their development and application is outwith the present purposes (for a discussion see for e.g. Morsink, 2000). However, existing studies of the nexus between HR and electoral politics have principally concentrated on the right to hold free and fair elections (Davenport, 1996, 1997), the conduct of popular ballots (Watt, 2002) – and socio-legal accounts of their application in different jurisdictions (Bartlett, 2001; Arat, 2003). Research has generally overlooked the role of electoral discourse. This is a key lacuna. The two are irrevocably linked. As Atria (2005, p. 154) states, they 'are political concepts used to express the importance of some political claims [and they determine…] which are subject to the political process'.

Despite this there has not been a systematic examination of the priority that parties have afforded to human rights over several electoral cycles; we know little of the party dynamics of discourse and framing as they advance policy proposals on the application of universal rights; and, despite their pivotal role in a range of contemporary political issues, there has not been a detailed exploration of the discursive processes whereby parties attempt to influence voting behaviour and secure a mandate for action. Accordingly, the following analysis marks an initial step in addressing these lacunae for, as Piazza and Walsh (2010, p. 408) underline, 'the next logical step in comparative research is to disaggregate democracy into its component parts, such as elections… to determine which are the most effective in preserving rights'.

Electoral theory (Cf. Rokkan, 1966; Budge, 1994) classifies human rights as a position issue; one on which opinion is divided. This is due to contrasting viewpoints on both their

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efficacy and desirability (Cf. Ingram, 2008). In the present case study the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic UK law illustrates their status as a position issue. It also typifies how manifesto discourse can play a formative, political agenda-setting role (Cobb and Ross, 1997). In this particular instance, as Ewing (1999, pp. 81-2) recalls: 'in 1997 the Labour Party included incorporation of the Convention in its election manifesto for the first time, proposing that citizens should have statutory rights to enforce their human rights in the UK courts… Following the election, attention turned to the manner of incorporation'.

In conceptual terms the role played by electoral politics in the development of HR is explained by both mandate and accountability theory (Budge and Hofferbert, 1990; Fearon, 2003). Both are fundamentally concerned with the connection between representation and policy responsiveness (Stimson, 2003). The former asserts that when in government parties should implement the policies that they promised when running for office (and were therefore mandated to introduce). In contrast, accountability theory asserts that elections are, in effect, 'opinion polls' on the performance and policy record of the party or parties forming the previous administration (Ferejohn, 2003). Przeworski *et al* (1999, p. 40) explain:

> Even if citizens are unable to control governments by obliging them to follow mandates, citizens may be able to do so if they can induce the incumbents to anticipate that they will have to render accounts for their past actions… those incumbents that act in the best interests of citizens win re-election, those that do not lose them… [thus] the incumbent chooses policies necessary to get re-elected.

Cingranelli and Filippov (2010, p. 243) underline the salience of this theory: 'democratic electoral institutions could positively influence the protection of human rights by supplying very specific electoral incentives. Appropriate incentives arise when the logic of electoral competition and political survival punishes elected officials who ignore or

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encourage human rights'. Accordingly, the current focus is on manifesto discourse and electioneering as parties attempt to influence voter behaviour to secure approval for their stance on human rights.

Traditionally, quantitative analysis has been used to explore manifesto discourse by focusing on 'issue-salience' (Libbrecht *et al*, 2009; Volkens, 2001) – or, the prominence and attention afforded to different issues in party campaigns. Ergo, the more an issue - in this case human rights, is emphasised by a party (making it 'salient'), the greater the probability it will attract voters who share similar concerns (Robertson, 1976; Budge and Farlie, 1983). However, as noted, the rate at which political parties have adapted their election programmes to accommodate human rights proposals has yet to be fully explored. One school of electoral theory suggests progressive reforms - such as the promotion of rights, face inertia for pre-existing programmes are only modified in light of significant shifts in public opinion or circumstances (Stimson *et al*, 1995). In contrast, others predict flexibility as parties seek to maximise new voters' support in responding to social change, evolving world events and international relations (Bischoff, 2005).

To explore such matters this paper makes an original contribution by combining quantitative analysis of issue-salience with a qualitative examination of policy framing. The latter refers to the persuasive, discursive dimension to politics based on the language used to advance policy proposals. As Creed *et al* (2002, p. 37) explain; frames can be viewed as 'a necessary property of a text—where text is broadly conceived to include discourses, patterned behaviour, and systems of meaning, policy logics, constitutional principles, and deep cultural narratives'. The qualitative aspect of the present study also explores the use of tropes. These form part of political discourse and cross-cut policy frames. As Fischer and Forrester (1993, p. 117) explain, they are 'figures of speech and argument that give persuasive power to larger narratives [including policy frames] of which they are part'.

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Based on this mixed methodology a series of hypotheses is tested. The present study follows existing practice (e.g. Moravcsik, 2000) by considering the 'modern era', specifically the period from 1945 for, as Landman (2005, p. 550) notes, it captures significant developments for 'in the history of ideas, rights per se are relatively old, while the notion of human rights is relatively new… Since the Universal Declaration [c.1948], the full content of human rights has grown in breadth and depth.'

The remainder of the paper is structured thus: a discussion of the literature on human rights and electoral competition is used to establish the research hypotheses. The study methodology is then outlined. This is followed by the findings in relation to each hypothesis. The main findings and their implications are discussed in the conclusion.

2. Human Rights, Party Politicization and Electoral Competition

Over recent decades a range of factors has placed increasing attention on human rights in the UK. Foremost is the civil unrest in Northern Ireland, where as Wilkinson (1989, p. 19) observed, the 'key to resolving the problem of terrorist violence [wa]s to get public opinion to recognize the true nature of the threat terrorism poses to human rights'. Other factors include the threat of post 9/11 terrorism (Gearty, 2005), foreign policy (Buenor Hadjor, 1998), immigration (Morris, 2002), gender equality (Robinson, 2003) and European Court of Human Rights rulings (Harris *et al*, 2009). All signal the growing importance of human rights as a policy issue and, more generally, the extent to which they are socialized into domestic practices (Risse and Sikkink, 1999). Against this background, it is therefore hypothesised that the manifesto discourse evidences party politicization arising from the increasing issue-salience of human rights over the post-war period (hypothesis 1).

Existing work underlines how party attitudes to human rights are shaped by their location on the Left-Right political spectrum (Cf. Dunne and Wheeler, 1999; Alston *et al*, 2007). Thus, earlier studies provide evidence to support the suggestion that 'right-wing

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political ideology and support for human rights [is] negatively correlated' (Moghaddama and Vuksanovica, 1990, p. 455; see also Diaz-Veizadesa *et al*, 1995). In general terms, the Right's concerns over human rights include: a potential loss of sovereignty (Cole, 2005), a clash with notions of personal liberty (Donoho, 2001) and fears of oppressive 'political correctness' (Carey, 1992). In contrast, as Davidson (2010, p. 109) explains, 'the Left hopes to build a politics of universal human rights' in order to protect the interests of the poor who [according to this view] are 'exclude[d] forever in a sort of right-less limbo'. In addition, Leftist parties are concerned to uphold welfare rights (Dean, 2007) - and promote what some proponents refer to as, a 'modern age of citizenship' (Mandelson and Liddle, 1996, p. 196; see also Straw and Boateng, 1996).

Accordingly, given this background it is hypothesised that in UK politics there is evidence of inter-party differences in issue-salience (hypothesis 2) and a right-left political cleavage in manifesto discourse as parties promote or resist human rights in their policy programmes (hypothesis 3). In addition, the literature on electoral competition highlights how parties may adapt their programmes to respond to voter attitudes on human rights (Bernstein, 1997; Dine, 2005; Redly, 2008; Peters and Wolper, 1995) - as well as policy claims by human rights campaigners (Wiseberg and Scoble, 1977; Mutua, 2002; Nelson and Ellen, 2003). It is therefore hypothesised that there are differences in the frames and tropes used in the discourse of human rights in UK state-wide parties' manifestos (hypotheses 4 and 5).

3. Methodology

By applying mixed methods the present study heeds earlier calls for policy work to combine content and critical discourse analysis (Wilson, 1993). Accordingly, issue-salience is determined by content analysis of manifestos. This is applied by recording the number of incidences of key words, ideas or meanings in party programmes (Topf, 1994; Krippendorff and Bock, 2008) and is complemented by frame analysis (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989;

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Schön and Rein, 1994). The latter is concerned with how, as key political texts, manifestos enable parties to construct (or 'frame') policy proposals on human rights and other matters. In electoral terms, as Nelson and Oxleya (1997, p. 75) observe: 'frames influence opinions by stressing specific values, facts and other considerations, endowing them with greater apparent relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternative frame'. In this way framing leads to political agenda-setting (Cohen, 1963; Cobb and Ross, 1997) and whether parties' stance on human rights is mandated or fails to attract electoral support.

It is acknowledged that manifestos have limitations as a data-source; not least because party policy proposals are also expressed in speeches, debates and other documents, yet they constitute the principal political texts that reflect a party's priorities and issue positions thereby allowing systematic analysis over time. Accordingly, as noted, electronic versions of the manifestos of the three leading[1] state-wide parties in UK general elections 1945-2010 were analysed using appropriate software.[2]

Adapting a procedure derived from the Comparative Manifesto Project,[3] the manifesto texts were divided into 'quasi-sentences' (or, 'an argument which is the verbal expression of one political idea or issue,' Volkens, 2001, p. 96). Splitting sentences in this way controlled for long sentences that contain multiple policy proposals. Individual quasi-sentences were subsequently coded using an inductive coding frame (Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe and Yardley, 2003) based on key topics/ themes derived from the policy literature on human rights (Cf. Gordon, 1998; Donelly, 2003; Alston *et al*, 2007; Gordon Lauren, 2011)

The quasi-sentences were subsequently coded for a second time using Reingold's notion of 'direction' (Reingold 2000, 166–7). This reveals whether they were pro- or anti-human rights - or neutral in orientation. In order to increase reliability, the coding process was repeated independently by a research assistant. Divergent views on the coding

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emerged in <2 per cent of cases[4] (resolved by discussion between coders). Issue-salience was then determined by recording the frequency of quasi-sentences as a percentage of all references to human rights in the manifestos 1945-2010.

4. Issue-Salience and Party Politicization of Human Rights in UK Electoral Politics 1945-2010

Against the background of growing public and political debate on human rights in the UK, attention now turns to address each of the research hypotheses on rights discourse in electoral politics 1945-2010.

The manifesto discourse evidences party politicization arising from the increasing issue-salience of human rights over the post-war period (hypothesis 1)*; *there is evidence of inter-party differences in human rights issue-salience (hypothesis 2).

Hypothesis 1 can be confirmed. There is a pronounced increase in the issue-salience of human rights in party manifestos over the post-war period to the 1990s (followed by a slight decrease in the 2000s) (Figure 1). This is illustrated by the mean number of references to HR per election, by decade. In the 1960s and 70s HR received limited attention ($\bar{x}$ = 6 references per election). Underlining its growing salience there was a several-fold increase in the 1980s and 90s ($\bar{x}$ = 47.5 and 65.5) – and, as noted, this was followed by a modest decrease in the 2000s ($\bar{x}$ = 43).

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Expressed cumulatively, 15.7 per cent of the 1945-2010 references was made in the 1970s; 20.2 per cent in the 1980s – and 27.3 in the 1990s – on this measure the increasing trend is sustained into the 2000s (when 27.8 per cent of the post-war total was made). The increasing salience after the 1979 ballot can be explained as a function of earlier HR activism and campaigning by new social movements in the 1960s and 70s (Cf. Marks, 1981; Marx Ferree and Tripp, 2006) – as well as the impact of globalization (Fairbrother and McCorquodale, 1999). It is also part of the trend whereby contemporary party manifesto discourse has become more expansive and concerned to advance substantive proposals in relation to new social priorities - such as equality, human rights, and sustainability (Cf. [redacted] and [redacted]). The modest decline in salience – (as measured by mean no. of election references per decade) - witnessed after the 1997 election can be explained by two factors: the implementation of long-campaigned-for HR reforms by the incoming Labour administration (see below) – and devolution. In the latter case new regional legislatures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland assumed responsibility for upholding HR (notably UNDHR Article 2 anti- discrimination responsibilities) in relation to a range of policy functions (e.g. health, education and social services).

The significance of these findings lies in their confirmation of the growing party politicization of human rights in the UK. They reveal HR as a 'new social priority' that, in discursive and symbolic terms at least, has gained increasing attention in the principal parties' post-war public policy making agendas. This is not to deny the potential disjuncture - or decoupling - between policy rhetoric and delivery (Meyer and Rowan 1991; Dahlström 2004; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui, 2005). Yet it provides evidence of a shift in mainstream political values.

[Temporary Note – Figure 1 – about here]

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Hypothesis Two can also be confirmed; there is evidence of a statistically significant inter-party difference in HR issue-salience (p= <0.001).[5] Almost a half (46.6 per cent) of references in the post-war discourse was made by the Liberals/ Liberal Democrats, with 41.6 per cent by the Labour Party, and 11.8 per cent by the Conservatives. This finding affirms existing work underlining the Left's greater support for human rights (Makinda, 1996; Moravcsik, 2000). Such party differences were prefigured in the immediate post-war electoral discourse. For example, in its 1945 manifesto the Labour Party stated that it 'stands for freedom – freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom of the Press… we will keep and enlarge these freedoms, and that we enjoy again the personal civil liberties we have, of our own free will, sacrificed to win the war' (Labour Party, 1945, p. 9).

A right-left political cleavage exists in the manifesto discourse on human rights (hypotheses 3)

Hypothesis 3 can also be confirmed. Not only do the parties of the left account for over three-quarters (88.2 per cent) of the post-war electoral discourse but textual analysis reveals general Left-Right politicking over human rights. The discourse of the Right criticises statist interventions by the Left – and asserts the need to uphold individual liberties and prevent excessive regulation. For example: 'faced with any problem, the instinctive Socialist reaction is to control, to restrict, and to tax. We aim to extend individual choice, freedom and responsibility' (Conservative Party, 1970, p. 17); and 'the consistent aim of Conservative policy is to uphold the British way of life, centred upon the dignity and liberty of the individual' (Conservative Party, 1964, p. 15).

In contrast, the Left's discourse centres on the Conservatives' alleged ambivalence to HR – as well as their record in government. For example, 'under the Tories there have been eight years of … abolition of rights of representation and negotiation' (Labour Party, 1987, p. 21); and 'today as often in the past the extension of human rights has had to wait for a Labour Government' (Labour Party, 1970, p. 16).

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The Right-Left cleavage is also apparent in the discourse on foreign policy (Cf. Cradock, 1997). For example, Labour assert: 'the Tories have regarded the Commonwealth as a wearisome obligation. Labour believes that this unique inter-racial and inter-hemispheric organization can play a central role in fighting human rights violations. We shall play an active part in the Commonwealth and join the South Africa Committee of Foreign Ministers which the Tories have boycotted' (Labour Party, 1992, p. 46). In response the Conservatives state: 'everywhere Socialism is in retreat… we will use overseas aid to promote… respect for human rights and the rule of law' (Conservative Party, 1992, p. 53).

Analysis shows that all incidences of discourse opposed to extending human rights policy came from the Right.[6] The arguments employed include a perceived loss of sovereignty, the threat of 'reverse discrimination' – and adverse impact on the military. For example: 'a Conservative government will negotiate for specific guarantees – on the Charter of Fundamental Rights… with our European partners to return powers that we believe should reside with the UK, not the EU. *We seek a mandate* to negotiate the return of these powers from the EU to the UK' (Conservative Party, 2010, p. 63, emphasis added); 'we will exempt the armed forces from the European Convention on Human Rights', (Conservative Party, 2001, p. 22); and 'our review of the Human Rights Act, will ensure fairness for all, rather than special rules for different groups' (Conservative Party, 2005, p. 18).

In state-wide parties' general election manifestos differences are present in the framing of human rights proposals (hypotheses 4).

This hypothesis can be confirmed. There are statistically-significant differences across the majority of policy frames analysed (Figure 2). For example, 'anti-discrimination' is the most employed frame in the post-war discourse, accounting for over a quarter (28.8 per cent) of quasi-sentences.[7] A significant Left-Right cleavage is apparent (p=<0.001).[8] Labour and the Liberal Democrats, predominate, accounting for 43.8 and 42.3 per cent, respectively. This finding affirms earlier work that shows parties of the Left to be more ideologically disposed to state intervention to promote equalities than the Right (Cf. Boix, 1998; Kitschelt, 1988). It

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also resonates with work that underlines Conservative opposition to what is perceived to be intrusive regulation associated with 'big government' (Taylor-Gooby, 1998; O'Brien and Madrick, 2010). The Left's manifesto discourse centres on developing HR legislation. For example: 'new legislation and the Equality and Human Rights Commission will ensure that people are not held back at work because of their gender, age, disability, race and religious or sexual orientation' (Labour Party, 2010, p. 49); and we will 'ensure equality before the law for lesbians and gay men through our new Human Rights Commission and the Bill of Rights. We will create a common age of consent regardless of gender or sexual orientation' (Liberal Party, 1997, p. 24).

The Liberal Democrats predominate in framing human rights issues in relation to the civil conflict in Northern Ireland (62.5 per cent; followed by Labour, 37.5 per cent) (p=<0.001).[9] The discourse centres on amending both the legal code and judicial processes in the province. For example: 'our commitment to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law will strengthen individual rights in Northern Ireland and we would reform the Diplock courts[10] so that three judges preside over non-jury trials' (Liberal- SDP Alliance, 1987, p. 44); 'we will 'strengthen the constitutional rights of individual within Northern Ireland [… with] a Bill of Rights…' (Liberal Democrats, 1992, p. 43); and 'Labour will help build trust and confidence among both Nationalist and Unionist traditions in Northern Ireland by acting to guarantee human rights' (Labour Party, 1997, p. 29).

[Temporary note – Figure 2 – about here]

The Left accounts for over three-quarters of references under the 'Bill of rights' frame; Labour make most references (68.6 per cent), followed by the Liberal Democrats (17.1 per cent) (p=<0.001).[11] Both parties are consistent in their support for a Bill. Examples include: 'our Charter of Rights, backed up by a complementary and democratically enforced bill of rights, will establish in law the specific rights of every citizen' (Labour Party, 1992, p.

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22); 'a Bill of Rights should guarantee the citizen against discrimination' (Liberal Party, 1964, p. 11); - and, 'we have presented to the House of Commons a Bill of Rights which would safeguard the rights of the individual against the State. We shall continue to press for its adoption' (Liberal Party, 1970, p. 17).

In contrast, the Conservatives shift their position under this frame; initially opening up the prospect of a Bill (e.g. 'there are other important matters, such as a possible Bill of Rights… which we shall wish to discuss with all parties', Conservative Party, 1979, p. 28), subsequently they oppose the idea (e.g. 'a new Bill of Rights… would risk transferring power away from parliament to legal courts - undermining the democratic supremacy of parliament as representatives of the people… we do not believe it is appropriate to the UK', Conservative Party, 1997, p. 28) – before once again committing to a Bill in 2010 (e.g. 'to protect our freedoms from state encroachment and encourage greater social responsibility, we will replace the Human Rights Act with a UK Bill of Rights', Conservative Party, 2010, p. 48). In this regard the party appears conflicted – at once supportive of domestic UK control over rights legislation, yet cautious of extending the prevailing rights framework.

On other matters, Labour lead the Liberal Democrats (64.7 compared to 29.4 per cent) in framing human rights proposals in relation to criminal justice (p=<0.05). This discourse centres on measures to uphold the rights of defendants. As such it affirms the salience to the UK of international work on the greater propensity of Leftist parties to advance equality policy reforms in criminal justice procedures (Cf. Galliher, 1989). For example: 'we will not allow people's legal rights to go by default. Accessible level services are essential to protect human rights… we will increase central government spending to set up new law centres and help existing ones, and to improve the legal aid scheme by widening its provisions. We will also introduce a system of appeals against the refusal of legal aid in criminal cases' (Labour Party, 1983, p. 52).

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Burnell (1994, p. 485) asserts that attaching conditionality to development aid is an inherently problematic foreign policy tool. He explains that: 'in practice this ideal may be unattainable, especially with regard to reconciling the moral of political accountability in the aid-receiving countries with the realities of power and influence in international relations'. Nevertheless, it is an approach favoured by both parties of the Left. They account for almost all human rights proposals framed in relation to 'foreign policy and international development aid' (Cf. Boyce, 2002). The Liberals/ Liberal Democrats make almost two-thirds of references (62.2 per cent), followed by Labour (32.4 per cent) (p=<0.001).[12] For example, we will be 'emphasising the protection of political and human rights as a basis for foreign policy' (Liberal Party, 1979, p. 12); 'Labour will do everything in its power to weaken Latin America's repressive governments by… drawing international attention to human rights violations' (Labour Party, 1983, p. 56); and, 'with a new Labour government, Britain will be an advocate of human rights and democracy the world over' (Labour Party, 1997, p. 39).

The Liberal Democrats also lead in proposals framed in terms of improving the administration of human rights (54.7 per cent). They are followed by Labour (43.4 per cent) (p=<0.001).[13] Underlining earlier shortcomings in the monitoring and enforcement of HR (O'cinneide, 2007), it is a strand of manifesto discourse that has been subject to sustained attention over almost seven decades. It begins with immediate post-war rhetoric (e.g. 'the nation is pledged to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and a Liberal Government would make its domestic and colonial administration conform to it', Liberal Party, 1950, p. 16) – and is followed by successive commitments from both parties of the Left (e.g. 'we will establish a Human Rights Commission', Liberal- SDP Alliance, 1987, p. 34; and 'we will set up a Human Rights Commission to strengthen the protection of individual rights', Labour Party, 1997, p. 37).

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Party differences are present in the tropes employed in the manifesto discourse on human rights (hypothesis 5).

As noted, tropes cross-cut policy frames. They include figures of speech, principles and values - as well as narrative and rhetorical devices (Jablin and Putnam, 2000). Analysis reveals statistically-significant party differences in the use of tropes in the discourse on human rights, thus confirming this hypothesis (Figure 3). For example:

- 'Equality' was the most used trope (accounting for over a quarter, 27.5 per cent, of the total analysed). For example, in order 'to promote equality …We are committed to improving the rights and opportunities of gays and lesbians' (Labour Party, 2005, p. 49) (p=<0.001).[14]
- 'Freedom' accounted for just under a fifth of tropes analysed (18 per cent). For example, 'individual freedom - we need a Bill of Rights - as a first step' (Liberal Party, 1979, p. 13); [15]
- 'Protection' was employed in 17.5 per cent of cases. For example, 'a Bill of Rights to protect individuals, is even more pressing in Northern Ireland than it is in the rest of the UK' (Liberal Democrats, 1992, p. 29) (p=<0.001);[16]
- 'Citizenship' was used in 17.2 per cent of the tropes analysed. For example, 'A Bill of Rights should guarantee the citizen against discrimination' (Liberal Party, 1964, p. 12) (p=<0.05);[17]
- 'Democracy' accounted for 15 per cent of instances. For example, 'without getting the structure of our democracy right, we will get nothing right. The Alliance, if empowered by the British people, will… incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights and its protocols into British law in a Bill of Rights' (Liberal- SDP Alliance, 1987, p. 34), (p=<0.001);[18]

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- Finally, 'justice' was used in 4.7 per cent of cases. For example, 'we believe in freedom, justice, prosperity and human rights for all' (Liberal Democrats, 2010, p. 62).[19]

[Temporary Note – Figure 3 – about here]

The Liberals/ Liberal Democrats led in the use of all but the latter trope. The overall significance of these findings lies in reinforcing the Left-Right cleavage on human rights discourse. Not only is this evident between policy frames but also in tropes that crosscut the frames – thereby affirming the deep-founded and enduring ideological divide between the Left's emphasis on HR – and the Right's favouring of a laissez faire, less interventionist approach.

5. Conclusion

The present findings confirm that electoral politics matter in shaping human rights development in contemporary democracies. From the 1945 election onwards HR are electorally salient and rise up the political agenda. In terms of electoral theory, the politics of human rights supports existing work that predicts flexibility and adaptation in party programmes as they modify their traditional policy focus to attract new voters and respond to world events and shifting international relations (Cf. Bishoff, 2005).

The current analysis also informs an understanding of the nature of the party politicization of HR over a span of almost seven decades. It shows key differences in the issue-positions of the parties (- such as on the introduction of a Bill of Rights/ reform of the Human Rights Act). It also reveals a pronounced Left-Right political cleavage in issue salience and policy framing. Not only do the parties of the Left attach greater priority to promoting human rights, but they employ different framing practices to articulate them. Tackling

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discrimination and foreign policy are the frames most employed to advance policy proposals in an attempt to influence voting behaviour.

Left-of-centre parties place greatest emphasis on the tropes of political citizenship, democracy and good governance. In contrast, the present analysis shows that recent attempts by the principal party of the Right to reposition itself as more centrist and progressive on a range of new social priorities (Cf. Kerr *et al*, 2011) does not extend to HR - for there has been a deepening of its opposition to aspects of human rights policy and practice. Thus the Conservative position can be seen to be conflicted; at once advocating the application of rights in foreign policy yet latterly proposing replacement of the Human Rights Act in domestic law.

Overall, the present findings resonate with existing work that reveals Left-party strength as an indicator of a progressive, reformist public policy agenda – one often associated with a concern for promoting equality and human rights (Cf. Esping-Andersen, 1990; Phillips, 1994). It is argued that the current study offers a new perspective on HR development by focusing on the formative policy-making role of manifesto discourse. This provides an holistic view that, as mandate and accountability theory predict, links the substance of human rights policy to the formal representative process in parliamentary democracies. Through combined quantitative and qualitative analysis it also provides the basis for future comparative study as to whether the patterns and processes of party politicization applying in the UK are replicated in other international jurisdictions.

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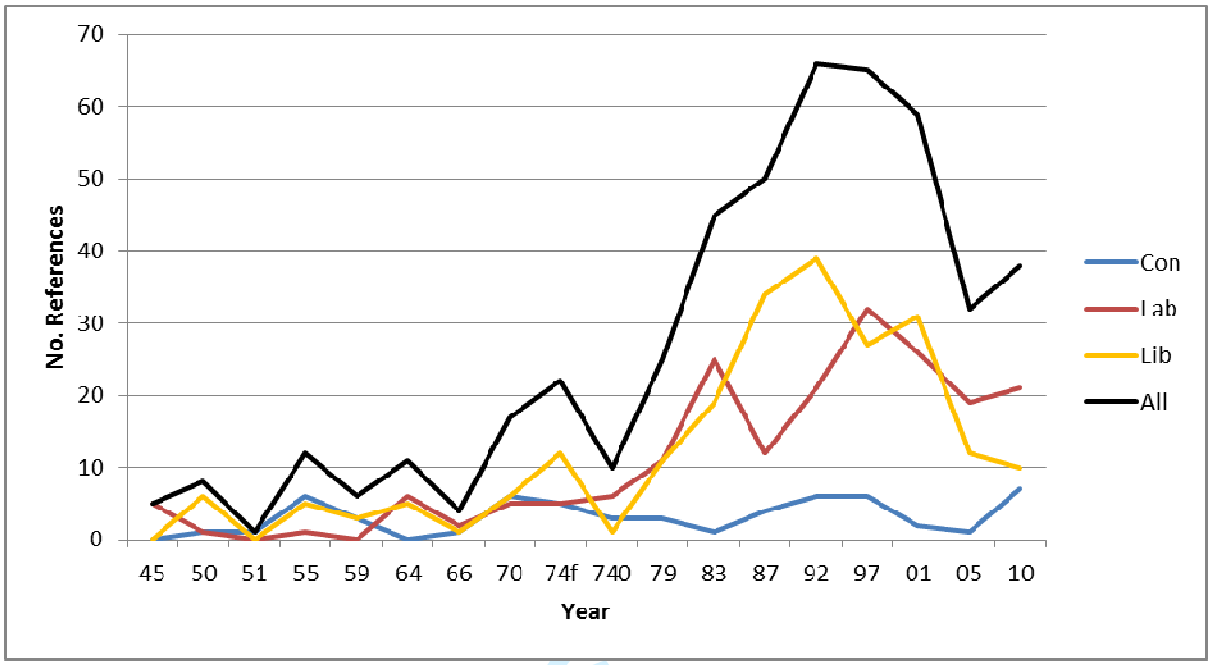

Figure 1. Issue-Salience of Human Rights in the Principal Parties' General Election Manifestos 1945-2010 (N= 476).

For Review Only

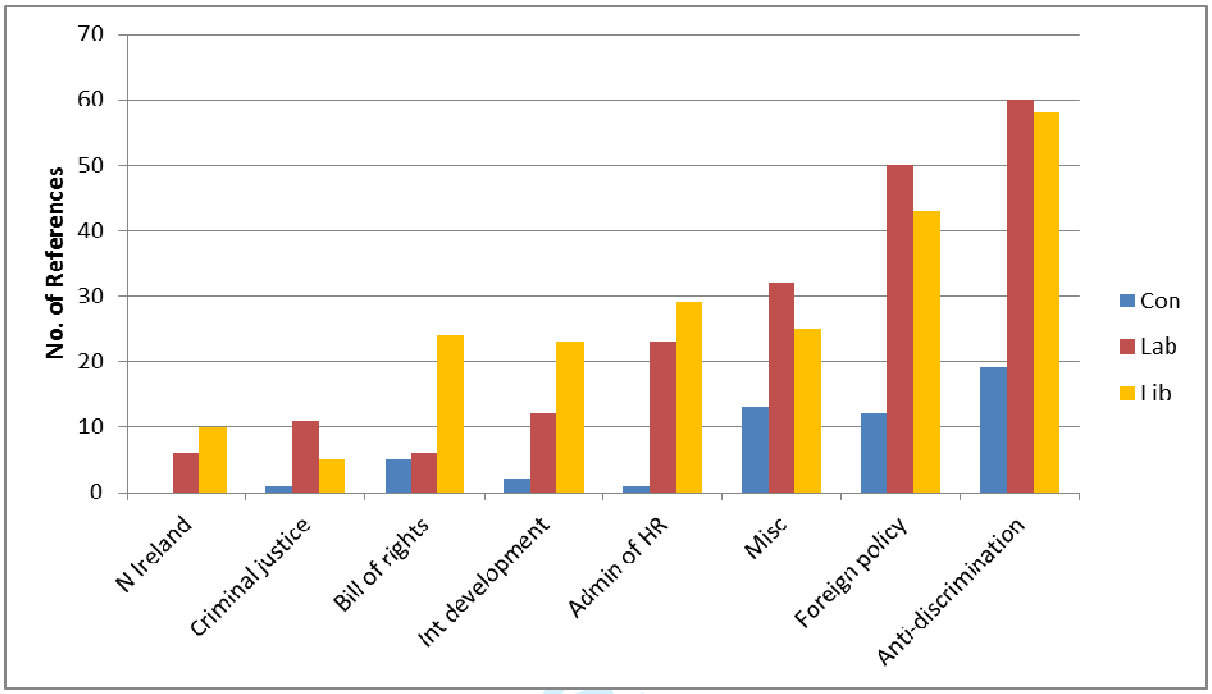

Figure 2. Party Differences in Policy Framing of Human Rights: UK General Election Manifestos 1945-2010 (No. of References per Frame, by Party).

For Review Only

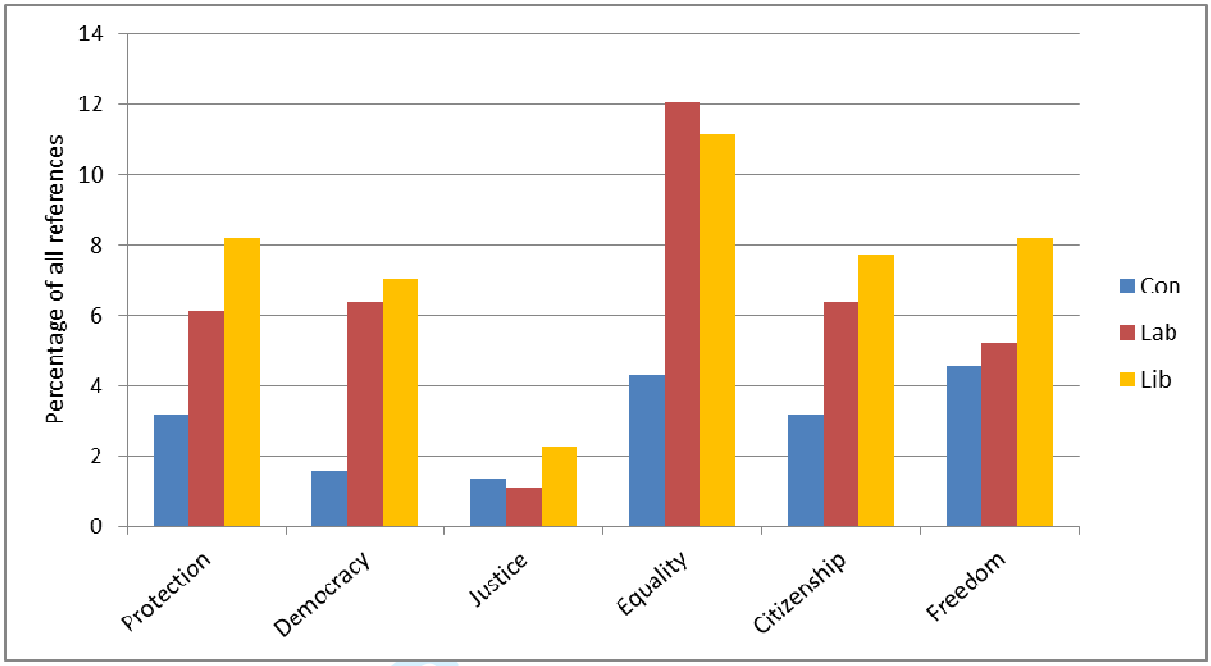

Figure 3. Party Differences in Tropes used in the Human Rights Discourse: UK General Election Manifestos 1945-2010 (Percentage of all references, by Party, N=440).

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[1] Defined in terms of share of the popular vote.
[2] Where necessary, hardcopy only versions of early manifestos were transcribed. The software used was Nvivo 9.
[3] See http://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/

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[4] 8 incidences.
[5] Chi squared =101.462, df = 2, p= 0.0000328
[6] 18 incidences.
[7] as set out in Article 2 of the UNDHR
[8] Chi squared = 23.401, df = 2, P= 0.00000829
[9] Chi squared =9.5, df = 2, p= 0.0086517
[10] Trial by jury was suspended for specific scheduled offences and the court consisted of a single judge.
[11] Chi squared = 19.6, df = 2, P= 0.00005545
[12] Chi squared = 17.892, df = 2, P= 0.00013026
[13] Chi squared = 24.604, df = 2, P= 0.00000454
[14] Chi squared = 17.124, df = 2, P= 0.00019124
[15] Not statistically significant.
[16] Chi squared = 9.532, df = 2, P= 0.00851437
[17] Chi squared = 8.316, df = 2, P= 0.0156388
[18] Chi squared = 15.545, df = 2, P= 0.00042116
[19] Not statistically significant.

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