

## ***Peasants' Uprising or Religious War? Re-examining the 1975 Conservative Leadership Contest***

PHILIP COWLEY AND MATTHEW BAILEY\*

This article analyses the nature of the support given to the candidates in the 1975 Conservative leadership contest, in which Margaret Thatcher replaced Edward Heath. In contrast to the orthodox account of the contest – which interprets it as largely non-ideological – the article argues that there were clear ideological forces at work. The right strongly supported Thatcher in both rounds; the left strongly backed Heath and then Whitelaw. Region, experience and education also influenced the voting. The traditional accounts, which explain those voting for Thatcher as doing so simply because she was not Heath, have, therefore, to explain why only certain types of MPs felt this way. Margaret Thatcher may have won because she was not Ted Heath; but she did not win solely because she was not Ted Heath.

One trembles to think what would have happened to our country had we not chosen that remarkable woman to lead us.

(Conservative Member of Parliament)<sup>1</sup>

Margaret Thatcher ceased to be the British prime minister in November 1990, having dominated British politics for more than a decade. She won three consecutive general elections, something achieved by no other party leader since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The effect of her premiership was profound, producing dramatic and significant changes in many aspects of British life, and in the case of some of those changes – such as privatization – even exporting them overseas. She was the first prime minister to generate an ‘ism’, and this eponymous ideology – ‘Thatcherism’ – did not depart with her, living

\* Centre for Legislative Studies, University of Hull. This article draws on research funded by the Nuffield Foundation's Small Grants Scheme. The authors would like to thank all those MPs and ex-MPs who responded to their queries, especially those who allowed them access to documents from the period, without which this article could not have been written. Earlier versions of this article were presented to the Conference of the Elections, Public Opinion and Parties Specialist Group of the Political Studies Association and to the Mass Conservatism Conference, both of which took place in Manchester in September 1998. The authors are very grateful to the participants of both, as they are to John Bartle, John Cordle, James Douglas, John Garry, Ed Page, Malcolm Punnett, John Ramsden, Sir William Shelton, Mark Stuart and Melanie Williams, all of whom helpfully commented on earlier drafts, as did Albert Weale and the *Journal's* two anonymous referees.

<sup>1</sup> All unattributed quotations in this article are drawn from correspondence with Conservative MPs from the 1974 Parliament.

on in some form in the premierships of both her successors, John Major and Tony Blair.

The *sine qua non* of Thatcherism was its eponym's victory in the leadership election of 1975. Had Edward Heath remained Conservative party leader, or had he been replaced by a less ideological figure, such as William Whitelaw, the recent political history of Britain would almost certainly have been very different. Rather than one of the major political figures of the twentieth century, Margaret Thatcher would be but a minor footnote, remembered (if remembered at all) as an unpopular secretary of state responsible for closing lots of grammar schools.<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason that one long-serving Conservative MP describes his vote in the leadership election in 1975 as the most important decision he took in over twenty years in the House of Commons.

Shortly after becoming leader Thatcher was to write to one of her parliamentary colleagues confessing that 'even now, I am not quite sure how it all happened'.<sup>3</sup> This purpose of this article is to take a look – the first involving systematic examination of the voting behaviour of the parliamentary party – at exactly that question.

#### THE ORTHODOX ACCOUNT

There is a widely-accepted account of the process by which Margaret Thatcher became leader of the Conservative party. It is an account which plays down the importance of ideological debate and division and plays up the importance of personality, fortune, manipulation and courage. Somewhat simplified, the orthodox account goes as follows. After the election defeats of 1974, a sizeable proportion of Conservative MPs – perhaps even a majority – wanted Edward Heath to step down as party leader. Few wanted rid of him for ideological reasons. Rather, their objections were based on a mixture of his electoral record – 'played four, lost three' – and a dislike of his almost unique brand of interpersonal skills ('Heath was just so rude all the time'). As the only serious candidate to challenge Heath – the others having ruled themselves out, shot themselves in the foot, or both – Thatcher received nearly all the anti-Heath votes. And whereas Heath's campaign team was inept, managing to alienate even those who should have ranked among his most loyal supporters, Thatcher's – led by Airey Neave and William Shelton – was skilful; in particular, by deliberately underplaying her chances, Neave persuaded some MPs who had been planning to abstain on the first round to vote for Thatcher instead, in order to deny Heath victory. As a result, instead of merely denying him victory, she led the first ballot by eleven votes, a result that gave her unstoppable momentum

<sup>2</sup> Thatcher herself was aware of the consequences of losing: 'I had no doubt that if I had failed against Ted that would have been the end of me in politics' (M. Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 277).

<sup>3</sup> The letter of 24 February 1975 is in the Weatherill archive at the University of Kent. We are grateful to Lady Thatcher for granting us copyright permission.

– a phrase frequently used in accounts of her victory but never defined – in the second round.

With minor variations, this is the tale told in nearly all accounts of Thatcher's rise to power.<sup>4</sup> Some accounts differ slightly from each other in points of emphasis, but there are two significant commonalities. First, the result was *negative*: the party, in Julian Critchley's words, 'did not vote for Margaret, they voted against Ted Heath'.<sup>5</sup> And secondly, the result was *accidental*: Conservative MPs did not intend to end up with Margaret Thatcher as their leader.<sup>6</sup> Her becoming leader was the unintended consequence of removing Edward Heath. As a result, the 1975 leadership contest is rarely presented as a victory for Thatcher, and, even more rarely, as a victory for Thatcherism. Indeed, most accounts deny that there was such a thing as Thatcherism by 1975; and even if there was, it is usually argued that the majority of those voting for Thatcher knew little or nothing about it.<sup>7</sup> The contest is thus presented as essentially 'a personal not an ideological event',<sup>8</sup> or, as Chris Patten put it: 'much more a peasants' uprising than a religious war. It was seen much more as the overthrow of the tyrant king than as a great ideological shift'.<sup>9</sup>

Many aspects of this orthodox account are nearly unchallengeable (which is, presumably, why they form part of an orthodox account). Neave's campaign on Thatcher's behalf does appear to have been extremely skilful; Heath's, by contrast, was inept in the extreme.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is difficult now to determine who

<sup>4</sup> The best accounts are in G. Gardiner, *Margaret Thatcher* (London: William Kimber, 1975); N. Fisher, *The Tory Leaders* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977); P. Cosgrave, *Margaret Thatcher: A Tory and Her Party* (London: Hutchinson, 1978); J. Campbell, *Edward Heath: A Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1994), chap. 34; and J. Ramsden, *The Winds of Change* (London: Longman, 1996), chap. 7. The book by L. P. Stark, *Choosing a Leader* (London: Macmillan, 1996), is also excellent.

<sup>5</sup> J. Critchley, *Westminster Blues* (London: Futura, 1985), p. 121. See also N. Lawson, *The View from Number 11* (London: Bantam, 1992), who describes the result as 'more a rejection of Ted... than a positive endorsement of her' (p. 13); and D. Kavanagh, *Politics and Personalities* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 69. Philip Norton goes so far as to say that she was elected for 'one principal reason: she was not Edward Heath' (P. Norton, 'The Lady's Not For Turning'. But What about the Rest? Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party 1979–89', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 43 (1990), 41–58).

<sup>6</sup> The word 'accident' (or its plural) is used by N. Wapshott and G. Brock, *Thatcher* (London: Macdonald and Sydney, 1983), p. 106; A. Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 83; W. Keegan, *Mrs Thatcher's Economic Experiment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 65; and, in quotes, by I. Crewe and D. Searing, 'Thatcherism: Its Origins, Electoral Impact and Implications for Downs's Theory of Party Strategy' (Essex Papers in Politics and Government, 1986), p. 5. See also R. Shepherd, *The Power Brokers* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p. 170.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, H. Young and A. Sloman, *The Thatcher Phenomena* (London: BBC, 1986), p. 31. This view is well summed up by Critchley's observation that Thatcher is a 'zealot whose fundamentalist beliefs were not, at the time of her election to the leadership of the party, as widely known as they are today' (*Westminster Blues*, p. 122). Also see Campbell, *Edward Heath*, pp. 667–8.

<sup>8</sup> H. Young, *One of Us* (London: Pan, Final Edition, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Young and Sloman, *The Thatcher Phenomena*, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> See Campbell, *Edward Heath*, p. 669.

was in charge of Heath's campaign.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, few doubt that Heath was poor at winning friends and influencing people. He was, remarked Robert Behrens, 'the rudest political leader since Andrew Bonar Law. However, Bonar Law at least insulted his opponents'.<sup>12</sup> Accounts of Heath managing to alienate colleagues, either by his absence or presence, are legion.<sup>13</sup> Even when Heath tried to be pleasant to his colleagues he often managed to be rude – as Edward Pearce once remarked 'when Mr Heath makes a joke, it's no laughing matter'<sup>14</sup> – and even those who stuck with him confess that he was difficult.<sup>15</sup> During the research for this article, many MPs confirmed that Heath's attitude and behaviour were factors which influenced their votes in 1975. One, who confesses that 'the way I voted amounts, with hindsight, to one of the greatest mistakes of my political life', admits to having voted 'negatively' in the first round:

My vote is a typical example of Edward Heath losing his basic support. There were various reasons for this and almost all of them were personal rather than having to do with his political beliefs and policies, with which I agreed then as now. If he had taken the trouble to address one sympathetic or personal word to me after my election in February 1974 he could have had me even though I tended to blame him at the time for losing the February 1974 Election. As it was his whole style and manner continued to irritate me, I was courted by the Thatcher campaigning team and fell for it.

This orthodox account has only recently begun to come under attack, most noticeably by Neal Jesse<sup>16</sup> and Mark Wickham-Jones.<sup>17</sup> The problem with both revisionist attacks – as, indeed, with many of the sources which propound the orthodoxy – is that they are not based on any systematic analysis of the factors

<sup>11</sup> The usual suspects are Kenneth Baker, Peter Walker and Timothy Kitson. All deny responsibility.

<sup>12</sup> R. Behrens, *The Conservative Party from Heath to Thatcher* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1980), p. 32. We are grateful to John Ramsden for pointing out that Heath did sometimes also manage to insult his opponents.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, E. Du Cann, *Two Lives: The Political and Business Careers of Edward Du Cann* (Upton upon Severn: Images, 1995), p. 198; J. Critchley, *A Bag of Boiled Sweets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 138–9; Gardiner, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 187; Fisher, *The Tory Leaders*, p. 141. For the period of government between 1970 and 1974, see P. Norton, *Conservative Dissidents* (London: Temple Smith, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Cited in P. Whitehead, *The Writing on the Wall* (London: Michael Joseph, 1986), p. 325.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, F. Pym, *The Politics of Consent* (London: Sphere Books, 1985), p. 21; P. Rawlinson, *A Price Too High* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), pp. 244–5; J. Prior, *A Balance of Power* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), pp. 101–2; N. Fowler, *Ministers Decide* (London: Chapman, 1991), pp. 7–8; and P. Walker, *Staying Power* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), pp. 120, 128–30.

<sup>16</sup> N. Jesse, 'Thatcher's Rise and Fall: An Institutional Analysis of the Tory Leadership Selection Process', *Electoral Studies*, 15 (1996), 183–202.

<sup>17</sup> M. Wickham-Jones, 'Right Turn: A Revisionist Account of the 1975 Conservative Party Leadership Election', *Twentieth Century British History*, 8 (1997), 74–89. A third revisionist account is that in B. Arnold, *Margaret Thatcher* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), although Arnold's revisionism concerns Thatcher's aims and tactics rather than the voting itself.

which made MPs vote as they did. We know for sure that *some* MPs voted negatively, alienated by the Heath style and record, but how many? Similarly, most of the accounts of the contest accept that there was *some* right-wing support for Thatcher. But how large was this right-wing bloc? The purpose of this article is to provide that missing analysis, based on an examination of the voting behaviour of the 276 MPs who in February 1975 elected Margaret Thatcher Conservative Party Leader.

#### DATA

Any such study stands or falls on the quality of the data used as the dependent variable, that is, how each MP voted. The voting data used in this article are based on three sources: (i) the lists kept by the Thatcher campaign team and by other interested observers during the contest; (ii) *post hoc* correspondence with the MPs who voted in the contest; and (iii) an extensive examination of the extant material on the contest, including newspapers and magazines of the period.

- (i) The files kept by the Thatcher team during the contest include annotated lists of all the Conservative Members in both rounds of the contest, as well as supplementary notes. Access was also gained to an annotated list kept in the whips office of voting intentions on the first round, as well as to a separate list kept by a member of the whips office, partly copied from the official whips' list but supplemented by additional annotations about voting in both rounds. Access to all these lists – as well as to the archives of Airey Neave, Sir John Biggs-Davison and Sir John Rodgers – was on the basis that the voting of no individual MPs be identified.
- (ii) Letters were sent to nearly all of the surviving Conservative members of the October 1974 Parliament, asking if they would confirm (or in some cases reveal) their voting, and, if possible, provide some explanation of their actions. Anonymity was promised. The response rate was extremely high. Of the 107 former MPs to whom letters were sent, ninety-five (89 per cent) replied, of whom just twelve declined to participate, giving a positive response rate of 78 per cent. Of the eighty-nine still serving, the response rate was somewhat lower, with fifty-nine (66 per cent) replying, of whom fourteen declined to participate, a positive response rate of 51 per cent. The overall response rate was, therefore, 65 per cent. As well as indicating how they voted, many also provided an explanation of their votes, ranging in length from four words ('Heath was no good') to six pages. A small number of interviews – conducted either face-to-face or over the phone – were also held. All unattributed quotes in this article are taken from these sources.
- (iii) These two sources were supplemented by an extensive examination of the existing published material on the contest. This included the many biographies or autobiographies written since either by or about the participants, as well as a thorough trawl through the newspapers and magazines of the period including *The Times*, *New Statesman*, *Telegraph*,

*The Economist, Financial Times, Guardian, Spectator, Express, Mail, Mirror and Sunday Times.*

Each source has its drawbacks: the canvass returns (and other listings) are unlikely to be 100 per cent accurate, as MPs may have deceived even the best canvassers as to their intentions<sup>18</sup> (although given the quality and accuracy of the Thatcher team's predictions we can at least be confident that they were not excessively duped); those to whom we wrote may have forgotten for whom they voted (deliberately in some cases: one confessed that on 'delicate votes of this type I made a point of not remembering how I voted as soon as possible after the event'), or may still, despite the passage of more than twenty years and despite the promise of anonymity, wish to mislead about their past actions; and biographies and press cuttings, in addition to suffering from the same problems of deliberate obfuscation, reveal the votes of only a small minority of Conservative MPs.

Taken together, however, the sources are an excellent (if not perfect) guide to the voting of MPs in the 1975 contest. They provide *some* information about the voting of all but six MPs on the first ballot and all but twelve on the second round. (We lacked some information about the voting of just one MP – the chief whip, Humphrey Atkins – on both rounds.) However, not all of this information was of equal validity. In some cases, for example, an MP's name featured on all the contemporaneous lists as voting for the same candidate, and the MP confirmed that vote to us. In others, we may have had only one contemporaneous record but not the benefit of a letter from the MP (either due to death or a desire not to participate). In yet others, the contemporaneous listings may have been unanimous but the MP claimed to have voted differently. Therefore, in addition to coding each MP with a variable indicating for whom they had voted, we also coded each one with a variable indicating the certainty of that information.

This variable ranged from 1 (those MPs about whose votes we had most information) to 5 (those about whose votes we had least information). For a first-round vote to be classed as level 1 we needed an MP to have appeared on three lists and for that vote to be confirmed to us (or to have featured in a personal account written by the MP). For a first-round vote to be level 2, the MP had to feature in two lists and there had to be some other information confirming their vote (either a letter, personal account or press cutting). For a first-round vote to be level 3, they needed to have appeared in two lists. Importantly, therefore, *for an MP's first round vote to have been classed in any of the top three categories required at least two independent sources of information and – crucially – for there to be no conflicting information.* MPs were classed as level 4 if we had some information about their vote, but either that information was not of sufficient quantity for any of the above categories, or there was some information (however slight) which conflicted with the majority of information.

<sup>18</sup> Behrens, for example, claims that two dozen MPs claimed to support both Heath and Thatcher (*The Conservative Party from Heath to Thatcher*, p. 40).

MPs were classed as level 5 if there was no information or the information was so contradictory as to be extremely unhelpful.

For a second round vote to be classed as level 1 required the MP's vote to have been on the Thatcher team's list and for there to be a letter or other personal account giving confirmation of that vote; to be level 2 required the presence on the Thatcher list plus some other piece of data; to be level 3 required presence on one list or one letter. Again, as with round one, *an MP could only be classed in the top three groupings if there was no conflicting information about his or her vote*. MPs were classed as level 4 if there was some information (again, however slight) which conflicted with the majority information; and as level 5 if there was no information or the information was very contradictory.

These criteria were stringently applied. Several members of Thatcher's campaign team are classed as level 3 simply because we did not have enough data to class them any higher (despite being in no doubt about how they voted); and the slightest piece of conflicting data was sufficient to class an MP as level 4, no matter how overwhelming was the rest of the evidence.

As Tables 1 and 2 show, despite being so stringent, only a small percentage of votes – 16 per cent in round one and 13 per cent in round two – came into the bottom two categories, with but a very small percentage – 4 per cent in round one and 6 per cent in round two – coming into the bottom category, those about whose votes we had next to no idea. Indeed, in both rounds, almost a majority of the votes came into the first two categories.

With the exception of the supporters of Geoffrey Howe, who were very visible, data on candidates other than the main two in each round tended to be slightly harder to confirm (or impossible in the case of the two MPs who abstained in the second round). There were few if any records kept by the minor candidates of their campaign (and, in the case of some, effectively no campaign at all). 'I am afraid I cannot help you,' wrote one, 'I haven't a clue who voted for me and did so badly I never took the trouble to try to find out!' Even so, the top three levels of certainty include more than half of those who abstained in round one, as well as more than half of the supporters of the three minor second-round candidates.

Despite these stringent tests it is possible that some of the data – even some of the data classed as level 1 or 2 – will be incorrect. Indeed, given the various problems inherent in such an exercise it is highly likely that *some* of the data will be incorrect. The results presented in this article report the findings when utilising the top three levels of data, but the overall findings are substantially the same no matter which sets of data are used.<sup>19</sup> The data therefore could potentially be improved, but any such improvements are unlikely materially to alter the findings of the article.

<sup>19</sup> A full analysis of the different data levels is available from the authors on request.

TABLE 1 *Certainty Levels of Round One Voting*

	1 only		1 and 2		1, 2 and 3		1, 2, 3 and 4		All data	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Thatcher	46	35	59	45	110	85	128	98	130	100
Heath	53	45	65	55	108	91	116	97	119	100
Fraser	2	12	3	19	7	44	11	69	16	100
Abstain	2	18	3	27	7	64	11	100	11	100
Total	103	37	130	47	232	84	266	96	276	100



TABLE 2 *Certainty Levels of Round Two Voting*

	1 only		1 and 2		1, 2 and 3		1, 2, 3 and 4		All data	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Thatcher	61	42	74	51	137	94	143	98	146	100
Whitelaw	26	33	36	46	69	87	76	96	79	100
Howe	13	68	13	68	15	79	19	100	19	100
Prior	5	26	6	32	10	53	12	63	19	100
Peyton	4	36	5	45	8	73	9	82	11	100
Abstain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	100
Total	109	39	134	49	239	87	259	94	276	100

## EXPLAINING THE VOTING

The factors which make MPs vote the way they do in leadership contests can usefully be grouped under three heads: the individual-level systematic; the collective systematic; and the individual idiosyncratic.

Individual-level systematic factors relate properties of the candidates to properties of the electors (the MPs). This is akin to the influence that social background or ideological position can have on the vote in general elections. These are the factors for which it is easiest to test: we need to find that candidates draw significantly disproportionate support from one section of the party and have a plausible hypothesis to explain why this should be so.

Collective systematic factors explain why people voted for a candidate but do not relate that explanation to any individual-level characteristic of the voter. These are similar to the evaluations of the candidate that may influence voters in general elections. Most extant explanations of the 1975 contest fall under this head. The argument that Heath was rude, for example, does not claim that Heath was rude only to some or that only some were offended by his behaviour. Rather, it argues that MPs from across the party – of all ages, backgrounds and beliefs – were offended by his behaviour and attitudes. The same applies to arguments about the impact of Heath's electoral appeal.

In the absence of any British Election Study-type data which at the time had asked MPs questions about the factors that influenced them – our more recent correspondence with MPs, whilst illustrative, is not comprehensive enough for empirical analysis<sup>20</sup> – such theories are hard to assess. The best we can do is to attempt to disprove such collective hypotheses by proving individual-level hypotheses. By their very nature, collective hypotheses should apply equally to all electors: if they do not, then it is plausible to argue that other factors are important. If, for example, we discover that there was a high degree of ideological voting this helps downgrade (though not eliminate) the importance of Heath's rudeness. It does not prove that Heath was not rude or socially clumsy – only foolhardy authors would attempt that line of argument – merely that if we find that only one sort of MP – say, right-wing ones – appear to have been alienated from him, then it is at least as plausible to assume that the *cause* of their alienation is not the behaviour of Heath but the ideology of the MP (with Heath's behaviour being used as an *excuse* for, or *rationalization* of, the alienation).

Individual idiosyncratic factors are those which affect individual electors but not in any systematic way (or at least not in any way which it is possible to model accurately). For example, one former MP admits to voting for John Peyton in the second round because 'he and his family were childhood friends and I thought it unlikely that he would get a vote from anybody else. I was nearly

<sup>20</sup> Even if it was comprehensive, it would be unwise to place too much weight on current rationalisations of actions which took place more than two decades ago.

right!<sup>21</sup> Such factors constitute the random noise that bedevils all empirical studies.

This article concentrates on the various individual-level systematic factors which are amenable to testing, whilst recognizing that many other factors – such as the collective or the idiosyncratic – affect the way MPs vote. It begins by examining the factors which appear to have affected voting in the first round of the contest.

## THE FIRST ROUND

### *Non-ideological Influences*

Table 3 shows the relationship between a variety of non-ideological variables and MPs' voting in the first round. The table shows the difference between the candidates' overall support and the support received from any particular group within the parliamentary party. For example, Thatcher received 47 per cent of support overall, but 53 per cent of support from those MPs with constituencies in the south of England; the table thus shows +6. To keep the table as uncluttered as possible, it gives the findings for the two major candidates only.<sup>22</sup> Six groups of variables show statistically significant differences between the candidates: region, ministerial experience, education, length of parliamentary service, age, and marginality.

Region was clearly a factor. MPs with constituencies in the South of England were more likely to back Thatcher and eschew Heath (by +/– 6 percentage points); MPs with constituencies in the North of England or in Scotland or Wales did the opposite.<sup>23</sup> This is almost certainly proof of concerns among some Conservative MPs that Thatcher's appeal would be predominantly to voters in the south of England.<sup>24</sup> Had the MPs in the South of England shared these

<sup>21</sup> Airey Neave received one letter which read: 'It has been reported in the press that Mr Whitelaw aged 57 weighs 16 stone and Mr Prior aged 49 weighs 15 stone 10 lbs. If these figures are correct, I do not think they are fit enough to carry out the duties as Head of the opposition and definitely will not be fit enough to become Prime Minister in a year's time'. It is unfortunately difficult to assess whether any Conservative MPs were swayed by considerations of the candidates' bulk.

<sup>22</sup> Given the problems involved in identifying the supporters of the minor candidates noted above, there are just seven Fraser supporters and just seven abstainers whose certainty rating was 3 or greater. Such small numbers make it very difficult to perform any meaningful analysis. For the record, Fraser's supporters – none of whom were women – tended to be from the right, making Thatcher's description of them as right-wing misogynists seem largely correct (Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, p. 276). The abstainers were more likely to be from the centre.

<sup>23</sup> Region was coded according to the definitions used by the Conservative whips, with Northern English MPs defined as those with constituencies in Cheshire, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Durham, Greater Manchester, Humberside, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Northumberland or Yorkshire.

<sup>24</sup> For example, in between the two rounds the Thatcher campaign team received a letter from a wavering MP outlining two reservations that he had about Thatcher's candidature. The second was, 'How well will she go down in the North and Scotland?' See also Cosgrave, *Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 64–5; and Ramsden, *The Winds of Change*, p. 446.

TABLE 3 *Non-ideological Influences on First Round Voting*

	Heath	Thatcher	N
<i>Region</i>			
Southern England	- 6***	+ 6***	174
Northern England	+ 15*	- 14	39
Scotland and Wales	+ 16	- 21	19
<i>Government experience</i>			
Under Heath	+ 19***	- 19***	65
Permanent backbenchers	- 12**	+ 12**	106
First job after Heath	+ 4	- 3	45
<i>Gender</i>			
Women	- 14	+ 20	6
<i>Education</i>			
Public school	+ 4*	- 3*	174
'Clarendon' school	+ 8	- 4	73
Eton	+ 3	0	38
Oxbridge	+ 3	- 4	155
<i>Parliamentary experience</i>			
< 1970	- 4	+ 5	134
1970-73	- 3	- 1	52
1974 +	+ 14*	- 12	46
<i>Age</i>			
< 50	+ 6*	- 5	125
50 +	- 8	+ 6	107
<i>Marginality</i>			
≤ 15%	+ 3*	- 2	136
15% +	- 5	+ 4	96
All			232

Notes: Table shows results with bottom two levels of data excluded. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

concerns and voted as their Northern, Scottish and Welsh counterparts did, Heath would have won the election. Unfortunately for Heath, not enough Conservative MPs sat for seats outside of Southern England to make an appreciable difference to the result.

There were also noticeable differences according to the ministerial experience of the voter.<sup>25</sup> Those who served under Heath between 1970 and 1974 were more likely to stay loyal to him (+ 19) and to eschew Thatcher. By contrast, those who have never served in government – memorably described by Thatcher's successor as the 'never possessed' – were much more likely to

<sup>25</sup> Ministerial experience was extracted from the list in D. Butler and G. Butler, *British Political Facts* (London: Macmillan, 1994) and excludes service as a parliamentary private secretary.

support her (+ 12). Importantly, this last group constituted almost 40 per cent of the party and more than countered Heath's increased support from those with whom he had served. George Gardiner refers to the contest as the 'backbenchers' revolution', and in this he was right.<sup>26</sup> This difference appears to be evidence of what Foley described as the insider/outsider effect: for candidates running from outside the establishment – as Thatcher was – to attract votes from those outside the establishment (and conversely, for those running from the inside to attract votes from fellow insiders).<sup>27</sup> Evidence for this in other elections is more mixed,<sup>28</sup> but in this case it is likely to have been enhanced by Heath's practice of excluding from his ministerial team many MPs of considerable ability but with whom he disagreed, as well as his limited use of patronage in order to keep sweet those so excluded.<sup>29</sup> This 'ensured a plentiful supply of enemies for Heath'.<sup>30</sup>

The figures for education are less dramatic. Those educated at public (that is, private) schools were more likely to have voted for Heath (+ 4) and eschewed Thatcher (– 3). These differences are not great, but given the preponderance of public school educated MPs in the parliamentary party – more than three-quarters having been so educated – statistically significant none the less. Something similar is true of higher education: those educated at either Oxford or Cambridge – 'Oxbridge' – were less likely to have voted for Thatcher (– 4). Various remarks were made during the contest (and after) about Thatcher's background and, given that she and Heath actually had rather similar backgrounds, especially her appeal, which was described as being 'irredeemably middle-class'.<sup>31</sup> Education may therefore be a measure, however crude, of the class element to the contest, explaining why those from the more socially elite backgrounds were less likely to vote for Thatcher.

Length of parliamentary experience also seems to have been a key influence. The newly-elected MPs – that is, those first elected in the two elections of 1974 – were significantly more likely to have supported the incumbent (+ 14) at the expense of the challenger (– 12). George Gardiner, himself elected in 1974, claimed that the 1974 intake:

were of a different character; its members took a far more detached view of the history of the 1970–74 Government and were far stronger in the opinion that the

<sup>26</sup> Gardiner, *Margaret Thatcher*, chap. 15.

<sup>27</sup> M. Foley, *The Rise of the British Presidency* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), especially chap. 3.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, P. Cowley, 'How Did He Do That? The Second Round of the 1990 Conservative Leadership Contest', in D. M. Farrell, D. Broughton, D. Denver and J. Fisher eds., *British Elections and Parties Yearbook 1996* (London: Frank Cass, 1996); and P. Cowley and J. Garry, 'The British Conservative Party and Europe: The Choosing of John Major', *British Journal of Political Science*, 28 (1998), 473–499.

<sup>29</sup> Norton, *Conservative Dissidents*.

<sup>30</sup> Cosgrave, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 33; see also Kavanagh, *Politics and Personalities*, p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> Hence Ian Gilmour's jibe about the folly of the Conservatives retreating 'behind a privet hedge'. See Foley, *The Rise of the British Presidency*, p. 61; Cosgrave, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 63; and Ramsden, *The Winds of Change*, p. 446.

Conservative Party needed to rediscover its fundamental beliefs if its politics were to be more appealing and more relevant to the needs of ordinary voters, and that if Heath's leadership stood in the way of this then it was he who had to go.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, the opposite appears to have occurred. Over 60 per cent of the 1974 intake supported Heath, with just over a third backing Thatcher. By contrast, those who had been in parliament during the 1970 Parliament were more likely to support the challenger. Rather than reflecting the arrival in parliament of a host of 'Heathmen', this is probably evidence of the newly-elected being more loyal to the incumbent; as one said: 'new MPs nearly always vote for the Leader under which [sic] they were elected'. Similarly (and perhaps for the same reason) the younger MPs (those aged under 50) were more likely to back Heath (+ 6) than were the older MPs. Finally, marginality also appears to have been a factor, with those from the more marginal seats – those with majorities of 15 per cent or less – being slightly (+ 3) more likely to support Heath.

### *Ideological Influences*

The orthodox account of the contest does not deny that there were ideological forces at play in the 1975 contest.<sup>33</sup> But it downplays them, arguing that only a small group of MPs supported Margaret Thatcher for ideological reasons. Cosgrave, for example, argued that ideological concerns, whilst important for some MPs, had 'little influence among the generality of Tory MPs'.<sup>34</sup> Wapshott and Brock talk of a 'small group of ideological dissenters'.<sup>35</sup> If this is true, we should detect some evidence of ideological voting, but it should be marginal.

Table 4 shows the influences of a variety of ideological factors on the contest. The table is in a similar form to Table 3, showing the difference between a candidate's total vote and the percentage received from any group. The table shows a range of measures of ideology. None of these measures is, of itself, a perfect guide to the beliefs of the Conservative MPs (if such a measure even exists); collectively, however, they help us to get a series of insights into the role played by ideology.

The first group of variables draws on the typology of the Conservative party published by Philip Norton in 1990.<sup>36</sup> A typology which analysed the party's ideological divisions as of 1989 is far from ideal for any examination of people's behaviour in 1975, both because individuals' views may have changed and because the typology did not characterise those who had left parliament in the

<sup>32</sup> Gardiner, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 169.

<sup>33</sup> Ideology is, for example, part – albeit usually a small part – of the accounts of Critchley (*A Bag of Boiled Sweets*, p. 139), Behrens (*The Conservative Party from Heath to Thatcher*), Kavanagh (*Politics and Personalities*, p. 69), and Ramsden (*The Winds of Change*, chap. 7).

<sup>34</sup> Cosgrave, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> Wapshott and Brock, *Thatcher*, p. 136. See also B. Evans and A. Taylor, *From Salisbury to Major* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> Norton, 'The Lady's Not For Turning'.

TABLE 4 *Ideological Influences on First Round Voting*

	Heath	Thatcher	N
<i>Norton (1990)</i>			
Thatcherites	- 35***	+ 34***	26
Populists	- 9	+ 16	8
Critics	+ 38***	- 32***	27
Loyalists	+ 2	0	71
<i>Rightish groupings</i>			
Powellites	- 36***	+ 16	19
Most right-wing	- 22*	+ 20*	12
Monday Club	- 39*	+ 15	13
92 Group	- 40***	+ 38***	27
<i>Leftish groupings</i>			
Bow Group	+ 17*	- 11	42
PEST	+ 27***	- 21**	31
<i>1970-74 rebellions</i>			
Rhodesia	- 37***	+ 25**	29
EEC	- 32***	+ 8	20
Immigration	- 44***	+ 38***	33
All			232

Notes: Table shows results with bottom two levels of data excluded. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

intervening period. It is, though, still of some utility both because views do not tend to change that dramatically over time and because, despite gaps, the typology covers more than half of the party of 1975.<sup>37</sup> The table shows the behaviour of four of Norton's groups: the Thatcherites (a combination of neoliberals, pure Thatcherites and old Tory right); the Populists (a small group, reflecting popular attitudes, being left-wing on social issues but right-wing on law-and-order); the Critics (a combination of left-leaning wets and dampers); and the Loyalists (the largest single grouping, who support the party rather than ideological strands of thought). Those Norton classed as Thatcherites voted overwhelmingly for Thatcher (+ 34) and not for Heath (- 35); those classed

<sup>37</sup> Despite this, one reader of an early draft of this article strongly objected to using a typology developed in the late 1980s to analyse behaviour in 1975, arguing that to do so 'prejudged history'. Whilst recognizing the problems, we would argue that finding a relationship between votes in 1975 and ideology in 1990 is extremely revealing. If we find (as we do) that many of those classed by Norton in 1990 as Thatcherite voted for Thatcher in 1975 then this makes it even harder to (a) argue that ideology was not at work in the contest of 1975; and (b) argue that this ideology was not 'Thatcherism', however embryonic or inchoate a concept it might have been at the time. The only way to negate this conclusion is to argue that people's ideological beliefs followed their votes; that is, that having voted for Thatcher, MPs decided to become Thatcherite. This seems unlikely.

as Critics voted overwhelmingly for Heath (+ 38) but not for Thatcher (– 32). The Loyalists split down the middle.

The second group of variables draws on membership of four right-wing groupings in the parliamentary party – groupings which are not mutually exclusive – all drawn from contemporaneous sources.<sup>38</sup> Two of the four – the 92 Group and the Monday Club – are formal organised groupings within the party; the other two are behavioural, based on the way Conservative MPs were voting. The influence of ideology again appears clear. Members of all four of the right-wing groups voted disproportionately for Thatcher and against Heath. At its most dramatic, some 85 per cent of the 92 Group voted for Thatcher (+ 38), leaving just 7 per cent (– 40) to vote for Heath. Even among the grouping which gave most support to Heath – those classed by Norton as the most right-wing – the difference between the behaviour of that grouping and the party *in toto* is – 22 percentage points.

The third set of variables measures membership of two left-leaning groups within the party.<sup>39</sup> Here we see the opposite to the behaviour of the rightish groupings. Members of the Bow Group and PEST (Political, Economic and Social Toryism) both voted disproportionately for Heath (+ 17 and + 27 respectively) and against Thatcher (– 11 and – 21).<sup>40</sup>

The fourth set of variables examines the behaviour of those MPs who rebelled in the 1970 parliament, over the issues of Rhodesian sanctions, membership of the EEC or immigration.<sup>41</sup> The rejection of Heath is again noticeable (– 37, – 32, and – 47), as is the (slightly less dramatic) support for Thatcher (+ 25, + 8, and + 38).

As well as this series of insights into ideology, it would be useful to be able to construct one measure that would allow us to examine the role that ideology played in the contest. Unfortunately, we suffer from a lack of available data. There is, for example, no systematic survey data from the period that we can

<sup>38</sup> The Powellites are those identified in P. Norton, 'Test Your Own Powellism', *Crossbow*, 17 (1976), 10–11. The most right-wing MPs are those identified in P. Norton, *Dissension in the House of Commons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 486. Details of membership of the Monday Club and 92 Group came primarily from papers found in various archives, and used on condition that no individuals be identified. Some 22 per cent of the parliamentary party are identified as a member of one or more of the four groupings.

<sup>39</sup> Details of membership of the Bow Group and PEST came primarily from F. W. S. Craig and E. P. Craig, eds., *The Political Companion*, issues 12 and 15 (Chichester: PRP, 1972, 1973), supplemented by Andrew Roth's *The MPs Chart* (London: Parliamentary Profiles, 1975). Around a quarter of the parliamentary party are identified as a member of one or both of the groupings.

<sup>40</sup> That the figures for the Bow Group are less dramatic than for PEST – both in terms of size and statistical significance – is not surprising. Whereas PEST was overwhelmingly a grouping of the left, the Bow Group was by 1975 more ideologically ambivalent, including, for example, some noticeable neoliberal elements (see Ramsden, *The Winds of Change*, p. 418).

<sup>41</sup> Included are those Members who voted against the government (or were known to have abstained) during the votes on Rhodesia in 1970, 1972 or 1973 (twice), the vote against the principle of entry into the EEC in 1971, and the vote on the Immigration Rules in 1972. See P. Norton, *Dissension in the House of Commons* (London: Macmillan, 1975), division numbers 377, 390, 520, 522, 570, 579.



utilise.<sup>42</sup> The best that we can do, therefore, is to combine the various pieces of data that we do possess, whilst being aware that such data is not ideal.

Table 5 offers nine different constructions of just such a left/right variable. For example, the first classifies MPs solely on the basis of their formal membership of groups, with those in PEST being classed as left-wing, those in the 92 Group or the Monday Club being right-wing. Those who are neither right- nor left-wing are classed as being in the centre.<sup>43</sup> The table shows the percentage of each ideological grouping to support either Heath or Thatcher. Using this definition of ideology, for example, 74 per cent of the left backed Heath, compared to only 9 per cent of the right; 26 per cent of the left backed Thatcher, compared to 79 per cent of the right. The other eight constructions of ideology utilise different, and more comprehensive, combinations of the available data.<sup>44</sup> Such classifications are of necessity somewhat crude. Any attempt at a definitive taxonomy of the party during this period would generate a more sophisticated mapping. The purpose here, however, is to generate typologies sufficiently robust to enable us to test the behaviour of MPs, by comparing them with other variables.

What is striking about Table 5 is the extent to which it matters very little which variant of ideology we utilise. Support for Heath from the left ranges between 71 and 80 per cent (and is always significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level); support for Thatcher from the left ranges between 20 and 30 per cent (and is always significant at the  $p < 0.01$ , and sometimes at the  $p < 0.001$ , level). Support for Heath from the right ranges from between 9 and 15 per cent (always significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level); support for Thatcher from the right ranges from between 73 and 79 per cent (also always significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level).

This underlines the importance of the left/right division. However you measure it, Heath receives disproportionate support from the left but is rejected by most of the right. Thatcher's scores are almost the opposite: she enjoyed disproportionate support from the right but not the left (although she always gets more support from the left than Heath does from the right). The centre split largely down the middle, with slightly more support usually going to Heath (but with the difference between the two usually not being statistically significant).<sup>45</sup> The rest of the article utilises variant number 9 as an overall measure of ideology,

<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, the data used by Donald Searing and Ivor Crewe in their examination of the origins of Thatcherism (see, for example, Crewe and Searing, 'Thatcherism') are not available.

<sup>43</sup> In a (very) few cases, some MPs become classed as both left and right; these are excluded from the analysis.

<sup>44</sup> For obvious reasons – notably, that most of the discontent against the Heath Government came from the right – it is harder to find evidence that places an MP on the left. In an attempt to overcome this problem in the ninth variant we also utilised two left-wing rebellions early in Thatcher's premiership – division numbers 96 and 269 on 18 March 1982 and 13 July 1982 respectively – both of which concerned unemployment benefit. As can be seen from the Table – comparing variants 8 and 9 – this makes very little difference to the figures.

<sup>45</sup> There are two exceptions, variants 3 and 4. In both, Heath receives significantly more support from the centre than does Thatcher. However, in both variants, the right has been defined broadly, the left narrowly. As a result, the 'centre' in effect includes many left-wing Conservative MPs, and

TABLE 5 *Differing Constructions of Left/Right Variables*

	Heath	Thatcher	N
1. Membership of groups only I (Left: PEST; Right: 92 Group, Monday Club)			
Left	74***	26**	31
Centre	49	45	167
Right	9***	79***	34
2. Membership of groups only II (Left: PEST, Bow Group; Right: 92 Group, Monday Club)			
Left	70***	30**	57
Centre	46	47	141
Right	9***	79***	33
3. Membership of groups I plus behavioural groups (Left: PEST; Right: 92 Group, Monday Club, Powellites, Most right-wing)			
Left	74***	26**	31
Centre	52*	43	149
Right	14***	73***	52
4. Membership of groups I, behavioural groups, plus right-wing rebellions (Left: PEST; Right: 92 Group, Monday Club, Powellites, Most right-wing, Rhodesia, EEC, Immigration)			
Left	74***	26**	31
Centre	55**	40**	139
Right	15***	74***	62
5. Membership of groups II, behavioural groups, plus right-wing rebellions (Left: PEST, Bow Group; Right: 92 Group, Monday Club, Powellites, Most right wing, Rhodesia, EEC, Immigration)			
Left	71***	29**	55
Centre	52	42	115
Right	14***	75***	59
6. Membership of groups I, behavioural groups, right-wing rebellions, plus Norton (1990) (Left: PEST, Bow Group, Critics; Right: 92 Group, Monday Club, Powellites, Most right-wing, Rhodesia, EEC, Immigration, Thatcherites)			
Left	80***	20***	45
Centre	52	42	117
Right	15***	75***	67
7. Membership of groups II, behavioural groups, right-wing rebellions, plus Norton (1990) (Left: PEST, Bow Group, Critics; Right: 92 Group, Monday Club, Powellites, Most right wing, Rhodesia, EEC, Immigration, Thatcherites)			
Left	75***	25***	61
Centre	51	43	101
Right	14***	75***	64
8. Membership of groups I, behavioural groups, plus Norton (1990) (Left: PEST, Critics; Right: 92 Group, Monday Club, Powellites, Most right-wing, Thatcherites)			
Left	80***	20***	45
Centre	50	44	126
Right	14***	75***	58

TABLE 5 (cont.)

	Heath	Thatcher	<i>N</i>
9. Membership of groups I, behavioural groups, Norton (1990), plus left-wing rebellions (Left: PEST, Critics, unemployment benefit rebellion; Right: 92 Group, Monday Club, Powellites, Most right-wing, Thatcherites)			
Left	78***	22***	46
Centre	50	44	125
Right	14***	74***	58

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

but as is clear from the table it makes little or no difference which variant is employed. Slice it how you like, there appears to have been a highly significant ideological division in the first round of the 1975 contest.

### *Multivariate Analysis*

Many of the variables identified as appearing to have influenced the voting correlate with each another. For example, Conservative seats in Scotland or Wales were more likely to be marginal; right-wing MPs were more likely never to serve in government, but less likely to have gone to Oxbridge or to a public school; those MPs who had gone to Oxbridge were more likely to sit for safer seats and more likely to serve in government; and, self-evidently, those who came in at the 1974 elections had not served under Heath and tended to be younger.<sup>46</sup> To control for such interrelationships, Table 6 shows the results of a logistic regression where the dependent variable was vote, and entered into the equation as independent variables were those non-ideological variables found to be significant at the bivariate level, along with the overall left/right variable.<sup>47</sup>

Once we control for any interrelationships, some of the non-ideological influences detected using bivariate analysis no longer appear as significant. This is true of age, education, marginality and permanent exclusion from government. Others, however, remain: region (albeit only for the North of England), service under Heath, and being a member of the 1974 intake all exerted independent influences on voting. The most significant variables, however, are the two measuring ideology, both of which were significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level for Heath and at the  $p < 0.01$  level for Thatcher. Taken together, these variables can predict three-quarters or more of the voting that took place in the

(*F*'note continued)

so it is not surprising that it leans towards Heath. Such a finding merely reinforces the importance that ideology played in the contest.

<sup>46</sup> All these relationships were significant at  $p < 0.05$  or lower.

<sup>47</sup> The dependent variable for the first column is coded 1 for those who voted for Thatcher and 0 for those who did not; the same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, for Heath in the second column.

TABLE 6 *Logistic Regression of Voting on the First Round*

	Thatcher vs others	Heath vs others
North	- 0.8986*	1.0004*
Scotland/Wales	- 1.0036	1.0494
Served under Heath	- 1.0893*	1.0107*
Never served	0.1944	- 0.2643
Oxbridge	- 0.3554	0.2320
Public school	- 0.3719	0.5278
Aged > 50	0.1984	- 0.2595
Marginal seat	- 0.2820	0.3930
1974 intake	- 1.0066*	1.1303*
Right	1.0333**	- 1.5333***
Left	- 1.2911**	1.6213***
Constant	1.1213	- 1.4760
Model $\chi^2$	62.085***	79.369***
Proportion predicted correctly	0.75	0.76
$Y = 0$	0.78	0.73
$Y = 1$	0.71	0.79

Notes: Table shows results with bottom two levels of data excluded. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

contest. Indeed, running the equations solely with the ideological variables produced prediction rates of 65 per cent.<sup>48</sup>

This suggests that ideology was more important in determining the outcome of the first round than most accounts allow. First, the data make clear the level of right-wing opposition to Heath and support for Thatcher. Most orthodox accounts do include a mention of, albeit often just a passing reference to, the presence of a right-wing grouping within Thatcher's supporters, but they rarely make clear quite how strong was the support she enjoyed from that group or how large the group was. If we estimate the right to be around a quarter of the party, then Thatcher enjoyed support from approximately three-quarters of that group: this alone accounts for more than fifty MPs. Given that our measure for ideology depends, *faute de mieux*, largely upon behavioural variables – and that most studies have stressed how behaviour is usually the tip of any attitudinal iceberg<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> For the Thatcher equation,  $y = 0$  was 88 per cent;  $y = 1$  was 40 per cent. For the Heath equation,  $y = 0$  was 41 per cent;  $y = 1$  was 93 per cent.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, John Garry, 'The British Conservative Party: Divisions over European Policy', *West European Politics*, 18 (1995), 170–89; and David Baker, Andrew Gamble, Steve Ludlam and David Seawright, 'Backbenchers with Attitude: A Seismic Study of the Conservative Party and Dissent on Europe', in Shaun Bowler, David M. Farrell and Richard S. Katz, eds, *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Government* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999).

– then this is if anything likely to be an underestimate of the quantity of Thatcher's right-wing support.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, most orthodox accounts do not make clear the level of left-wing opposition to Thatcher and support for Heath. There were *some* MPs from the left who backed Thatcher (for what the MP quoted above termed 'negative reasons', and/or for tactical reasons, in order to get Heath out so that Whitelaw could stand) but they almost certainly amounted to no more than ten in total: the vast majority of the left – around 80 per cent – stuck with the incumbent. These MPs are important, both because had they not stuck with him, Heath's defeat would have been even more dramatic, but also, and crucially, because they make it harder to argue that Thatcher's views (or at least the general tenor of her views) were not known and appreciated at the time of the contest.<sup>50</sup> For if they were not, why did the left object so strongly to her?

This is not to argue that there was a coherent body of 'Thatcherites' backing Thatcher or that the left were clear about exactly what it was that they objected to. The available data do not allow us to measure the extent to which the support for Thatcher was 'Thatcherite' rather than 'right-wing' in form. In particular, we lack any reliable measure of the extent to which Thatcher's support was economically neo-liberal, a key component of Thatcherism. But it is to argue that the significance of the ideological variables make it very difficult to present the first round of the 1975 contest as solely or even largely a personal rather than an ideological matter. Ideology – however defined – was clearly important.

Nor is this to dismiss the orthodox view. The data lend some support to the more traditional explanation of the contest. First, there is the proportion of voters whose behaviour is not explained by individual-level factors, including a large number of MPs from the centre of the party for whom ideology – as measured here – could not be a factor. Whilst not a majority, these MPs still constitute around a quarter of the parliamentary party, some seventy MPs, and enough to make the difference between success and failure. Collective factors – such as electoral defeat or Heath's behaviour – might well have been the motivating force behind the voting of these MPs. Furthermore, the percentage of Thatcher voters predicted by the logistic regression is the lowest of the four prediction figures. Thatcher, therefore, more than Heath, attracted supporters whose votes were not the product of these individual-level factors, something which also chimes with the orthodox view. But even here around seven out of every ten votes for Thatcher can be explained not by reference to anti-Heath factors but by a combination of ideology, intake, experience and region, factors which the orthodox account rarely if ever mentions.

<sup>50</sup> Such a view came out strongly in many of the letters from those who backed Heath in the first round, of which the following is typical: 'in my judgement, so long as Mr Heath was Party Leader, he would continue to carry the banner of One Nation Conservatism in which I have always believed, while Mrs Thatcher would not do so ... Her stance was too far to the Right and her opinions were often narrow-minded and over-ideological'.

## THE FLOW OF THE VOTE

By gaining an eleven vote lead in the first round Thatcher is said to have attracted enough ‘momentum’ to prevent any of the four newcomers to the contest from overtaking her. This phrase is much used in accounts of the contest, but it is rarely defined.<sup>51</sup> Such momentum appears to have derived from three sources. In addition to the benefits that came from having an existing and experienced campaign team whilst others tried to organise theirs from scratch, Thatcher also benefited from a feeling among some MPs that anyone brave enough to challenge the incumbent should not then be denied the prize,<sup>52</sup> as well as from a wish among others to get the contest over with as quickly as possible.<sup>53</sup> Yet as well as gaining votes from elsewhere it would have been possible for her to lose votes, as those MPs who had backed Thatcher in the first round in order to depose Heath switched their votes towards their favoured candidates.

The data reveal that she did lose some votes. As Figure 1 shows, 11 per cent of those who backed her on the first round switched to one of the other four candidates on the second (the majority of these going to Whitelaw). But this was more than compensated for by the arrival of nearly a quarter (22 per cent) of those who voted for Heath in the first round, along with about half of those who had voted for Fraser or abstained. In itself this would have been sufficient for victory, but the result was made even more convincing by over a quarter of Heath’s supporters transferring their support to Howe, Prior or Peyton (these three gaining nearly all of their support from those who had backed Heath in round one). Whitelaw thus received barely half of Heath’s support along with just a handful of votes from elsewhere. As a result, Thatcher’s victory on the second round was decisive. Not only did she fulfil the requirements for victory on the second round of the contests – the support of a majority of those entitled to vote – she also fulfilled the stricter requirements necessary for victory on the *first* round: the support of a majority of those entitled to vote and for 15 per cent more of the votes of those entitled to vote than any other candidate.

As with the initial decision to vote, the decision to stay with or defect from one candidate may be driven by all sorts of collective or idiosyncratic factors, such as the desire to reward Thatcher’s initial decision to stand, or to wrap up the contest as quickly as possible. Similarly, evaluations of the candidates might have been important. Interestingly, many of those who responded to our enquiries explained their decision not to vote for Whitelaw on precisely these grounds. One claimed that he could see Whitelaw as having no electoral appeal; another was concerned that Whitelaw would give away ‘too many slip catches’;

<sup>51</sup> Thatcher puts the phrase in quotation marks: ‘without knowing it, I had what the Americans call “momentum”’ (Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, p. 278).

<sup>52</sup> Gardiner, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 198. Or as Norman St John-Stevas put it: ‘She had belled the cat and had reaped the reward of her boldness’ (*The Two Cities* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 17).

<sup>53</sup> As one MP wrote: ‘I felt it was in the best interests of the Party to achieve a clear cut result in the second round.’

a third described Whitelaw as a ditherer, unable to make up his mind.<sup>54</sup> One MP of the period summed it up in a crisp (if sexist) phrase: 'the choice was between a woman and an old woman'. The MP concerned chose the woman.

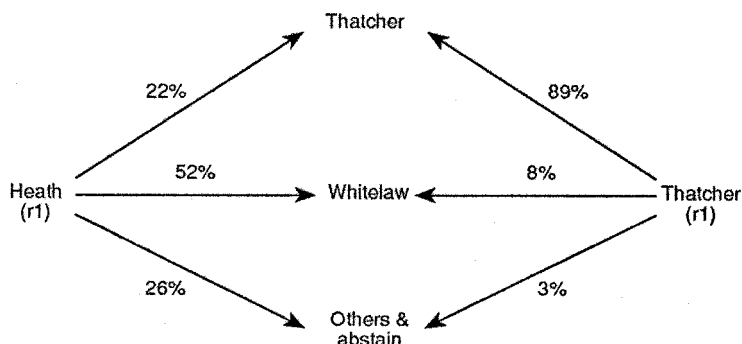


Fig. 1.

But there may also be individual-level factors at work. Again, if we find that only a certain sort of Conservative MP stayed with or defected from a candidate, then we can plausibly argue that factors other than the collective may be at work. Four parts of the flow of the vote are of sufficient size to facilitate analysis. These are the three broad groupings into which Heath's first-round vote split (that is, those who went on to vote for Thatcher, those who went on to back Whitelaw, and those who went on to vote for one of the other three minor candidates or to not vote) as well as those MPs who voted for Thatcher in the first round but then defected from her in the second round.

Table 7 shows the significant characteristics of each of the first three groups. The table is in a similar format to the earlier tables, showing the difference between the overall percentage and the percentage from any one grouping. (To simplify the table, only groups of variables which showed any significant differences have been displayed). Four types of variables show significant differences between the candidates (and especially between those who switched to Thatcher or Whitelaw): ministerial experience, education, parliamentary experience and ideology.

Of those who voted for Heath in round one, those who had served under him in government were more likely to back Whitelaw in the second round (+ 12). Similarly, those who voted for Heath and went to a public school were more likely to vote for Whitelaw and not Thatcher in the second round. When we

<sup>54</sup> Whitelaw appears to have shared many of these doubts. Lunching with the editor of the *Guardian* shortly after the contest (9 April 1975), he confessed that he was not sorry that he had not won and 'thought he probably didn't have the capacity to be a good Conservative leader' (*The Hetherington Papers* (22/7). See also W. Whitelaw, *The Whitelaw Memoirs* (London: Aurum Press, 1989), pp. 142–3.

TABLE 7 *Characteristics of Heath Vote by Second-Round Vote*

	Whitelaw	Thatcher	Others	N
<i>Government experience</i>				
Served under Heath	+ 12*	- 9	- 4	39
<i>Education</i>				
Public school	+ 1	- 2	0	75
'Clarendon' school	+ 17*	- 15*	- 1	32
Eton	+ 17	- 15	0	16
<i>Parliamentary experience</i>				
Pre-1970	+ 15**	- 12**	- 3	51
1974	- 26**	+ 22**	+ 3	23
<i>Ideology</i>				
Left	+ 10	- 16**	+ 5	34
Centre	- 3	+ 11**	- 9	49
Right	- 38*	+ 7	+ 30	7

*Note:* Table shows results with bottom two levels of data excluded. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

concentrate on the behaviour of those educated at the more elite public schools the differences become even sharper, and are worth + 17/- 15 for those educated at 'Clarendon' schools.<sup>55</sup> Date of entry to parliament also exerted a significant effect on the flow of the vote. Those who voted for Heath in round one and who had entered parliament before 1970 were more likely to vote for Whitelaw (+ 15) rather than Thatcher (- 12) in round two. Those who had voted for Heath in round one and who came in at one of the 1974 elections, however, did the opposite: they were more likely to vote for Thatcher (+ 22) than Whitelaw (- 26) in round two.

There were also ideological differences. The (few) right wingers who backed Heath in the first round were significantly less keen than others to vote for Whitelaw (- 38); whereas the left were more likely to stick with the heir apparent (+ 10) and not vote for Thatcher (- 16). Perhaps the most interesting element of the ideological flow, however, is that Thatcher received disproportionate support from those centrists who had backed Heath in round one (+ 11).

What of those who backed Thatcher and then defected in the second round? Despite dealing with a small number of cases ( $n = 12$ ), there are, as Table 8 shows, still some significant differences between those who stayed and those who defected. Education, again, appears to have been important: those educated at public schools, and particularly at the more elite public schools, were more likely to defect from Thatcher after the first round (+ 12 for those educated at Clarendon schools, + 28 for those educated at Eton). Date of entry also seems

<sup>55</sup> 'Clarendon' schools are the leading public schools, as identified by the Clarendon Commission in the 1860s.



TABLE 8 *Characteristics of Thatcher Defectors*

	Defectors	<i>N</i>
<i>Education</i>		
Public school	+ 5*	73
'Clarendon' school	+ 12*	31
Eton	+ 28***	18
<i>Parliamentary experience</i>		
Pre-1970	+ 5*	67
1974	- 11*	25
<i>Ideology</i>		
Left	+ 29**	10
Centre	- 1	52
Right	- 4	43

*Note:* Table shows results with bottom two levels of data excluded. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

to have been a factor: the more experienced MPs were more likely to defect from Thatcher (+ 5 for those who came in before 1970), whilst the more recently elected stayed with her (- 11 for those who came in between 1970 and 1973). And ideology mattered: the small number of left-wingers who supported Thatcher in the first round were more likely to defect in the second (+ 29), almost certainly further confirmation of negative/tactical voting by some left-wing MPs in the first round.

#### THE SECOND ROUND

##### *Non-ideological Influences*

Having examined the characteristics that determined the flow of the vote, it is now possible to examine the end product: support for the candidates in the second round. As before, we begin with the non-ideological factors (see Table 9). As we would expect from our analysis of the first round and the subsequent flow of the vote, three groups of variables show significant differences between the candidates: ministerial experience, education and parliamentary experience.<sup>56</sup>

Those who served under Heath were less likely to vote for Thatcher (- 23)

<sup>56</sup> As with the first round, it is difficult to make any distinctions between those who backed either of the individual minor candidates, since the *n* involved is too small. Broadly speaking, Howe's support was younger and less experienced; Peyton, by contrast, tended to draw disproportionate support from the older members.

TABLE 9 *Non-ideological Influences on Second-Round Voting*

	Thatcher	Whitelaw	Others	N
<i>Region</i>				
Southern England	0	- 2	+ 1	176
Northern England	0	+ 3	- 3	44
Scotland and Wales	+ 1	+ 8	- 9	19
<i>Government experience</i>				
Under Heath	- 23***	+ 20***	+ 4	68
Permanent backbenchers	+ 12***	- 9**	- 3	106
First job after Heath	+ 8	- 11	+ 2	49
<i>Gender</i>				
Women	+ 23	- 9	- 14	5
<i>Education</i>				
Public school	- 6**	+ 4*	+ 2	180
'Clarendon' school	- 17***	+ 14**	+ 4	73
Eton	- 24**	+ 20**	+ 4	39
Oxbridge	- 4	+ 3	+ 1	163
<i>Parliamentary experience</i>				
< 1970	- 4	+ 5*	- 1	141
1970-73	+ 9	- 5	- 4	50
1974 +	+ 3	- 10	+ 7	48
<i>Age</i>				
< 50	- 3	+ 1	+ 1	136
50 +	+ 4	- 2	- 2	103
<i>Marginality</i>				
≤ 15%	0	+ 3	- 2	139
15% +	+ 1	- 4	+ 3	100
All				239

Notes: Table shows results with bottom two levels of data excluded. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

and more likely to back Whitelaw (+ 20). Similarly, those who never held office were more likely to vote for Thatcher (+ 12) but not Whitelaw (- 9). The insider/outsider split remained, therefore, even after any ties of loyalty to the incumbent had gone.

Those educated at public school were more likely to vote for Whitelaw (+ 4) and not Thatcher (- 6). However, when we concentrate on the behaviour of those educated at the more elite public schools the differences become even sharper, reaching - 24/+ 20 amongst those educated at Eton. As we saw above, education was a factor both in determining which MPs switched from Heath to Whitelaw as well as which ones defected from Thatcher after the first round. The 'class effect' detected using education on the first round of the contest - which anyway disappeared once multivariate techniques were used - was

neither as strong nor as significant as this; and given the way the figures increase as the type of education becomes more exclusive it is hard to dismiss this as anything other than a class effect. Of the three serious candidates – that is, Thatcher, Heath and Whitelaw – Whitelaw was the only one to have gone to a public school (Winchester). Thatcher frequently complained about the way she was treated by the ‘grandeers’ of the party, and the data appear to show that their objection to her was strong enough to affect the way they voted.<sup>57</sup>

The loyalty effect seen in the first round among the 1974 intake did not occur in the second round (which appears to confirm that it was just such an effect), with the only significant effect of experience being that those who entered the Commons before 1970 showed a preference for Whitelaw (+ 5). The difference between the way that ‘loyalty’ appears to have worked in different rounds implies that it may be more complicated than is often suggested.<sup>58</sup> Instead of there being one loyalty effect, there appear to have been two. The first – which is what Foley calls the insider/outsider effect – is a form of loyalty to the regime: this explains why those who had served with Heath were more likely both to back him and then to back Whitelaw. The second – which is loyalty to the individual – explains why those Conservative MPs elected in 1974 were more likely to back Heath but then not to back Whitelaw. Having come in on Mr Heath’s coat-tails – albeit rather small coat-tails – they felt they owed him their loyalty; once he had gone, however, they owed Mr Whitelaw nothing.

### *Ideological Influences*

Table 10 shows the impact of the ideological variables. As in round one, ideology was important, but not in exactly the same way. Thatcher received disproportionate support from the Thatcherites (+ 32) but was rejected by the Critics (– 41). Whitelaw, by contrast, received support from the Critics (+ 29) – as did the Others (+ 12) – but not the Thatcherites (– 25). The various rightish groupings continue to show differences between the candidates – Thatcher, for example, does disproportionately well among all four – but with only one, the 92 Group, are the differences statistically significant (+ 26 for Thatcher, – 19 for Whitelaw). Similarly, Thatcher received disproportionate support from all three groups of rebels, but only in the case of the immigration rebellions were these differences significant (+ 25 for Thatcher, – 17 for Whitelaw).

The two leftish groupings also continue to show differences, rejecting Thatcher (– 24 and – 30), with the members of PEST more likely to plump for Whitelaw (+ 23) and the members of the Bow Group more likely to go for the other three candidates (+ 14). Most of these Bow Group members voted for Howe, as a result of his close links with the Group.<sup>59</sup> The overall ideological

<sup>57</sup> Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, p. 268.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Jesse’s description of loyalty to the leader as a ‘Hobbesian’ fear of the unknown (‘Thatcher’s Rise and Fall’).

<sup>59</sup> See G. Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty* (London: Macmillan, 1994), chap.3.

TABLE 10 *Ideological Influences on Second-Round Voting*

	Thatcher	Whitelaw	Others	N
<i>Norton (1990)</i>				
Thatcherites	+ 32***	- 25**	- 6	26
Populists	+ 29	- 29	0	7
Critics	- 41***	+ 29***	+ 12*	31
Loyalists	+ 9	- 8	0	71
<i>Rightish groupings</i>				
Powellites	+ 10	- 7	- 1	18
Most right-wing	+ 25	- 20	- 3	11
Monday Club	+ 5	- 14	+ 9	13
92 Group	+ 26**	- 19*	- 7	29
<i>Leftish groupings</i>				
Bow Group	- 24***	+ 10	+ 14**	46
PEST	- 30***	+ 23**	+ 7	33
<i>1970-74 Rebellions</i>				
Rhodesia	+ 15	- 15	0	29
EEC	+ 10	- 10	0	21
Immigration	+ 25**	- 17*	- 9	34
<i>Overall</i>				
Left	- 35***	+ 27***	+ 8	50
Centre	+ 4	- 1	- 2	127
Right	+ 23***	- 20***	- 2	59
All				239

Notes: Table shows results with bottom two levels of data excluded. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

scales, similarly, show a continuing ideological divide. The left supported Whitelaw (+ 27) at the expense of Thatcher (- 35), whilst the right backed Thatcher (+ 23) at the expense of Whitelaw (- 20). As in the first round, then, ideology appears to have been an important divide between the candidates.

### *Multivariate Analysis*

As with the first round, it is necessary to conduct multivariate analysis of the variables in order to take into account any relationships between the independent variables. Table 11 therefore shows the results of logistic regressions, with variables which were shown to be significant at the bivariate level entered as independent variables and with second round vote as the dependent variable.<sup>60</sup> Two of the variables shown to be significant at a bivariate level – never having served in government and entry before 1970 – cease to be significant. Four others

<sup>60</sup> The first column shows those who voted for Thatcher coded 1, and all others coded 0; the same, *mutatis mutandis*, applies for Whitelaw in the second column.

TABLE 11 *Logistic Regression of Voting on the Second Round*

	Thatcher vs others	Whitelaw vs others
Served under Heath	- 0.8771*	0.6322
Never served	0.3879	- 0.3444
'Clarendon' school	- 1.1667***	0.8994**
Entered before 1970	0.2391	0.0853
Right	0.9026*	- 1.3509*
Left	- 1.6839***	1.1219**
Constant	0.7394*	- 1.3797***
Model $\chi^2$	63.367***	46.783***
Proportion predicted correctly	0.73	0.77
$Y = 0$	0.57	0.92
$Y = 1$	0.85	0.43

Notes: Table shows results with bottom two levels of data excluded. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

remain. Having served under Heath continues to be a factor preventing people from voting for Thatcher, even after Heath had ceased to be leader. Having been to a Clarendon school predisposed people not to support Thatcher but instead to support Whitelaw.<sup>61</sup> And ideology again comes across as important (albeit not as significant as in round one): the right backing Thatcher, the left Whitelaw. Taken together, these variables predict around three-quarters of the voting.

As with our analysis of the first round, the data lend some support to the orthodox account of the contest. Thatcher suffers very few defections after the first round and centrists within Heath's first round support were disproportionately likely to move to her in the second round rather than to Whitelaw. This is consistent with the idea of Margaret Thatcher establishing 'momentum' (however defined) as a result of her success in the first round.

However, not all MPs were affected by this 'momentum' in the same way. The more socially elite, those who served with Heath in government and those on the left of the party were noticeably less moved by Thatcher's courage or by a desire to wrap the contest up as quickly as possible. Again, these factors – rarely if ever mentioned in the extant accounts of the contest – explain a high proportion of the votes cast in the second round.

## CONCLUSION

The orthodox account of how Margaret Thatcher became leader of the

<sup>61</sup> Separate runs, using different measures of education produce similar results, but the proportion explained is highest when using Clarendon schools as the independent variable.

Conservative party has, as Mark Wickham-Jones has pointed out, important consequences for Conservative party historiography:

For supporters, the fact that a non-Thatcherite party elected Margaret Thatcher as leader helps to explain the slow progress Thatcherites enjoyed in many policy areas ... For critics of Thatcherism the thesis that the leadership election result was accidental absolves them of blame. A minority had captured the party.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, the orthodox view of the contest was said to have been shared by Thatcher herself, leading to her harbouring doubts about the legitimacy of victory and for 'a long time the existence of such doubts vitiated her leadership'.<sup>63</sup>

This article is not – or is at least not intended to be – an attack on the orthodox account. Much of that orthodoxy is unchallengeable. In the first round of the contest Margaret Thatcher almost certainly benefited from the strength of anti-Heath feeling within the parliamentary party and the ability of her excellent campaign team to persuade or cajole even the most unlikely of MPs to support her. In the second round she almost certainly benefited from what – for want of a better term – can be termed momentum.

Some of the data analysed in this article lend support to this explanation of her victory. There were some left-wing MPs, and considerably more centrist MPs, who refused to support Heath in the first round, demonstrating the ability of Heath to alienate those who should have been his natural supporters (with the left-wing defections from Thatcher after the first round providing further evidence of anti-Heath voting). Indeed, the data help demonstrate quite how unpopular Heath had become. His support was bolstered by three (over-lapping) types of loyalty vote: from those on the left of the party (showing loyalty to the ideology); those with whom he had served in government (loyalty to the regime); and those who had come in at the 1974 election (loyalty to the leader). Had he not enjoyed disproportionate support from these three groups, Heath would have fared much worse than he did, and Thatcher might well have won outright on the first round. Furthermore, the data also reveal a centrist surge from Heath towards Thatcher between the first and second rounds, almost certainly evidence of 'momentum'. And in both the first and second rounds a substantial minority of the votes of MPs cannot be predicted by reference solely to individual-level factors. These MPs could be – and almost certainly were – the difference between victory and defeat.

Yet the data also suggest that a series of substantial caveats need to be inserted into the orthodox account. The collective factors stressed by the orthodox account were complemented by a series of individual-level factors. Ministerial experience, education, region and ideology exerted independent influences on the votes in one or both of the rounds of the contest. Ideology, in particular, was a key determinant of voting in both rounds of the contest (and of the flow of the

<sup>62</sup> Wickham-Jones, 'Right Turn', p. 76.

<sup>63</sup> P. Cosgrave, *Thatcher: The First Term* (London: Bodley Head, 1985), p. x.

vote between rounds of the contest). The right – however defined – strongly supported Thatcher; the left – however defined – Heath and then Whitelaw. These individual-level factors did not merely operate at the margins: taken together, they enable us correctly to predict around three-quarters of the votes in both rounds of the contest.

Unfortunately, we do not have the data to enable us to test the extent to which the right-wing support for Thatcher (and opposition to Heath and Whitelaw) was 'Thatcherite'. Some of it will have been, but we have no way of knowing how much. But the presence of an ideological divide – between the left and the right of the party – is indisputable. Of course, on its own, this divide would not have been enough. The votes of the right alone would not have delivered the leadership of the party to Thatcher. But the right gave her a cohesive and substantial bloc of support, on to which she could add votes from the centrists and left-wingers dissatisfied with Heath's leadership. A contest fought between centrists and left-wingers alone would have resulted in a Heath victory, however fed up many of them were with him.

To present the 1975 contest as an accident (or a series of accidents), then, is misleading, not because it is incorrect (because it is not), but because it obscures as much as it reveals. Accidents, courage, manipulation and personality all played their part, but Margaret Thatcher's victory in 1975 was not due to these factors alone. Margaret Thatcher would not have become Conservative party leader had she received support from the right of the party and from nowhere else; but neither would accidents, courage, manipulation and personality alone have been enough. She won, to be sure, because she was not Ted Heath but she did not win solely because she was not Ted Heath. The 1975 Conservative leadership contest, therefore, was both peasants' uprising *and* religious war.