

Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes

in a Changing Britain

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The Conservatives' Record on Physical Safety and Security

Kerris Cooper and Nicola Lacey

In terms of safety and security policy by means of criminal justice reform, the Conservatives made commitments in both their election manifestos to focus on reducing domestic violence, to increase efficiency and reduce corruption in prisons and to review the law on hate crime. Like many other policy areas progress has undoubtedly been hindered by the focus on Brexit as well as the impact of austerity. Since 2015, we found that:

- There have been important policy plans and developments in the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy which set out a range of preventive and protective measures and coercive controlling behaviour has become a criminal offence.
- Other important policy developments include the Serious Violence Strategy which proposed a multi-agency public health approach to reducing violence.
- In relation to race and the criminal justice system (CJS) the Lammy Review produced 35 recommendations.
- The Prison Safety and Reform Review also set out planned improvements to prison standards.
- Expenditure on police services, prisons and law courts flat-lined, though this was following a previous period of significant decline in spending.
- There is some evidence of short-term deterioration in policy inputs and outputs so far: police clear up rates have declined, prisons have become less safe for both prisoners and staff and the time taken to charge on domestic abuse related cases has increased over the last three years. Domestic violence homicides have reached a five year peak and knife crime continues to rise.
- The cumulative effects of disinvestment not only in criminal justice policies but, also in the health, housing, youth services, social care and other areas bearing on safety and security pose a significant challenge. This will further inhibit the ability to take the multi-agency holistic approach required to tackle many of the most serious problems including interpersonal violence and violence against women.

What were the Conservatives' aims and goals?

We have two party manifestos to draw on during this period and there are some common themes to both:

One clear focus is that of domestic violence. In 2015 this took the form of pledging to 'ensure a secure future for specialist FGM and forced marriage units, refuges and rape crisis centres', as well as specialist training in this area and a new Victims' Law to enshrine the rights of victims. In the 2017 manifesto the Conservative government committed to new laws to protect victims of domestic violence.

A second theme is prisons and community sentences, focussing on efficiency with the 2015 manifesto promising to close old inefficient prisons and replace them with larger modern ones, as well as tackle corruption, drug use and mobile phone use in prisons. There were also promises to improve the use of technology to monitor offender and to introduce a new semi-custodial sentence. In the 2017 manifesto commitments were made to reform both prisons and community sentences. Both manifestos made a commitment to review treatment and sentences for women offenders.

Finally, both manifestos made a commitment to review the law in relation to hate crime and to extend its scope to include disability, sexual orientation and transgender identity.

What did the Conservatives do?

There has been a lot of policy development during this period:

Serious violence

The Conservative government published a Serious Violence Strategy in April 2018, acknowledging the complex and multifaceted nature of the problem and the need to coordinate efforts across different agencies. The strategy includes an £11m investment in an Early Intervention Youth Fund and the establishment of a National County Lines Co-ordination Centre. However, this funding has to be shared across more than 400 local authorities and takes place in the context of large educational and local authority cuts, as well as rising rates of school exclusion.

Violence against women and girls

In December 2015 for the first time 'coercive or controlling behaviour' was made punishable by up to five years in prison. This followed the criminalisation earlier in the same year of 'revenge pornography'. In 2017 the government announced it was scrapping legal aid restrictions for victims of domestic violence, after reports that the cuts had had a substantial impact on the number of victims withdrawing their complaints. Also in 2017 the Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Act 2017 was passed to ratify the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women. In 2017-18 the Home Office and Ministry of Justice held a consultation on domestic abuse, following on from the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG) 2016-20. The consultation was followed in early 2019 by the publication of a Domestic Abuse Bill. The Bill defines domestic abuse and preserves the consultation's recognition of the need for multi-agency co-ordination. Among its other provisions are a bar on the cross-examination of victims by their abusers;

the appointment of an independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner to tackle the issues across government; protection orders compelling offenders to take rehabilitation programmes; and a new legal duty on councils to provide secure accommodation for those experiencing domestic abuse.

Prisons

In 2016 the MOJ review *Prison Safety and Reform* was published outlining reforms for the provision of adequate prison standards, a more empowering framework for governors, better safety and an improved estate as well as better training and support for staff. Notwithstanding these policy aspirations the combination of overcrowding and budgetary constraints has led to a decline in standards of safety, security, health, hygiene, order and basic decency within prisons as highlighted in increasingly critical reports by the Prisons Inspectorate. This included a prison riot in Birmingham in 2016, prisoner escapes, and the Minister of Justice's decision to impose direct MOJ control and install an entirely new team of management and staff at Birmingham; as well as the issuing of an urgent protocol on the state of HMP Bedford in 2018 and a large scale walkout of prison staff in protest at levels of violence within prisons in September 2018.

Race and the Criminal Justice System

An independent review of the treatment of BAME individuals in the CJS was led by David Lammy MP and published in September 2017. The review highlights the racial disproportionality in policing practices and high levels of distrust in police and lawyers which inhibit arrangements such as plea bargains and contribute further to disproportionate outcomes. It makes a number of policy recommendations, many of them relating to better coordination between the CJS and other services at the local level, placing a burden of proof on CJS institutions to justify disproportionate outcomes. The Government responded to the review by making several recommendations and one year later the MOJ published an update with a commitment to embed a dedicated MOJ team to coordinate work on ethnic and racial disparity in the CJS and review action thus far on each of Lammy's 35 recommendations.

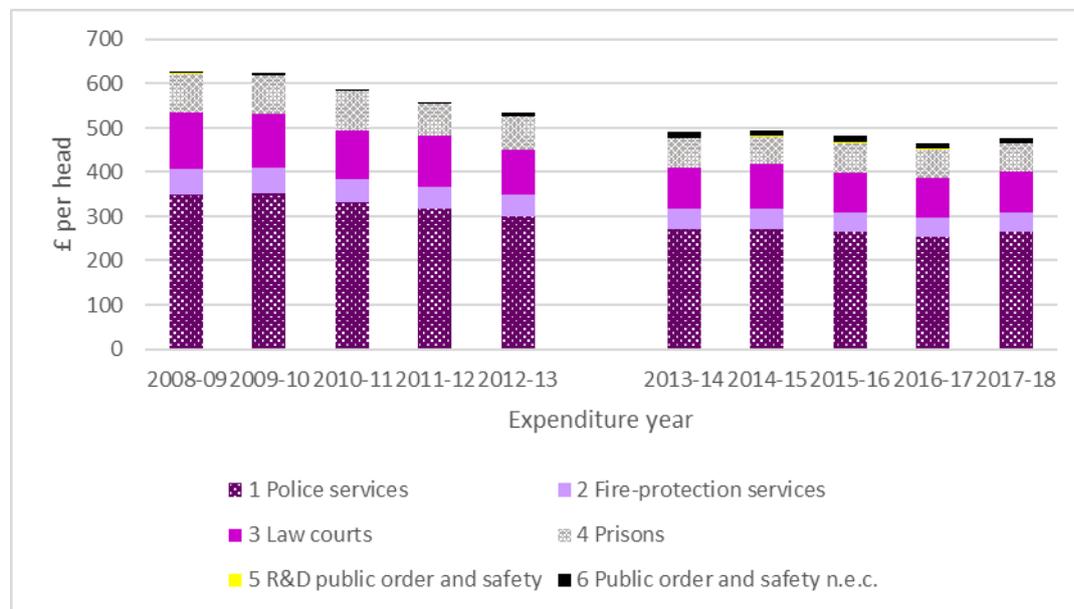
Hate crime

There has been no legislative change in relation to hate crime. The 2016 action plan against hate crime was updated in 2018, partly prompted by a rise in hate crime around specific events such as the Westminster Bridge terrorist attack. The report emphasises online crime and promises a White Paper to tackle it. In addition there is increased emphasis on offences against the LGBTQ community. In 2018 the Law Commission launched a comprehensive reassessment of the adequacy of the definition and scope of the law on aggravated offences, looking for example at the option of extending their reach to cover factors such as disability and transgender. The category of hate crime is being steadily expanded, with the Law Commission's current review including crime motivated by misogyny, misandry and ageism. However, senior police figures have argued that police do not have the resources to treat misogyny as a hate crime and should instead prioritise tackling violence.

How much did the Conservatives spend?

Overall expenditure on public order and safety remained flat between 2015/16 and 2017/18, however this is following the marked decline in expenditure from 2009/10 to 2013/14.

Figure 1 Total identifiable expenditure per capita on public order and safety in the UK, in 2017/18 prices

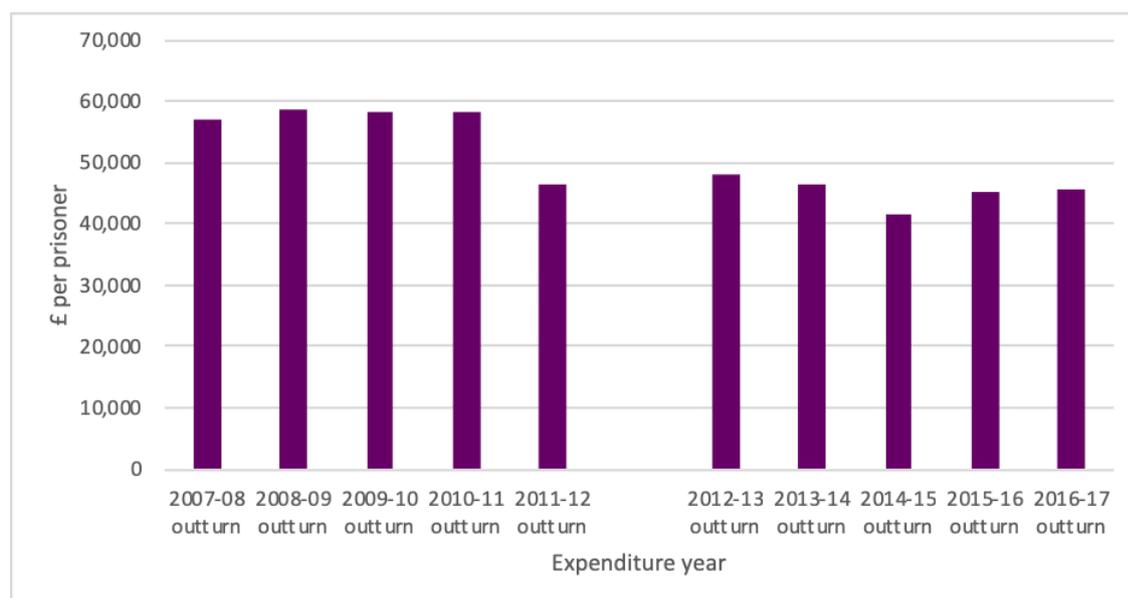


Source: Author's calculations based on the following public expenditure data: HM Treasury (2013) Chapter 5 tables; HM Treasury (2018) Chapter 5 tables

Note: Gap in chart indicates break in data taken from different PESA editions.

In terms of real spending, the previous decline in spending saw central government grants for police fall by over 20% in total between 2010/11 and 2014/15, so the flattening out of expenditure started from an already lower base compared to the Coalition government period. This decline in central government grants for police has had an uneven impact on different areas, with some areas more able to offset these reductions with increases in the police precept within the council tax. The National Audit Office has recommended that the funding formula is reviewed in order to more fairly take account of forces' local circumstances including the proportion of funding received from local taxation and levels of demand, after finding the funding formula to be ineffective in taking into account need. In the Spring 2019 Statement the Chancellor promised an additional £100 million funding for police forces in areas worst affected by violent crime. This has been welcomed by senior police figures but still falls well short of the £200-300 million police chiefs asked for. Additionally the 2019 Spending Review included a commitment to fund the recruitment of 20,000 new police officers, as well as a 5% real terms increase in MOJ funding and an extra £80m for the Crown Prosecution Service.

Figure 2 Expenditure on prisons in England and Wales, per prisoner, in 2017/18 prices



Source: Author’s calculations based on: HM Treasury (2013) Chapter 10 tables; HM Treasury (2018) Chapter 10 tables and House of Commons (2018) UK Prison Population Statistics. Note: Gap in chart indicates break in data taken from different PESA editions.

Spending on prisons has recovered slightly after a decline between 2008/09 and 2011/12, following additional funding of £291m over three years from the Autumn 2016 statement, in attempts to address the decline in prison safety. Nevertheless, 2016/17 expenditure per prisoner was below that of 2007/08 levels.

Assessing the resources dedicated to addressing violence against women is difficult as women’s refuges for instance are funded from a variety of sources. There is evidence that the £80m announced in the refreshed VAWG strategy (£20m per year over the remainder of parliament) has not benefitted all local authorities equally, with huge variation in the amount of funding per head of the population and some 50 local authorities received nothing. Again looking further back, local authority funding for domestic violence refuges has declined by 24% since 2010, with poorer areas faring worse. In addition to the ring-fenced VAWG funding, in the Spring 2017 budget the Government announced an additional £20 million funding over two years for services addressing domestic violence, though the Women’s Budget Group cautioned that this falls well short of the level of funding required to meet existing need.

As safety and security depends on social policies beyond those specific to the CJS, austerity measures across other policy areas are also relevant. Cuts to local authority budgets have meant a decline in spending on youth services between 2010 and 2019, resulting in the closure of 160 youth centres and loss of around 900 youth workers. According to the Women’s Budget Group central government funding for local government fell by 30.6% in 2017/18, leaving less money available for a range of local government services. The funding of third sector organisations has also been affected by austerity. These wider cuts are important

and may inhibit potential progress of the strategies and funding that have been dedicated to for example addressing violent crime and violence against women.

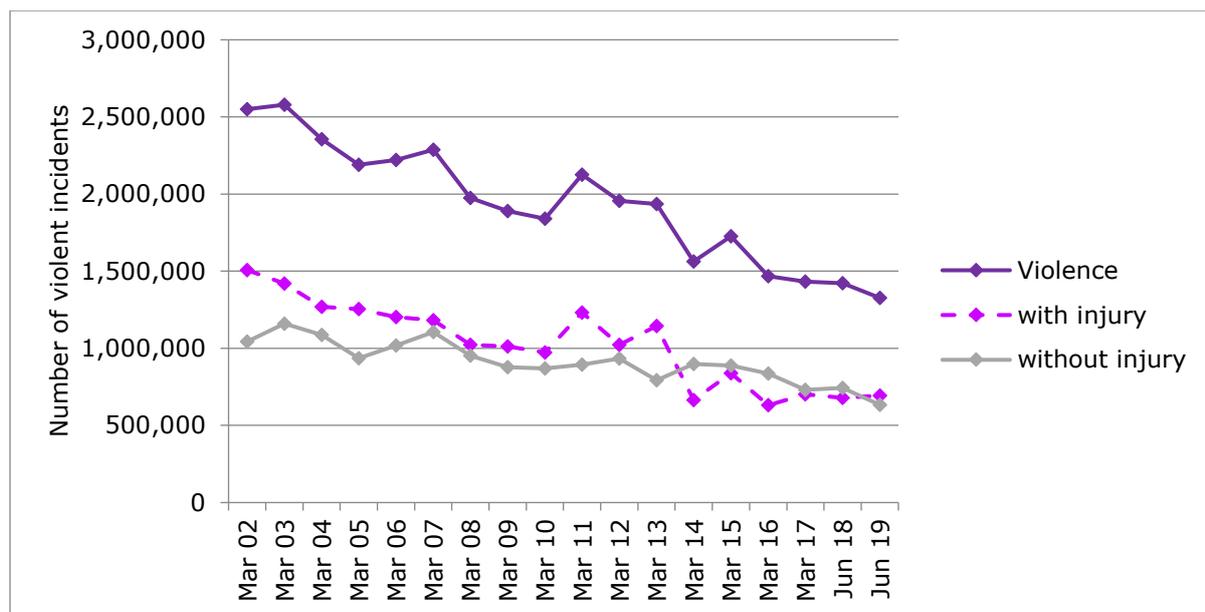
What has been the short term impact of Conservative spending and policies?

It is too soon to assess the medium to long term impact of the Conservatives' spending and policies since 2015. Moreover establishing causal relationships in an area where so many policies are relevant to outcomes is fraught with complication. We can however summarise a number of relevant concrete outcomes over the short term.

A flattening out of overall violent crime and worsening of some types of violent crime

After long-term decline in violent crime there has been no significant change in the number of violent incidents since 2014 according to estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales. Over the same period police recorded crime has shown an increase in knife crime, gun crime and homicides.

Figure 3 Number of violent incidents in England and Wales according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: data from Figure 7 in ONS, (2019) 'Crime in England and Wales: Year ending June 2019'

Fewer police officers

There are now fewer police officers than there were in the late 1990's, though it is difficult to assess precisely the impact of the reduced work force as at the same time demands on police time have changed, with an increase in online crime and an increase in the amount of time police spend dealing with non-criminal matters such as mental health. There is also evidence that clear up rates have declined between 2015 and 2018. Additionally a recent report found that there were not always enough officers available to respond to domestic abuse cases as quickly as they should. There is evidence police have responded to resource constraints by

taking a less proactive approach, focusing on the most serious incidents. Some senior officers have suggested the decline in police numbers has been a contributing factor to the ongoing rise in knife crime, though the complexity of the factors at play mean it is difficult to test this.

Less safe and overcrowded prisons

Funding restrictions have seen the number of prison officers as well as levels of prison officer experience decline. The prison population in England and Wales continues to be well above official capacity, and overcrowding continues to be a problem despite slight improvements since 2017, with higher overcrowding rates in private prisons. Youth imprisonment is a welcome exception to this trend, with significant and continued declines in the youth custody rate. Prisons have become more dangerous with violence against prisoners and staff continuing to increase. In terms of rehabilitation the number of prisoners completing accredited courses has declined by 22% since 2014/15.

New legal protection but a reduction in services for women experiencing abuse and indications violence against women is worsening

Although there is new legal protection against coercive control, the time taken to charge on domestic abuse related cases has increased in the last three years and rates of prosecution, charges and convictions for rape are at a record ten year low. At the same time cuts in funding for women's refuges have reduced the services available for women, with around 30% of referrals declined due to lack of capacity. Police data indicates a 32% increase in domestic killings of adults in the UK last year bringing it to a five-year high of 173, with three quarters of the victims being women.

Policy challenges looking forward

Looking forward to the 2020's the government faces six main policy challenges in relation to safety and security.

- First, Brexit is likely to remain key to the context in which policy develops, and to exacerbate the economic constraints on safety and security policies, as well as exacerbating social conflict and diverting policy attention.
- Violent crime continues to increase and the public health approach outlined in the Government's Violence Reduction Strategy will require significant resources as well as multi-agency coordination. Relatedly the increase in violence against women comes against the background of a reduced police force as well as reduced refuge services for women which again would require investment to reach unmet need.
- New types of online crime are also becoming more prevalent and require a new approach to policing and potentially additional resources.
- Prison safety and overcrowding remains at crisis point with serious consequences for both prisoners and staff. Improving conditions and training again is likely to require additional resources.
- Addressing racial disparities in the CJS is a continued challenge, with recent evidence showing racial disproportionality of stop and search has increased in London. This is likely to become more significant, as previous restrictions

to stop and search (following evidence of unfairness and inefficiency) have been removed and it is now taking a central place in policing tactics to reduce knife crime.

- The cumulative effects of disinvestment not merely in policing and other criminal justice policies but, perhaps more importantly, in the health, housing, youth services, social care and other areas bearing on safety and security pose a significant challenge. This will further inhibit the ability to take the multi-agency holistic approach required to tackle many of the most serious problems including interpersonal violence and violence against women.

Conclusions

The Conservative record on physical safety and security can be characterised in two contrasting ways. On the one hand this period has seen positive and important policy developments: The Serious Violence Reduction Strategy aims at taking a more holistic approach to addressing violent crime, recognising the complex factors at play and accompanied by ring-fenced funding. Similarly the government has created new legal protections for those experiencing abuse and its Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy sets out a vast range of preventive and protective policies. The government has also shown a commitment to addressing the issue of race and the criminal justice system, with a commitment to review progress made against the recommendations from the Lammy Review. However, these positive policy developments have not yet been accompanied by adequate resources and the cumulative impact of austerity has inhibited policy inputs and outputs. There is evidence of a deterioration of outcomes in terms of violence and specifically violence against women. A reduced police force, reduction in refuge services and overcrowded and under-staffed prisons are all a cause for concern that the planned policy developments are divorced from the reality of what is possible to achieve with restricted resources. Ongoing and future challenges posed by Brexit divert policy attention as well as resources and exacerbate these problems further. The incoming government faces, by any standards, significant challenges in the area of safety and security. They are challenges which the disinvestment of the last decade – a disinvestment not merely in policing and other criminal justice policies but, perhaps yet more importantly, in the health, housing, youth services, social care and other areas bearing on safety and security – will only deepen.

Further information

The full version of this paper *Physical safety and security: Policies, spending and outcomes 2015 – 2020* (including references) is available at <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spdo/spdorp05.pdf>

This is one of a series of papers produced as part of CASE's research programme [*Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes in a Changing Britain*](#) (SPDO) funded by Nuffield Foundation. The research examines what progress has been made in addressing inequalities through social policies, looking across ten major social policy areas. The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the funders.