

Analysing patterns of ideological change amongst Conservative MPs and the response of voters: A study of Liverpool

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Abstract

Between 1852 and 1983 Liverpool had been continuously represented by at least one Conservative MP. Whilst it is a common myth that the Conservative Party's lack of success in Liverpool began during Margaret Thatcher's time as prime minister (Jeffery, 2017), it is undeniable that the Conservatives lost their final MPs during her premiership. This paper will analyse the changes in the ideological positions of Conservative Party MPs elected to represent Liverpool, and the tensions between them, as well as paying attention to how Conservatives from different eras framed their policies for Liverpool.

This paper will pay special attention to the question of whether the ideology of these MPs became more 'Thatcherite' in the 1979-1983 parliament, and how these MPs suggested challenges around urban issues, including the Toxteth Riots, should be addressed. Overall, the paper argues that we cannot see evidence for an increasingly Thatcherite Liverpool Conservative cohort. The two Liverpool Conservative MPs in the 1979-1983 parliament – Anthony Steen and Malcolm Thornton – were no ardent Thatcherites. However, neither were they radical Conservatives willing to revisit the era of 'Tory democracy' or 'municipal socialism' (O'Leary, 2004) seen under 19th century Liverpool Conservatives.

Author information

Dr David Jeffery is a lecturer in British politics at the University of Liverpool. His doctorate examined the causes of Conservative decline in Liverpool – busting some popular local myths in the process – and he is currently working on expanding this research to cover the entire Merseyside region, for a monograph to be published in 2021. David has also published widely on the British Conservative and Labour parties and is a regular national/international media commentator.

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