

To what extent have the Conservatives under Cameron moved to the ideological centre on Law and Order policy?

Crime is an important aspect of society that the public are always concerned about during elections, meaning that every political party aims to take harsh approaches towards law and order. In the UK the chances of being a victim of any crime at least once during your life time is 21%, though public opinion polls often suggest that the public think this figure is higher (due to media amplification of serious crimes). In actual fact, the crime rates across England and Wales have decreased over the past 30 years.

Under Cameron, Conservative party policy on Law and Order prior to the 2011 riots had increasingly become focused on the socio-economic causes of crime and trying to improve the effectiveness of crime prevention, especially focusing on young offenders and anti-social behaviour. This compassionate conservatism approach goes against traditional Tory policy that has previously leaned further to the right and encouraged the judiciary to discourage criminality and lawlessness by harsh punishments including longer custodial sentences. It maybe suggested that Cameron's compassionate approach was significantly aimed at gaining more of Labour's votes. Since he took leadership of the party in 2005, Mr Cameron and his cabinet have proposed to improve social welfare as a means of reducing crime rates. In the 2009 party manifesto, the Conservatives discussed introducing ground orders as a way of tackling anti-social behaviour without specifically criminalising young people and to increase support for specialised organisations that provide drug and alcohol rehabilitation to offenders to reduce re-offending. This approach is more focused on the ideological left and it moves away from harsh punishments as a method of deterring criminals. These alterations in Law and Order policy have often been referred to by the media as the 'hug a hoolie' approach that Mr Cameron became associated with (despite it originally being used by the Labour party) after stating that social factors such as family breakdown and poverty influence young offenders: a complete turn round to the previous Tory policies of Deterrent Sentencing (1979-82) and Major's policies of Basic Law Enforcement (1993-97). Therefore from 2005, up until the London riots, we had seen the Conservatives move more towards the left in terms of Law and Order.

Despite Cameron's move away from traditional Tory attitudes towards crime between 2005 and 2011, the 2011 Riots attracted huge international attention to the British government's law and order policy that resulted in the party taking a complete U-turn towards criminality. The reputation of Britain had been jeopardised and the international community questioned the lawlessness of the UK and its ability to host the London 2012 Olympic Games the following summer. From August 2011, the frustration and discontentment with the government and the police (primarily amongst young people from disadvantaged areas) became a reality. The results of the rioting included 5 deaths and over £200 million in insurance claims which lead to the public wanting to hold the government to account. As a result, parliament was recalled and Mr Cameron and the cabinet began to debate future actions to prevent the events of August 2011 occurring again. In one of his first public speeches to the media after the riots, the Prime Minister condemned the rioters and looters calling it "criminality, pure and simple" and requested harsh penalties against those who took part in and incited the riots across the country while also calling for an enquiring into the causes of the riots including education, poverty and family structures. Two defendants for example, received four years for using Facebook to incite the riots, which some critics believe to be far too harsh and one defendant received a 6 months custodial sentence for stealing a bottle of water. This approach towards crime is completely contradictory to the previous compassionate conservatism of Cameron in previous years. The justice secretary at the time, Ken Clarke MP, called for penal reforms and blamed the riots on a broken judiciary system. Rehabilitation had failed as well over 75% of those arrested during the riots had previous convictions,