

# 'Values clans': how clusters of the electorate have shaped the political landscape

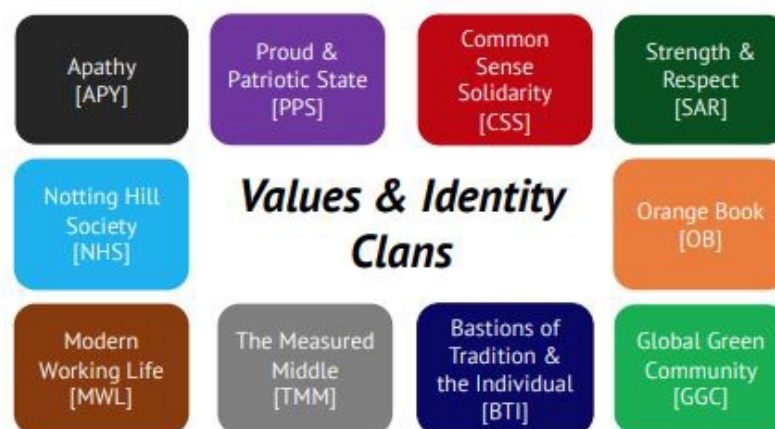
To explain the divisions which permeate UK politics, [Paula Surridge](#), [Michael Turner](#), [Robert Struthers](#), and [Clive McDonnell](#) introduce an approach that takes the dimensionality of voters' preferences more seriously; and in a [second piece](#) they illustrate the political behaviour of two of these groups in more detail.

Our political parties are in disarray as they struggle to make sense of divides among elected representatives, members, and voters which do not sit neatly along the existing party lines which have long been organised broadly around an economic left-right division. Some have gone so far as to declare the 'death' of the left-right divide but whilst it is the case that one could not helpfully predict the EU referendum vote, nor distinguish between Labour and UKIP (or indeed Green Party) voters at the 2015 general election based on left-right position, it is not the case that economic values no longer matter in our politics. But they are no longer the only thing that matters.

To make sense of the changes in party competition and the electorate more widely, it is useful to think of a set of 'core values' that structure our political beliefs. Following [Rokeach \(1973\)](#), we can think of these values as 'core conceptions of the desirable within society', or our deeply held views of the kind of society we want to be part of.

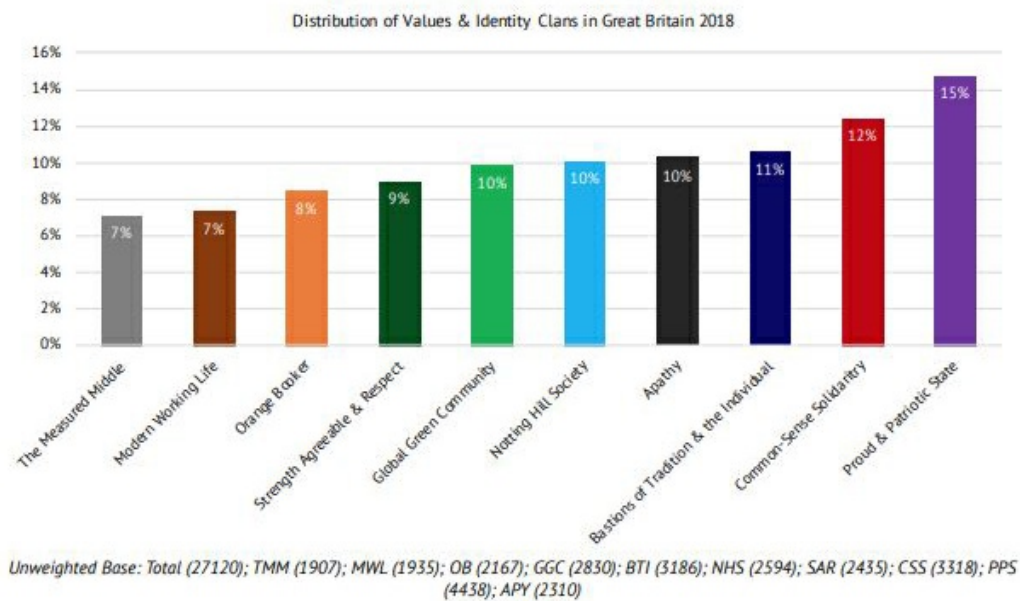
Drawing on responses from almost 30,000 members of the British electorate, to 27 items designed to tap into these 'conceptions of the desirable', [BMG research](#) have identified ten 'values clans'. Some of these will seem familiar and occupy what might be thought of as 'coherent' positions within a broader value and party space. For example, the 'Global Green Community' (GGC) are broadly speaking the most 'liberal-left' of the clans, while the 'Bastions of Tradition and the Individual' (BTI) are representative of the 'authoritarian-right'. But there are also clans here that represent more complex clusters of values, for example the '[Modern Working Life](#)' group who share many 'liberal' values around the environment and gender equality, are left-leaning in their economic outlook but who also believe in individual responsibility.

The ten clans identified are shown below. Do not let the specifics of the names of any clans put you off; exactly what they are called really doesn't matter: it is the clusters of values represented that are important.



Four of the clans combine clear cut values on both economic and social issues; though not always in ways found among party elites. As already described, the 'Global Green Community' and 'Bastions of Tradition and the Individual' represent the 'liberal-left' and 'authoritarian-right' respectively. Combining liberalism with more right-wing economics we have the 'Orange bookers' (OB) while the largest of the clans, the 'Proud and Patriotic State' (PPS), combine left-wing economics with socially conservative values. Together these four groups make up a little under half of the electorate; the PPS group being the largest and OB the smallest of these clans.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Values & Identity Clans**



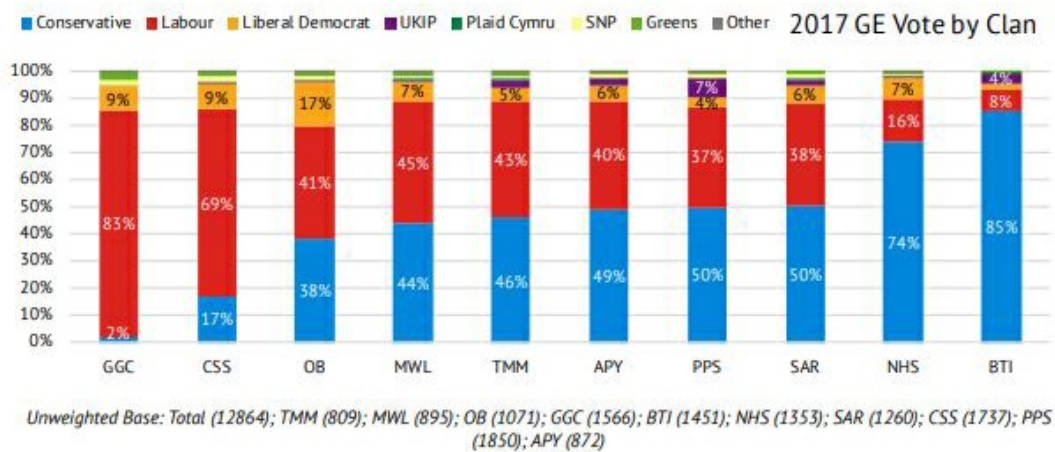
A further two of the clans share key sets of values with one of these core clans and are 'sympathetic' on other dimensions. The 'Common-Sense Solidarity' (CSS) group are similar to GGC in their economic positions but a little less socially liberal, positioned somewhere between the GGC and the PPS overall. Similarly, the 'Notting Hill Society' (NHS) group have economic values in line with the BTI and OB groups while laying between them in terms of social values (being less socially liberal than OB but a little more so than the BTI group).

Adding these groups in we now account for roughly seven in ten members of the electorate. The 'Apathy' clan, account for a further one in ten of the electorate, are more disengaged from politics and less likely to express strong views on any of the value dimensions. The remaining groups are less clearly defined on any single set of values; in some respects they could be thought of as the 'middle ground' of British politics. However, by looking more closely at their political values we can better understand how these shaped their political behaviour and how this changed between 2015 and 2017.

The 'Modern Working Life' (MWL) group are economically left of centre in their political values; and share many aspects of social liberalism with the GGC group. They combine this with belief in hard work and a tougher stance on welfare and law and order. This group were the clan which was most likely to switch from Conservative to Labour in 2017; perhaps initially attracted by the modernising leadership of Cameron but finding the less liberal elements of May's Conservative Party less attractive and the left-wing economics of Corbyn's Labour more so.

The two remaining clans hold values very close to the centre both economically and socially, 'The Measured Middle' (TMM) are the least distinctive of the clans (aside from the 'Apathy' group), while the 'Strength, Agreeable and Respect' (SAR) clan are distinguished most clearly by the value placed on authority and discipline especially in defence and the criminal justice system.

**Figure 2: 2017 General Election Values & Identity Clans (voters only).**



The two most 'coherent' values clans voted overwhelmingly for the parties we would expect, the GGC for Labour and the BTI for the Conservatives. More than eight in ten voters in these clans supported what might be thought of as the 'natural' party. In keeping with their cross-cutting values, PPS and OB were both divided in their voting behaviour, though OB leaned overall a little towards Labour and PPS a little towards Conservative, suggesting an alignment weighted slightly towards their social values over their economic ones. In contrast, both CSS and NHS seem to have followed their economic instincts, the broadly left-wing CSS with almost seven in ten voting Labour and the broadly right-wing NHS with just over seven in ten voting Conservative. This returns us to the need to understand these value groupings as distinct from just positions on value scales alone. For some clans it appears that economic values are more important, while for others social values seems to have the strong effect.

The 2017 election was unusual and saw the squeezing of votes for parties other than Conservative and Labour in England (and to a lesser extent in Scotland where the SNP retained a larger share of its 2015 vote). If we compare 2015 voting across the clans, we can see even more clearly how votes for 'minor' parties were clustered within clans. Two clans stand out as having a concentration of votes for minor parties. Among the PPS group, one in five voted UKIP in 2015; while among the OB one in five voted Liberal Democrat. These groups were most 'cross-pressured' in their values and this is reflected in voting behaviour where parties making appeals on social issues can pick up large shares of the votes of these clans (something worth noting for anyone currently in the 'new party' market).

The values clans framework is powerful as it allows us to move beyond any single dimension of values to understand how clusters of the electorate who share value positions have responded to and shaped the political landscape. They are more powerful than thinking of any single socio-demographic divide alone, though they are strongly rooted in these divides of education, income, ethnicity and gender. They also allow us to understand how reaching out the values of one 'clan' may lead to losses of support elsewhere and the challenge of building election winning coalitions of clans for any political party.

The detailed report on this research can be found [here](#). You can find your values clan by answering the questions [here](#).

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