

The 1892 general election in England: Home Rule, the Newcastle programme and positive Unionism*

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Abstract

Largely ignored as an anomaly, the 1892 general election represents a major gap in the scholarship on late nineteenth-century British politics. This article is the first to analyse the issues on and electioneering rhetoric with which it was fought, with a focus on England's constituencies. It argues that the early 1890s saw the inauguration of a new, 'positive' kind of political appeal. It explores how Liberals embraced the radical reforms of the National Liberal Federation's 'Newcastle programme' and how Unionists constructed a self-referential 'positive Unionism' that trumpeted their achievements in government. In addition, by considering the limits of Home Rule as an electoral strategy, the article challenges accepted narratives of Liberalism's slide into 'faddism' and Unionist dominance. The article draws on my databases of election addresses. Addresses were an essential medium for the communication of political appeals; by analysing their content, the article highlights the utility of quantitative methodologies for studying shifts in and the transmission of political discourses.

Reflecting on the resolutions passed at Newcastle in October 1891 by his former party organization, Joseph Chamberlain declared that the 'Gladstonians have now lost confidence in the attractions of Home Rule as an election cry, and they admit that it will only pass if sandwiched between more alluring proposals'. The National Liberal Federation's (N.L.F.) seven resolutions had signalled its adherence to: Home Rule; Welsh disestablishment; free education; electoral, registration, parliamentary and local government reform; an overhaul of the land laws; and a direct veto on liquor licenses. An 'omnibus' resolution encompassed issues as diverse as Lords reform, the Factory Acts and the equalization of death duties. This 'Newcastle programme' was, according to Chamberlain, a 'conglomerate', an 'undigested policy' that would 'crumble to pieces from its own weight'.¹ The 'sandwich' metaphor was 'hardly strong enough' for the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, who likened Home Rule's position in the 'celebrated Newcastle programme' to 'capsules made up in gelatine, in which very nasty stuffs are enclosed'. Home Rule was not, Lord Hartington stressed, 'presented to us as a tempting dish', rather, 'in the form of a pill or bolus, which will only be swallowed if accompanied by a great quantity of more palatable

* Where the term 'Unionist' is used, it refers to Conservative and Liberal Unionists collectively. I would like to thank Prof. Paul Readman, Dr. Joel Barnes and the Modern British History Reading Group at King's College London for reading earlier drafts of this article, as well as Prof. John Bradley for his advice on databasing and the two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments. I am also grateful to the following bodies for funding the research presented here: the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Catherine Mackichan Trust, the Chalke Valley History Trust, the Gilchrist Educational Trust, the Lynne Grundy Memorial Trust and the Sir John Plumb Charitable Trust.

¹ Letter to Liberal Unionist conference, *The Times*, 11 Nov. 1891, p. 6; 22 Oct. 1891, p. 10.

jam'.² The gastronomic infelicities of the Newcastle 'sugar stick' were similarly mocked in Unionist propaganda, with a cartoon predicting 'ructions' once electors opened their eyes to the 'bait' on offer and realised the attempted 'trick' (Figure 1).

Newcastle was however more than mere 'gild' for 'the bitter pill of Home Rule'.³ That the programme was the product of machine politics rendered it still more ridiculous, and indeed, dangerous. The N.L.F. was depicted as the 'Radical Arch-Caucus',⁴ its conference being 'the elaborate piece of machinery ... annually constructed for the purpose of giving a pretence of popular sanction to such "cries"' as its secretary, Francis Schnadhorst, 'may think valuable to the Gladstonian section'.⁵ It was suggested that 'if any man had a fad, let him write to Mr Schnadhorst',⁶ for he had proven willing to 'put into his programme something he thought likely to tickle the ears of every class'.⁷ The programme was 'a demand proceeding not from the wishes of the people',⁸ but from a man whose 'only concern' was to 'devise ingenious political prospectuses ... by which the largest amount of votes may be obtained'.⁹ The chancellor, George Goschen, was disquieted at the prospect that 'the wirepullers should determine both the order and the character of the measures which are to be produced', while *The Times* lamented that candidates' 'Liberal principles are to be decided for them by Mr Schnadhorst' and the 'policy of the party ... modelled upon the Schnadhorstian notions of expediency'.¹⁰ A 'catalogue of heterogeneous proposals',¹¹ the programme was duly derided for resembling "'the job lots" ... offered for sale by a country auctioneer'.¹² The result, Chamberlain claimed, was 'a gigantic system of log-rolling, in which every man is to vote for something which he does not want ... that he may get something else which he specially desires'.¹³ Of course, none of these desires could be realized. The return of a Liberal administration with Home Rule as its first plank would postpone 'to an unknown future all beneficial legislation'.¹⁴ Thankfully, Ireland 'block[ed] the way *only* for the Gladstonian party'.¹⁵ Unionists were at pains to emphasize that they would spend the next parliament 'dealing with social and industrial problems and legislate upon matters which directly affect the moral, material, and social advancement of Englishmen, Scotchmen, and Welshmen, no less than Irishmen'.¹⁶ The Salisbury government's record was assured to be 'worth cartloads of the vague promises now so plentifully scattered' among electors.¹⁷ It had

² *The Times*, 25 Nov. 1891, p. 10; 20 Nov. 1891, p. 7.

³ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 12 Dec. 1891, p. 4.

⁴ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 3 Oct. 1891, p. 4.

⁵ *Exmouth Journal*, 21 Nov. 1891, p. 5.

⁶ *Derby Mercury*, 7 Oct. 1891, p. 5.

⁷ *Bury Post*, 26 Jan. 1892, p. 8, Lord Chelsea.

⁸ *Evening Standard*, 17 Nov. 1891, p. 3, Lord Stanhope.

⁹ *The Times*, 11 Feb. 1892, p. 11, James (Bury).

¹⁰ Derbyshire Record Office, D3287/116/8/42, 'Liberal Unionists in Oxford', speech by chairman of local association, p. 3.

¹¹ *The Times*, 6 Nov. 1891, p. 7; 2 Oct. 1891, p. 9.

¹² *Morning Post*, 2 Oct. 1891, p. 4.

¹³ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 6 Nov. 1891, p. 6, Imbert-Terry (South Somerset).

¹⁴ *The Times*, 22 Oct. 1891, p. 10; 19 Nov. 1891, p. 7.

¹⁵ British Library, 'General election addresses: The National Liberal Club Collection Part 1: 1892–1922', micro-film (hereafter N.L.C. Coll.), White (North-West Devon).

¹⁶ N.L.C. Coll., Disraeli (Altrincham).

¹⁷ Brit. Libr., General Reference Collection, 1899.r.49 (1892 material in 5 volumes), 'Collection of Addresses issued by Candidates for Election to Parliament, and other election literature relating to the General Elections of 1880–1906' (hereafter B.L. Coll.), Fisher (Fulham), vol. ii, fo. 441.

¹⁸ N.L.C. Coll., Lorne (Bradford Central).



Figure 1. Unionist poster of Gladstone substituting the 'Newcastle sugar stick' for the 'Home Rule candle', ©British Library Board (General Reference Collection, 1899.r.49 (1892 material in 5 volumes), vol. i, fo. 63).

established that Ireland could be 'firmly and generously dealt with under the Union'¹⁹ and, crucially, had 'not permitted Irish affairs to block the way to Reform'.²⁰ 'Unfettered' by 'fantastic schemes of "Home Rule"',²¹ a Unionist victory would deliver 'a final blow' to the policy,²² which would 'disappear from the field of practical politics'.²³

To the Liberal imagination, however, Newcastle could be acclaimed as 'the most successful and inspiring meeting ever held' by the N.L.F.²⁴ The *Liverpool Mercury*, believing it 'desirable that a broad and far-reaching platform should be outlined', declared the country 'indebted to the Federation for selecting and cataloguing those reforms which are most urgent, and thus indicating, far in advance of legislative action, the path to be traversed'.²⁵ The *Northern Echo* admitted that in the aftermath of the 1886 Home Rule crisis, the Liberal party had been 'routed and disorganised, and the faint-hearted feared its rout was final'. Happily, the party had transformed into 'a triumphant army marching to ... almost certain victory'.²⁶ To those 'who think that English Liberalism is played out, or that beyond Home Rule it has nothing to offer', the *Speaker* would 'recommend careful perusal of the Newcastle resolutions'.²⁷ The resolutions were similarly hailed by local party associations as constituting a truly Liberal programme worthy of implementation.

¹⁹ N.L.C. Coll., King (Kingston-Upon-Hull Central).

²⁰ N.L.C. Coll., Round (Harwich).

²¹ N.L.C. Coll., White.

²² N.L.C. Coll., Beckett (Whitby).

²³ B.L. Coll., Wroughton (North Berkshire), vol. v, fo. 1397.

²⁴ *Daily News*, 3 Oct. 1891, p. 4.

²⁵ *Liverpool Mercury*, 2 Oct. 1891, p. 5.

²⁶ *Northern Echo*, 3 Oct. 1891, p. 2.

²⁷ *The Speaker*, 3 Oct. 1891, p. 394.

Stopping at Darlington railway station two days after his speech to the N.L.F., the party's leader, William Gladstone, was presented with an address from the town's association, which trusted that the coming election 'will place you in power with a large majority to aid you in passing many important measures in the Newcastle programme'.²⁸ Motions of 'hearty approval', 'confidence' and 'support' were carried throughout the country that October,²⁹ praying that electors would soon have the opportunity of electing M.P.s 'who will carry out the reforms adopted as the Newcastle programme'.³⁰ Pascoe Glyn's address to East Dorset for November's by-election was the first to endorse 'the future policy of the Liberal party, as set forth in the Newcastle programme'.³¹ Other candidates followed suit that winter. Charles Vero told Atherstone Liberals that he 'accepted the Newcastle programme, wholly and entirely believing it to be worthy of the great Liberal cause and their Grand Old Leader', and Thomas Seymour Brand launched his campaign in Eastbourne by declaring that his 'political belief shortly summed up was entire concurrence with the Newcastle programme from beginning to end'.³² When Thomas Stephens was asked at his adoption meeting in Droitwich if he adhered to its provisions he deemed it 'hardly necessary' to answer, for 'if he had not conscientiously accepted the Newcastle programme in every word he should not have been there'.³³ 'The Newcastle programme' was thus swiftly appropriated into electioneering rhetoric and into the broader Liberal vocabulary on reform.

Home Rule's integration into a package seemingly 'baited to suit every palate'³⁴ therefore prompts the question of whether the July 1892 election was won because of or in spite of the Liberal party's continued commitment to the policy. As the first in-depth study of the election in England – and, in particular, of its electioneering rhetoric – this article argues that we need to reassess established narratives about Liberal decline and Conservative dominance and suggests that the early 1890s witnessed the inauguration of a new 'positive' type of appeal, on both sides. The article treats the election holistically, approaching it from both empirical and discursive points of view, considering how far the subjects discussed and the rhetoric used were countrywide phenomena. As Jon Lawrence has pointed out, retrieving what the 'public' thought of political discourses is no easy task, nor is determining the effect they had on parties' electoral performances. However, elections offer a glimpse of what Paul Readman termed 'parliamentary politics at a local level', wherein electioneering rhetoric arguably both fills and mediates what Lawrence has identified as 'the space between "formal" and "informal" politics', namely, that 'between politicians and those they seek to represent'.³⁵ Would-be representatives tailored their appeals to the perceived demands of the represented, competing to show that they, and not their opponent, best understood the interests of the nation and the

²⁸ *Northern Echo*, 5 Oct. 1891, p. 3.

²⁹ See, association resolutions reported in, e.g., *Derbyshire Courier*, 31 Oct. 1891, p. 6; *Gloucester Citizen*, 21 Oct. 1891, p. 3; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 24 Oct. 1891, p. 5; *Bromley Times*, 30 Oct. 1891, p. 5; *Eastern Daily Press*, 21 Oct. 1891, p. 6; *Buckingham Express*, 24 Oct. 1891, p. 2.

³⁰ *Worcestershire County Express*, 28 Nov. 1891, p. 6, Sheffield Liberals.

³¹ *Western Gazette*, 13 Nov. 1891, p. 5.

³² *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 23 Nov. 1891, p. 3; *Sussex Agricultural Express*, 8 Dec. 1891, p. 4.

³³ *Worcestershire County Express*, 28 Nov. 1891, p. 6.

³⁴ *The Times*, 13 Jan., p. 6, Home Secretary Henry Matthews.

³⁵ P. Readman, 'The Conservative party, patriotism, and British politics: the case of the general election of 1900', *Journal of British Studies*, lx (2001), 107–45, at p. 111; J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 65–7.

locality. This article is therefore less about ‘forms of “reception”’³⁶ and more about the transmission of political discourses.

To paraphrase Lawrence, an election can illustrate not only how far a party had adapted to change but also how it interpreted that change ‘through language’ and influenced it ‘through policy’.³⁷ In July 1892, the change in question was the advent six years prior of Home Rule as Liberal creed. Liberals adapted their appeal to embrace not merely Irish self-government but also the reforms of the Newcastle programme, the relationship between the two being interpreted through the language of programmatic politics, which thus signalled policy intent. For Unionists, six years of Salisburian government had been predicated upon the conviction that the change involved in Home Rule was not only dangerous but unnecessary, the righteousness of which was borne out in policies which were claimed to have improved the condition of Ireland and of the English working classes and in turn conveyed through the language of what has been termed ‘positive Unionism’. What follows illustrates the extent to which the Newcastle programme and a self-referential positive Unionism formed the cornerstones of the respective party messages in England. The article also considers how far – and how well – Ireland was incorporated into these platforms. Liberals did not shy away from Home Rule and Unionists offered more than just Unionism, with both treating Ireland as intimately connected to their extended narratives on reform.

As Luke Blaxill has observed, 1892 is ‘perhaps the most confusing – and certainly the most neglected’ election of the period between the third and fourth reform acts.³⁸ 1892 witnessed no barnstorming Gladstonian crusade, and Gladstone made no effort to Bulgarianize the Newcastle programme. 1886 has held more immediate attraction for those tracing the ebb and flow of party fortunes; 1892 facilitates neither the conclusion of a narrative nor the commencement of a new one. 1895 and the unimplemented Newcastle programme afford a neater coda, ‘Newcastle style “programme” politics’ being rejected after that year’s election ‘debacle’ and the Liberal party thereafter ‘gripped by an essentially negative, reactive mentality’.³⁹ As a result, the Liberal victory in 1892 is regarded as an anomaly; suffering from the disbenefit of hindsight, the election remains largely ignored. Indeed, even a 2010 article by Ian Cawood which professedly takes 1892 as its focal point appears essentially uninterested in the contest itself. Cawood concentrated on the position of the Liberal Unionist party in the early 1890s, and, when he discussed the campaign, he focused almost exclusively on Chamberlain and Devonshire.⁴⁰ A partial exception is perhaps Blaxill’s short comparative discussion of 1886 and 1892, which contends that on each occasion Home Rule ‘easily eclipsed any other issue’. Blaxill was more sympathetic toward the Newcastle programme and its impact on radical language than much of the literature, although, beyond Ireland, he paid little attention to the policy content of Unionist discourse, which is portrayed as squarely non-reformist.⁴¹ 1892 is more typically situated in its high political context and glossed

³⁶ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p. 67.

³⁷ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p. 267.

³⁸ L. Blaxill, ‘The language of British electoral politics, 1880–1910’ (unpublished King’s College London Ph.D. thesis, 2012), p. 88.

³⁹ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, pp. 195, 217.

⁴⁰ I. Cawood, ‘The 1892 general election and the eclipse of the Liberal Unionists’, *Parliamentary History*, xxix (2010), 331–57, at p. 343. Hartington had by the 1892 election been elevated to the title of duke of Devonshire.

⁴¹ Blaxill, ‘Language of British electoral politics’, pp. 88–95, 120–3.

over in a sketch of Gladstone's twilight administration, a government described by Colin Matthew as 'primarily an emblem'.⁴²

Gladstone's imposition of Home Rule is generally regarded as prompting a slide after 1886 into unruly radicalism,⁴³ his attempt to 'purge' the party of 'sectionalists' by asserting the primacy of single-issue politics ultimately resulting, 'in a fit of panic, of reaction against reliance on Home Rule alone', in a return to the very 'dispersive "programme" politics' he had sought to do away with.⁴⁴ The Newcastle programme has been dismissed as 'a political liability',⁴⁵ with October 1891 seen as the culmination of a process whereby 'faddism' was 'marshalled in the annual programmes of the NLF',⁴⁶ its product being a 'cobble[d] together ... capacious ragbag'.⁴⁷ According to David Allen Hamer, if the programme initially afforded a semblance of Liberal unity it did so by 'appearing to promise all the sectional interests that something would be done for them'; unfortunately, its 'multifarious commitments' simultaneously 'exposed' to view these 'sectional causes in all their disunity'.⁴⁸ For Michael Barker, the programme's advent was indeed the result of 'factional pressures', but it amounted in the end to little more than a 'new set of clothes with which to cloak the Irish skeleton', Liberals ultimately coming to the conclusion that programmatic politics were neither 'desirable' nor 'electorally advantageous'.⁴⁹ That the programme originated from the N.L.F. has done much to colour interpretations of its impact on Liberalism. In Moisei Ostrogorski's seminal 1902 study of political organization, Newcastle was portrayed as the 'masterpiece of the wire-pullers'. By Ostrogorski's reckoning, 'the Caucus' had seen that 'the party could not go to the country on Home Rule alone' and so had 'set to work', 'piling up' demands into a 'cleverly concocted compound'; the programme duly presented 'the semblance of having a common platform', but the failure of Gladstone's and Lord Rosebery's governments to fulfil its 'elaborate' promises 'burst up the party with a formidable crash'.⁵⁰ The 'suicidal capacity' of the programme, as the political scientist A. L. Lowell termed it,⁵¹ would, like Home Rule before it, become essential to the narrative of Liberal malaise. As James Thompson has noted, as with 'attacks on the caucus, assailants of programmatic politics claimed it was transforming parliamentary candidates into mere instruments of party machinery'.⁵² With Newcastle, then, there collided the chief preoccupations of those who feared the consequences of the politics of organization: caucusization, sectionalization and programmatization.

That the Conservatives in particular benefitted from apparent Liberal disarray has led some to conclude that the late nineteenth-century Unionist hegemony was 'essentially

⁴² H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1809–1898* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 579–80, 587. See also, D. Brooks, 'Gladstone's fourth administration, 1892–1894', in *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, ed. D. Bebbington and R. Swift (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 225–42, at pp. 226–8; R. Shannon, *Gladstone. Heroic Minister 1865–1898* (London, 1999), pp. 519–21; H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1892–1914* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 38–45.

⁴³ See, e.g., T. Heyck, 'Home Rule, radicalism, and the Liberal party, 1886–1895', *Journal of British Studies*, xiii (1974), 66–91, at p. 72; M. Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism: the Reconstruction of Liberal Policy in Britain 1885–94* (Brighton, 1975), p. 88; G. R. Searle, *The Liberal Party Triumph and Disintegration, 1886–1929* (Hampshire, 2001), p. 37.

⁴⁴ D. A. Hamer, 'The Irish Question and Liberal politics 1886–1894', in *Reactions to Irish Nationalism*, ed. A. O'Day (London, 1987), pp. 237–58, at p. 249.

⁴⁵ Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism*, p. 164.

⁴⁶ M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867–1945* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 39–40.

⁴⁷ R. Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London, 1995), p. 581.

⁴⁸ D. A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 173–4, 211.

⁴⁹ Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism*, pp. 56, 163.

⁵⁰ M. Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* (2 vols., London, 1902), i. 316, 319–20, 567.

⁵¹ A. L. Lowell, *The Government of England* (2 vols., New York, 1908), i. 539.

⁵² J. Thompson, *British Political Culture and the Idea of 'Public Opinion', 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 161–2.

a negative achievement'.⁵³ Scholars remain divided over how far manipulation of registers and the orchestration of low turnouts formed staple Unionist electioneering practices which enabled them to capitalize upon Liberal weaknesses.⁵⁴ However, as Alex Windscheffel has remarked, an obsessive focus on organization has helped 'valorise a non-ideological view of Conservatism' whereby it is assumed that 'elections could be won by organisational methods rather than ideas'.⁵⁵ This is surely ironic given that the Liberal apparatus, stigmatized as a 'caucus', with its admixture of 'machine' politics and ideological 'faddism', has been seen as the reason why Liberals were unable to win elections. Historians have in recent years sought out the political as opposed to structural reasons for Unionist successes, giving rise to the concept of a 'positive Unionism' which utilized an 'electorally effective liberal message'.⁵⁶ Lawrence has shown that Conservatives could charge that, thanks to 'the innovation of "caucus" organisation, the Liberal party had been hijacked by nonconformist "faddists"', while also positively distinguishing themselves from 'killjoy' moral reformism by identifying and engaging with manly popular culture.⁵⁷ These advances aside, we remain unclear as to when 'positive Unionism' 'became electorally important'. Matthew Roberts suggested it was a 'negligible feature of Unionist politics until after' 1892, with 'defence of the Union ... virtually the only issue on which Unionists fought elections'.⁵⁸ For Readman, it was in 1895 that Unionists adopted a 'new libertarian appeal' and cast themselves as an 'alternative to the falsely liberal "democratic tyranny" of modern radicalism'. Windscheffel's study of London Conservatism posits 1892 as the point at which candidates in the capital incorporated social reform into their addresses on the lines sketched by Readman, by presenting the legislation of the outgoing ministry as a 'responsible alternative to ... incessant institutional tampering'. Windscheffel's attention to this earlier rhetoric is welcome, but he gave little detail save a handful of quotes and it is unclear how coherent or central a plank it provided.⁵⁹ 1892 therefore continues to represent a substantial gap in our knowledge of positive Unionism as an electoral language in England.

This article seeks to enhance our understanding of the 1892 campaign in England, by locating the 'positive' in both Unionist and Liberal electioneering rhetoric. Its findings

⁵³ E. H. H. Green, 'Radical Conservatism: the electoral genesis of tariff reform', *Historical Journal*, xxviii (1985), 667–92, at p. 680.

⁵⁴ The classic account of 'negative Unionism' is J. Cornford, 'The transformation of Conservatism in the late nineteenth century', *Victorian Studies*, vii (1983), 35–66, at pp. 54–6, 66. See also, R. Shannon, *The Age of Salisbury, 1881–1902: Unionism and Empire* (London, 1996), p. 313; E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: the Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880–1914* (New York, 1995), p. 126. For criticism of the low-turnout theory, see J. Lawrence and J. Elliot, 'Parliamentary election results reconsidered: an analysis of borough elections, 1885–1910', *Parliamentary History*, xvi (1997), 18–28, at pp. 22–3; P. Readman, 'The 1895 general election and political change in late Victorian Britain', *Historical Journal*, xlii (1999), 467–93. For a reappraisal of Cornford and an argument that Conservatives could both fight 'positive campaigns' and utilize 'anti-democratic stratagems', see L. Blaxill and T. Saleh, 'The electoral dynamics of Conservatism, 1885–1910: "Negative Unionism" reconsidered', *Historical Journal*, lix (2016), 417–45.

⁵⁵ A. Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London, 1868–1906* (London, 2007), p. 85.

⁵⁶ Readman, '1895 general election', p. 491.

⁵⁷ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p. 198; J. Lawrence, 'Class and gender in the making of urban Toryism, 1880–1914', *English Historical Review*, cviii (1993), 629–52, at p. 638; J. Lawrence, 'Popular politics and the limitations of party: Wolverhampton, 1867–1900', in *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850–1914*, ed. E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 65–85, at pp. 75–6. For a summary of 'revisionist' interpretations, see M. Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England, 1832–1914* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 116.

⁵⁸ M. Roberts, "'A terrific outburst of political meteorology": by-elections and the Unionist electoral ascendancy', in *By-elections in British Politics, 1832–1914*, ed. T. G. Otte and P. Readman (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 180, 200. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ Readman, '1895 general election', pp. 479–81; Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, pp. 62–3.

are based on the results of a major quantitative project that I carried out. The article utilizes my database of 836 addresses issued by 846 candidates,⁶⁰ or 95.2 per cent of those who stood in England in 1892. It also draws upon a separate database covering the 1886 election in England.⁶¹ In compiling the databases, I categorized the topics mentioned in these addresses first into quantifiable 'issues', or headline questions – such as 'Ireland', 'disestablishment' and 'parliamentary reform'⁶² – and then into 'sub-issues' dealing with the specific aspects of the matter discussed. For example, for Ireland, there are a range of 'sub-issues' relating to Home Rule, from claims that it would provide the Irish with control of their own affairs or repeal the union, to stipulations as to Westminster's supremacy. There are likewise 'sub-issues' which cover, among others, law and order, land, and local government in Ireland.⁶³ The 'issue' 'labour' encompasses 'sub-issues' such as the restriction of working hours, old-age pensions, and the poor law, while the 'issue' 'land' includes 'sub-issues' relating to allotments and smallholdings, security of tenure, and the freedom of sale. In each database, an entry is provided for each address, itemizing the points mentioned in the order they appeared, and the attitude taken, noting where a candidate signalled a sole or main issue for electors to decide. The data was then analysed to establish the subjects afforded greatest (and least) prominence by candidates (the 'issues'), the manner in which they were discussed (the 'sub-issues'), and the typicality of the electioneering rhetoric used. The way candidates referred to individual topics was by no means identical and the sub-issues do not correlate perfectly with the wording used, but they are accurate descriptors that capture several possible rhetorical variations on a given point.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Addresses were found for 848 of the 889 candidates who stood (95.4%). A total of 838 addresses were found, two of which were excluded from the database because they contained no reference to any quantifiable 'issues'. 20 candidates issued joint addresses for two-member seats. Certain candidates did not produce an address – in some cases, I found 'thank you' addresses but no pre-poll documents, while others announced that they would not issue anything.

⁶¹ Contains addresses for 91.8% of candidates who stood. Addresses were found for 722 of the 794 candidates. 12 candidates issued joint addresses for double-member constituencies. A total of 709 addresses were databased. Neither the 1886 or 1892 databases contain addresses issued by candidates for Welsh seats – these are databased separately, as are addresses for Scottish seats. For more information, see N. Lloyd-Jones, 'A new British history of the Home Rule crisis: public opinion, representation and organisation' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, King's College London, 2019).

⁶² To ensure comparability, the same 'issues' were used across the two databases, with two additional entries in 1892 relating to the Salisbury government's record. The 'issues' are: Ireland; Salisbury government record; government's record on Ireland; local government; London; church reform; disestablishment; land; licensing laws; financial reform; labour; registration reform; parliamentary reform; foreign policy; education; legal reform; Wales; Scotland; constitution; general references to legislation; political parties and the candidate's local connection. The 'legislation: general references' 'issue' covers statements such as the candidate's views were well known to electors and that they would support well-considered reforms.

⁶³ There are also in many cases variations on a 'sub-issue'. E.g., in the case of 'local government', a candidate might mention both parish and district councils, mention only one of these policies or mention each at different places in an address – there are therefore separate 'sub-issues' for 'parish and district councils', 'parish councils' and 'district councils', as well as 'sub-issues' relating to the powers candidates argued ought to be accorded to these bodies. An asterisk was used in the databases to denote a straightforward reference to a sub-issue – for example, government record* would refer to a simple statement that the candidate approved of the government's record.

⁶⁴ The National Liberal Club's (N.L.C.'s) album of addresses – the traditional resource for research of this kind – is, although wide-ranging, incomplete for 1892 and does not cover 1886. I therefore also traced addresses in newspapers and in the British Library's underutilized collection of late 19th and early 20th-century addresses and memorabilia. The B.L. Coll. was the brainchild in 1885 of the British Museum's Keeper of Printed Books (see B.L. Coll., 1886 vol., fos. 11, 160, 203, 256). In 1892, the Principal Librarian wrote to newspapers requesting that copies of addresses and electioneering literature be forwarded to him (*Evening Standard*, 5 July 1892, p. 5). The only mention of the collection that I have found in the scholarship is a brief one in G. Goodlad, 'The Liberal party and Gladstone's Land Purchase Bill of 1886', *Historical Journal*, xxxii (1989), 627–41, at p. 640. Goodlad provided no reference information and the collection is difficult to locate in the British Library's catalogue.

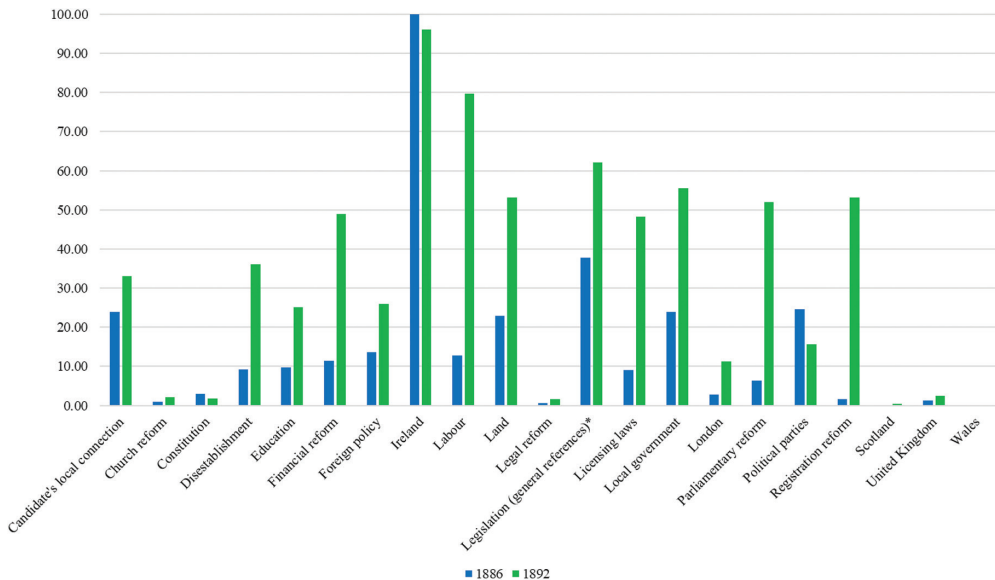


Figure 2. Issues mentioned in English election addresses 1886 and 1892 (percentage of addresses).

As Figure 2 shows, the 1886 election in England was unidimensional, fought unambiguously on the Irish question. Ireland featured in every address, half of which declared it the sole or main issue to be decided. Home Rule was the dominant individual topic, appearing in 98 per cent each of Liberal, Liberal Unionist and Conservative addresses. One-fifth of all addresses contained only references to Ireland, and a further quarter added merely a generalized allusion to the candidate's opinions on legislation past or future, an explanation of their connection with the constituency, or a combination of the two. Ireland was the first issue mentioned in 77 per cent of addresses. It was in more than half the remaining addresses second only to the candidate's local connection or a statement that their views on 'general questions' were so well known as to not require recapitulation, with over a quarter of all addresses making the latter point. In only 2.5 per cent of cases was Ireland neither the first nor second issue mentioned. In 1892, Ireland continued to occupy a prominent position, featuring in 96.1 per cent of addresses, a figure which increases to 98.2 per cent if we include references to the government's Irish record. However, only one-fifth (21.9 per cent) identified either some aspect of the Irish question or of the government's Irish record as the main or only issue for consideration, and the proportion placing Ireland at their head fell from three-quarters to one-half. Not a single address referred solely to Ireland. Ireland now faced stiff competition from a host of other issues, with labour appearing in eight-in-ten addresses – more than six times the proportion seen in 1886 – and with local government and reforms to the registration, land, parliamentary, financial and licensing systems each featuring in around half. The extent to which Ireland overshadowed all other issues in 1886 is thrown into further relief by the fact that, of the 'domestic' measures that would become Newcastle resolutions in 1891, just two-fifths were mentioned in Liberal addresses. Of these policies, half were discussed in less than 3 per cent of addresses, with only the popular veto on liquor licenses and a catch-all pledge to reform the land laws in more than one-in-ten. Over the course of the two elections, the proportion of Liberal addresses mentioning licensing reform rose four-fold, and labour seven-fold; there were six-and-a-half times

as many referring to parliamentary reform in 1892 and twenty-seven times as many referring to registration reform.

As Neal Blewett rightly argued, election addresses ‘can tell us more conveniently than anything else what issues the politicians thought would determine’ voters’ choices.⁶⁵ They can likewise tell us much about the issues on which candidates and parties thought an election would, and should, be fought, and about their respective positions on the eve of a contest. W. H. Rowe, in his 1892 *Practical Manual* for Conservative candidates and agents, explained that the ‘first necessity’ at an election was the preparation of an address, a document ‘upon which so much sometimes depends’. It should be ‘**short, clear, and incisive**, expressing boldly and frankly the candidate’s opinions on the leading topics of current national or local interest’. The aim was to ‘arrest the attention and awaken the interest of a large class of electors who are indifferent to politics’. ‘Early circulation’ was crucial: the address ‘should be **posted** so as to reach the electors in every part of the constituency at the **same time**’ and with it included a few leaflets or ‘a **bill** suitable for exhibition in windows’ to secure ‘immediate display of the candidate’s name in a large number of houses’.⁶⁶ Addresses were a form of political propaganda, a means of communicating a message in a succinct, easily transmissible and consumable fashion. Printed in local and regional newspapers and produced in a variety of other formats – from pamphlets, leaflets and notecards, to placards and posters in a range of sizes – they were a media by which candidates and agents could conveniently bombard voters with reminders of their prospective member’s views. Addresses were also after the event treated as evidence of promises made. For example, the Liberal Unionist Viscount Ebrington produced in April 1886 a study of Liberal addresses from the previous election, as ‘a fair test of the degree to which the [Irish] question was before either candidates or constituencies’. He concluded that one-third made no reference, ‘a small portion’ desired the extension of ‘self-government’, and ‘those who then declared themselves plainly in favour of Home Rule were very few’.⁶⁷

Both Blewett and Readman have produced statistical analyses of the issues mentioned in addresses and candidates’ positions thereon. However, since the publication nearly two decades ago of Readman’s pioneering work on 1895 and 1900, there has been little attempt to quantitatively assess addresses, and the practice has not been applied to either the 1886 or the 1892 contests.⁶⁸ Attention has instead turned to speeches, driven by Blaxill’s innovative handling of electronic text-analysis techniques to yield data from digitized corpora covering the period 1880–1910. Blaxill examined the impact and prevalence of key moments and themes in modern British politics on party language,

⁶⁵ N. Blewett, *Peers, the Parties and the People* (Hampshire, 1972), p. 316.

⁶⁶ W. H. Rowe, *A Practical Manual on the Conduct and Management of Parliamentary Elections* (2nd edn., London, 1892), pp. 13–14, 63–64. See requests of ‘Please put this in the Window’ in B.L. Coll., e.g., vol. i, fo. 204.

⁶⁷ Lord Ebrington, ‘Liberal Election Addresses’, *Nineteenth Century* (Apr. 1886), p. 607.

⁶⁸ Blewett, *Peers, the Parties and the People*, pp. 315–29; Readman, ‘1895 general election’ and ‘Conservative party, patriotism, and British politics’. Neither Blewett nor Readman explained their methodology. For qualitative use of addresses, see A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: the General Election of 1906* (Devon, 1973); Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism*, pp. 60–5. A new project by David Thackery and Richard Toye, ‘The age of promises’, indicates a renewed interest in addresses, albeit for a later period. Blending qualitative and quantitative analysis, it is investigating the problem of electoral promises, looking at the changing nature of 20th-century election manifestoes and addresses as a mode of political communication and the relationships between voters, candidates and parties (see <https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/research-project-grants/promises-promises>). Thackery and Toye have argued that ‘a history of the act of making promises ... illuminates the development of political communication and democratic representation’ (D. Thackery and R. Toye, ‘An age of promises: British election manifestos and addresses 1900–1997’, *Twentieth Century British History*, early view (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwz033>).

seeking to establish ‘scope and typicality’ in the ‘huge discourses’ generated during an election, and, ultimately, to discover what these contests were ‘actually about’.⁶⁹ Addresses are clearly not therefore to be regarded as the sole indicator of a candidate or a party’s priorities or of the nature of their appeal. They are, however, a snapshot of a moment of heightened political activity and are, in and of themselves, a stable phenomenon, a fixed point in a campaign as opposed to a discourse evolving over its course. Addresses are, crucially, a highly quantifiable source – and one for which there are fewer methodological complications relating to reporting bias or length of text – that allow us to move away from the generalizations of ‘high political’ studies, as well as those based on single localities or regions. That it is possible, moreover, after a close reading of the text of addresses, to comprehend their language in an empirical manner, hints at a nationalization and, to an extent, a standardization, of electoral discourse. While Blaxill’s methodology, as well as the scale of his corpora, bear natural comparison with this article’s approach, his research focuses on East Anglia and his discussion of the ‘national’ platform is confined to speeches by major politicians. By contrast, my databases are authoritative nationwide samples which provide extensive coverage of all regions, constituency types and parties in England. Perhaps the next innovation, methodologically speaking, could be sustained comparison of addresses and speeches, to trace how closely candidates stuck to the messages articulated, at the outset, in their addresses, and how far an appeal could develop in response to events, the actions of opponents and the perceived demands of an audience.

This article comprises three sections. It covers the respective Liberal and Unionist platforms in 1892, before turning to a discussion of the impact the Newcastle programme had on the relationship of the Liberal party to its organizational machinery after the election. The claims each side made about the other did, to an extent, reflect the realities of the campaign: Liberals did offer electors a diverse collection of reforms but could not avoid the complications arising from the party’s commitment to Ireland; Unionists relied upon voters recognizing the value of performance over promise and did not, beyond undertaking to continue their good work, generally attempt to construct a rival vision for the future. Where Conservative reformism has increasingly been branded as ‘positive’ by scholars, its Liberal counterpart has remained stuck in the ‘sectionalist’ mould. Arguably the major success of positive Unionism is to be found in the fact that its negative aspect – the portrayal of Liberalism as faddism – is the narrative that has continued to dominate. However, as this article will emphasize, the Newcastle programme should be understood less as the sorry apotheosis of faddist-enabling/enabled caucus politics and more as a malleable tool that proved remarkably valuable in informing the Liberal appeal. Radicalized Liberalism was more electorally successful than has been allowed for. The advent of what we may call ‘Newcastle Liberalism’ did not make the Liberal creed incoherent in 1892. Rather, it fleshed out the base upon which candidates could build a campaign, positively, not negatively, making it about something more than Home Rule. It perhaps did more to reshape the Liberal platform in the early 1890s than, as Eugenio Biagini would have it, ‘the crisis of public conscience caused by the debate over Home Rule act[ing] as the main catalyst in the remaking of popular radicalism’.⁷⁰ The article will also show that positive Unionism was an earlier and more widespread phenomenon than previously assumed and that it played a central role in 1892. Unionist language

⁶⁹ L. Blaxill, ‘The language of imperialism in British electoral politics, 1880–1910’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xlv (2017), 416–48, at pp. 420–2; L. Blaxill, ‘Quantifying the language of British politics, 1880–1910’, *Historical Research*, lxxxvi (2013), 313–341, at p. 322.

⁷⁰ E. F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 376.

was more expansive and constructive than supposed, albeit more self-referential than visionary in tone. Criticism of Liberal ‘fads’ was integrated into a narrative of reform wherein six years of concrete achievements were evidence of ‘the wise regard which the Government has paid to the needs of the Working Classes’;⁷¹ juxtaposed against fanciful promises, these measures signalled the boons that would follow re-election. Attacks on Home Rule enabled Unionists to further reinforce their reformist credentials, for, ‘unhampered by a promise of Home Rule’, they were ‘free to begin work at once’ on measures actually desired.⁷² Both platforms were nationalized, ‘positive’ and, broadly speaking, coherent.

*

Liberals took full rhetorical advantage of the recognizability of ‘the Newcastle programme’ in 1892. Two-fifths of candidates referred either to the ‘Newcastle programme’, a ‘Liberal programme’ or the results of the N.L.F.’s conference in their address, and a third of addresses explicitly sanctioned the ‘programme’. The application of programmatic language in this manner assumed a general knowledge by the electorate of the programme’s content and served to neatly signify support for a corpus of reforms. Candidates variously stated that their political creed was ‘covered by the Newcastle programme’⁷³ and that they were in harmony with ‘the whole Liberal Party in the adoption of the Newcastle Programme’.⁷⁴ Henry Roscoe admitted that when he was elected for South Manchester in 1886, granting Ireland ‘a legislative body to deal with affairs exclusively and specifically Irish formed the sole topic of my address’. Now, to alert voters to his broader principles, he pointed to ‘the programme of the Liberal Party, as expressed at Newcastle’.⁷⁵ The programme was ‘not merely a declaration of political intentions’, W. A. Macarthur apprised a Filey audience, ‘it meant a happier prospect, a fuller life for those who practically constituted the nation’. It was the ‘lever’ by which ‘the people of this country’ could be ‘lifted to a higher plane’, Thomas Parker told Dudley Liberals.⁷⁶ Where Unionists ‘likened the promises of the Newcastle programme to the stuffing of a goose’,⁷⁷ Liberals ‘asked what programme the Tories had to lay before the country’, to which they answered ‘none’ – their opponents simply ‘relied upon their past performances’.⁷⁸ The chief speaker at a Liberal event in Redditch contended that ‘nobody had heard of a Tory programme’ – the government did not ‘think it worth their while’ to put one forward, instead urging electors: “‘we have been in office six years, and shall be exceedingly obliged to you to send us six years longer’”.⁷⁹ Speaking in Tavistock, James Bryce proclaimed that the ‘Tory programme might be dismissed in a few words’: it ‘consisted in appealing to the past for confidence in the future’ and was ‘as meagre and unsatisfactory as the Liberal programme was large and sufficient’.⁸⁰ The expansiveness of the one was a special virtue when compared with the sparseness of the other.

⁷¹ B.L. Coll., Dorrington (Tewksbury), vol. ii, fo. 410.

⁷² B.L. Coll., Williams (Truro), vol. v, fo. 1370.

⁷³ N.L.C., collection, Harvey (Mid Hertfordshire).

⁷⁴ N.L.C., Cheetham (Oldham).

⁷⁵ N.L.C., Cheetham.

⁷⁶ *Reading Mercury*, 18 June 1892, p. 4; *Driffield Times*, 4 June 1892, p. 3; *Worcester County Advertiser*, 4 June 1892, p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Sussex Agricultural Express*, 16 July 1892, p. 7, Broadie-Hoare (Hampstead).

⁷⁸ *Wellington Journal*, 4 June 1892, p. 8, Lander (Shropshire, Newport).

⁷⁹ *Alcester Chronicle*, 4 June 1892, p. 5.

⁸⁰ *Cornish & Devon Post*, 4 June 1892, p. 4.

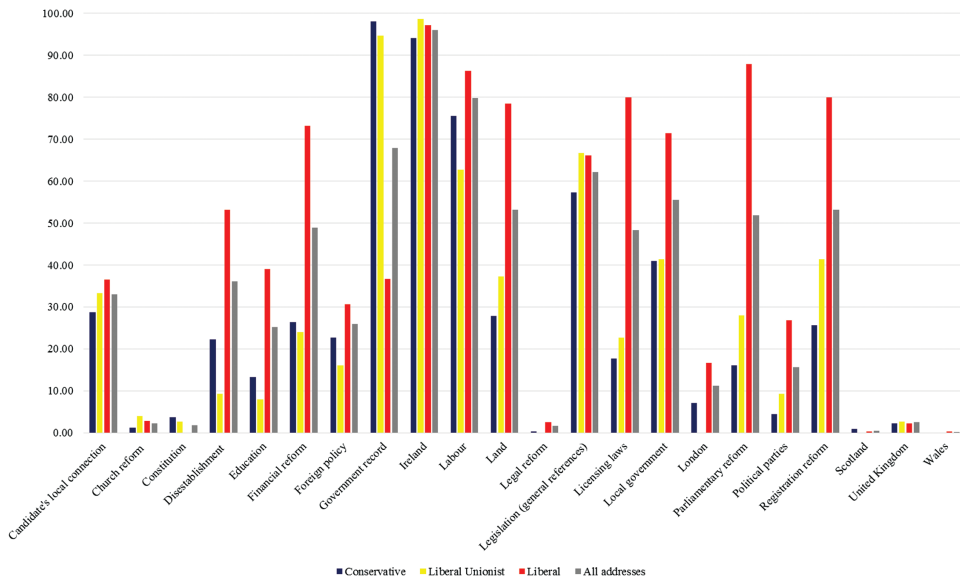


Figure 3. Issues mentioned in English election addresses 1892 by party (percentage of addresses).

The Newcastle programme moreover provided the major organizing theme around which the Liberal appeal was structured. Figure 3 shows that the Liberal platform in 1892 was considerably more varied than the Unionist. This could be interpreted as symbolic of sectionalism. However, that financial reform, labour, land, local government, licensing, and parliamentary and registration reform each appeared in more than 70 per cent of addresses signifies a high degree of consistency in the party's message nationwide. Excluding Ireland, 91.9 per cent of addresses mentioned one or more of the reforms endorsed in October 1891, and all but one of the ten most popular non-Irish sub-issues were N.L.F. resolutions. The programme however proved remarkably pliable. As Figure 4 and Table 1 illustrate, Irish self-government aside, the most salient Newcastle policy among Liberals was the local veto, followed closely by one-man-one-vote and district and/or parish councils (65.1 per cent). At Newcastle, these measures had been endorsed, respectively, in the omnibus, fifth and sixth resolutions. In addresses where Ireland or the government's Irish record received top billing, district/parish councils, registration reform and one-man-one-vote were the most popular second topics. Four-fifths of addresses alluded to some form of registration reform, whereas only a third interacted explicitly with Welsh disestablishment. Among the English addresses that frontloaded Ireland, 6.1 per cent accorded Welsh disestablishment the position it had occupied in the N.L.F.'s schedule of resolutions, making it only the seventh most popular second point of discussion. For Welsh Liberals, by contrast, the programme was effectively a two-issue document, comprising Home Rule and disestablishment; they interpreted it as a binding commitment upon the part of British Liberalism, made on its behalf by its representative organisation.⁸¹ Disestablishment appeared in 96.4 per cent of Welsh Liberal addresses, a quarter of which described the party as having placed disestablishment 'on its programme immediately after Home Rule', such placement 'ensur[ing] for it an early

⁸¹ For the consequences of the Welsh Liberal approach to the Newcastle programme, see N. Lloyd-Jones, 'Liberal Unionism and political representation in Wales, c.1886–93', *Historical Research*, lxxxviii (2015), 482–507; Lloyd-Jones, 'A new British history of the Home Rule crisis', ch. 5.

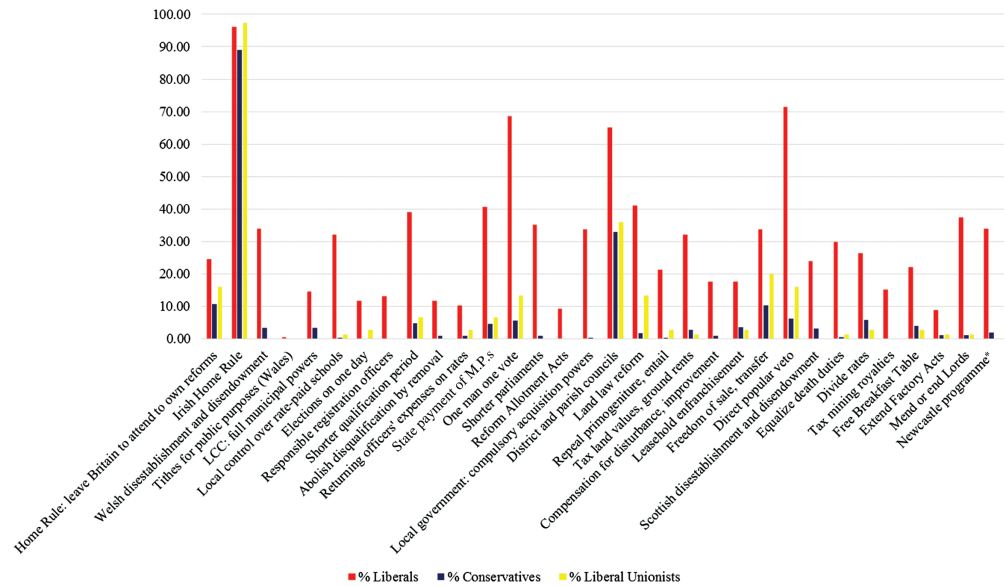


Figure 4. Treatment of Newcastle resolutions in English election addresses 1892 by party (percentage of addresses).

treatment in the next Liberal parliament’.⁸² The relative lack of interaction with the Welsh church question throws into relief the programme’s plasticity in the English context: it was a manifesto not a blueprint.

The programme’s adaptability meant that it could be referred to as a whole and by its individual measures, with candidates pulling out policies from the list of resolutions and rearranging them, for the sake of thematic clarity or to reflect their own priorities. For example, in Launceston, Cornwall, Thomas Owen provided a twelve-point numbered list explaining ‘the Liberal programme’, the first two items of which followed the Newcastle resolutions but were then followed by registration reform, one-man-one-vote, and district and parish councils.⁸³ Thomas Burt’s address to Morpeth stated that ‘the Newcastle Programme’ comprised Home Rule, one-man-one-vote, the payment of M.P.s, the popular veto, land law reform, the taxation of ground rents, and a free breakfast table.⁸⁴ A column carried in multiple provincial newspapers listed the reforms embraced in ‘The Liberal Programme’ in the order of their respective resolutions, under the title ‘For The Whole Country’, before elaborating on their thrust under the headings ‘For Ireland’, ‘For Wales’, ‘For London’, ‘For The Villages’ and ‘For Labour’. Grouped under the ‘Villages’ category were district and parish councils, reforms to allotments legislation and compulsory purchase powers for local authorities; registration reform, one-man-one-vote and the payment of M.P.s were placed under ‘Labour’, along with an extension of the Factory Acts and ‘prosecution of rural reforms with a view to lessening the rush of villagers into the towns’.⁸⁵ ‘THE NEWCASTLE PROGRAMME. WHAT THE LIBERALS PROPOSE TO DO’, a placard and poster used in several constituencies,

⁸² E.g., N.L.C. Coll., Edwards (Radnorshire); B.L. Coll., Lloyd George, vol. iii, fo. 813.
⁸³ N.L.C. Coll.
⁸⁴ N.L.C. Coll.
⁸⁵ *Northampton Chronicle*, 22 June 1892, p. 3; *Thanet Advertiser*, 25 June 1892, p. 6; *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 25 June 1892, p. 6; *Yarmouth Independent*, 25 June 1892, p. 3.

Table 1. Top ten Liberal non-Ireland sub-issues.

Sub-issue	Percentage of addresses
Direct veto/local option	71.4
One-man-one-vote	68.6
Parish councils	59
Registration reform (general references)	51.9
Land law reform (general references)	41
Payment of M.P.s	40.8
District councils	39.2
Shorter qualification period	39
Shorter parliaments	35.2
Welsh disestablishment	33.9

similarly re-assembled the resolutions around common topics, albeit in a more condensed fashion. Scottish disestablishment, one of nine measures in the ‘omnibus’, was advertised alongside Welsh disestablishment, the original second resolution. The ‘simple and easy’ transfer of land, also an omnibus item, was promoted to number four, while the third resolution, on the London County Council’s (L.C.C.’s) powers, was omitted in favour of the sixth, a broader local government reform, relevant in all constituencies. With Gladstone’s face positioned above the list, it linked the programme with the Grand Old Man and thus with Liberal orthodoxy (Figure 5). In Prestwich, this iteration of the programme appeared in a booklet, which stated that the candidate would ‘support The Programme of Legislation set forth’.⁸⁶ In Cheltenham, the resolutions were re-ordered and printed in abridged form as ‘The Liberal Programme’; carried adjacent to the address in handbill form, they were a supplementary source of information.⁸⁷ In South Hampshire, the resolutions made up the address’s frontispiece, with an image of Gladstone mirroring that of the candidate inside. The address concluded with support for ‘the Newcastle programme’, although the ‘programme’ as stated on the frontispiece had been altered to match the content and order of the address.⁸⁸ Only two candidates structured the content of their addresses around the resolutions’ original sequence.

Because it drew upon a catalogue of measures upon which Liberals were agreed – the precise original scheduling of which arguably mattered less than the fact of the programme’s existence and function as a repository of reforms – the Liberal appeal was highly consistent across the different categories of constituency.⁸⁹ Three ‘domestic’ policies appeared in the ten most frequently mentioned Newcastle proposals in each constituency type: the veto, one-man-one-vote and the mending or ending of the Lords. The payment of M.P.s, shorter parliaments and the taxing of land values each featured in the top ten for urban and provincial boroughs and for London; district/parish councils did so in the case of the counties and boroughs, and a shorter qualification period in the counties, provincial boroughs and London. The veto was after Home Rule the second most popular Newcastle reform in both urban and provincial borough addresses, and the third most popular in London and the counties. One-man-one vote occupied third place

⁸⁶ B.L. Coll., vol. i, fo. 18.

⁸⁷ B.L. Coll., vol. ii, fo. 377.

⁸⁸ B.L. Coll., vol. iv, fo. 965.

⁸⁹ The English constituency type classifications referred to here are those used by Readman in his study of 1895 addresses. They are: London; counties; provincial boroughs; and highly urbanized boroughs (Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Newcastle, Sunderland, Middlesbrough, and Sheffield).

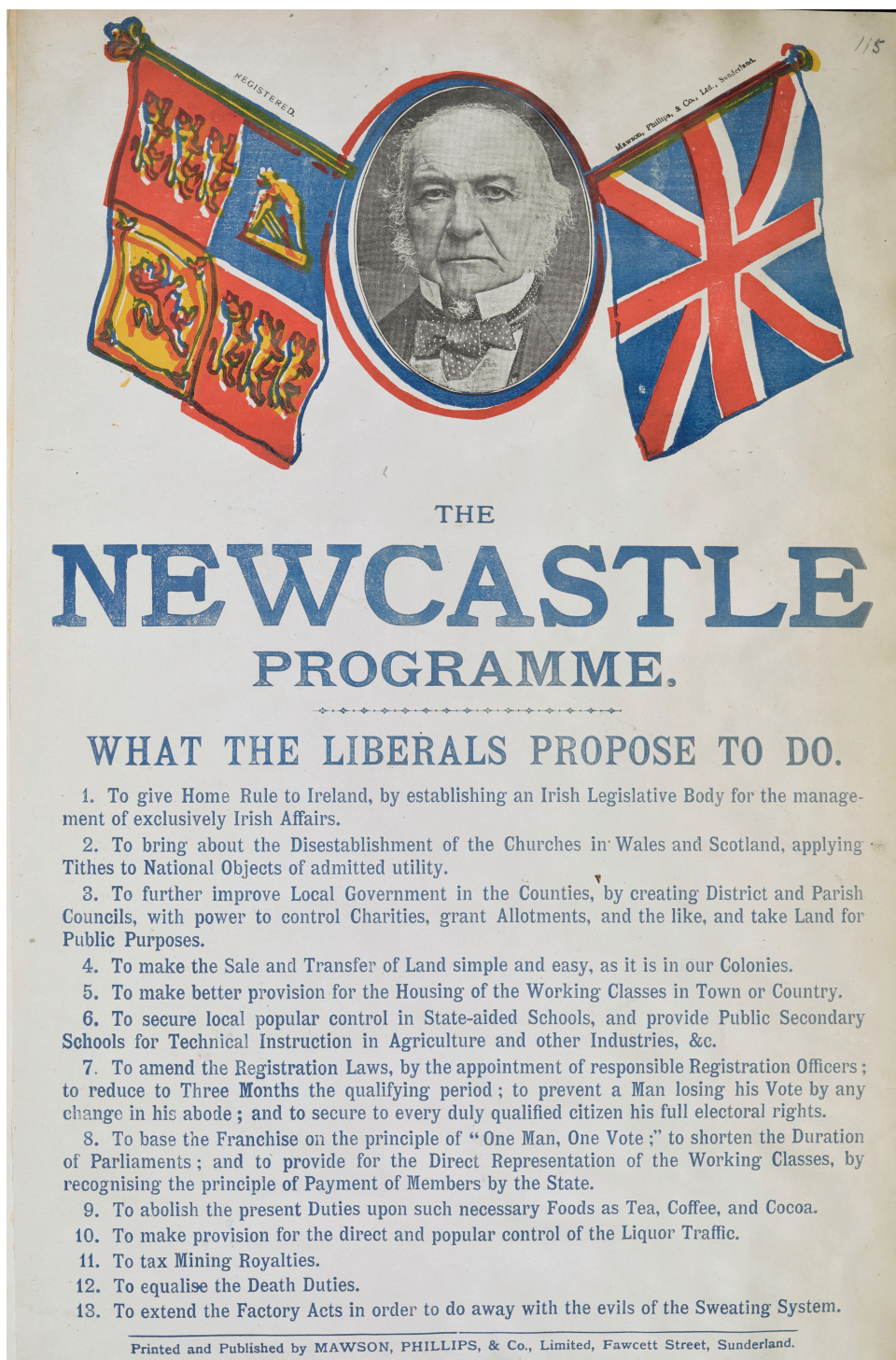


Figure 5. Liberal poster outlining the 'Newcastle Programme' ©British Library Board (General Reference Collection, 1899.r.49, vol. i, fo. 115. See also vol. i, fo. 78 and vol. ii, fo. 526).

in the boroughs, fourth in the counties and fifth in London. The incidence of mentions of licensing reform across constituency types is strikingly similar, with only labour and registration reform coming close to achieving a comparable degree of uniform visibility. Regarded as ‘potent engines of rural reform and renewal’,⁹⁰ district/parish councils played more in the counties, where they were included in 81.7 per cent of addresses – double the percentage among borough addresses – whereas in the capital the specific promise to expand the L.C.C.’s remit was incorporated into nine-in-ten platforms. Among these London Liberals, the most recurrent individual L.C.C. reforms were the allocation of powers over water (68.8 per cent), the police (60.4 per cent), gas (54.2 per cent) and markets (52.1 per cent), and the amalgamation of the L.C.C. and the Corporation of London (54.2 per cent) – all of which had been covered in the N.L.F.’s resolution and formed articles in the ‘London Programme’ from that March’s Council elections.⁹¹ Two-fifths of London Liberal candidates expressed support for ‘the Newcastle programme’ and three-quarters made explicit their endorsement of ‘the London Programme’, again suggesting the utility of a broader programmatic language.

Blaxill suggested that 1892 ‘might reasonably be described as the sequel to 1886’, but it could in many respects be better understood as the prequel to 1895. According to Readman, the Liberal appeal that year was ‘more “programmatic” than that of 1892’ and was ‘based on the provisions of the Newcastle programme’.⁹² Many of the reforms listed by Readman as among the top Liberal issues in 1895 in fact achieved greater prominence at the previous election, for which he provided no figures. Although Readman asserted the coherence and ‘logic’ of the message in 1895, it can be argued that the Liberal platform possessed a still higher degree of lucidity and consistency at the first of the two contests. One-man-one-vote appeared in considerably more English county and borough addresses in 1892, while registration reform went from featuring in over fourth-fifths of provincial and three-quarters of county addresses to half in each case. In 1892, district/parish councils were included in eight-in-ten county addresses; in 1895, this dropped to 50 per cent, with the proportion in both urban and provincial boroughs falling by one-third. The payment of M.P.s and the taxation of ground values were likewise more conspicuous in 1892. The difference in mentions of the veto was less than one percentage point, indicating that it was by 1895 an established policy among candidates and not, as Blaxill intimated, one that ‘failed to take fire in 1892’ only to ‘become important’ three years later.⁹³ If 1895 was perceived by contemporaries to have been lost on the Newcastle programme, it was not necessarily *fought* on it to the extent of the previous contest. Two Newcastle issues were however accorded more visibility in 1895. The percentage of borough and county addresses contemplating reform or abolition of the upper house more than doubled in the context of Lord Rosebery’s crusade against the Lords. There was, on average, a fourteen percentage point increase per constituency type in the proportion advocating disestablishment, presumably owing to the collapse of the Welsh disestablishment bill in the spring of 1895.

It is nonetheless clear that the Newcastle programme had a major blind spot: labour. The sole labour sub-issue contained in the resolutions – an extension of the factory acts – appeared in just 8.9 per cent of Liberal addresses. Yet as Figure 3 shows, nearly ten times this number referred to labour measures (86.3 per cent) and, as an issue, labour’s

⁹⁰ P. Readman, *Land and Nation in England: Patriotism, National Identity, and the Politics of Land, 1880–1914* (Suffolk, 2008), p. 27.

⁹¹ S. Webb, *The London Programme* (London, 1891).

⁹² Blaxill, ‘Electoral politics’, p. 88; Readman, ‘1895 general election’, pp. 470, 492.

⁹³ Blaxill, ‘Electoral politics’, p. 120.

prominence was superseded only by Ireland and parliamentary reform. Excluding Factory Act reform from this calculation has negligible impact on the overall figure, with labour still featuring in 86.1 per cent. By contrast, local government and licensing reforms which fell outside the measures endorsed at Newcastle appeared in far fewer addresses – 28.9 per cent and 32.4 per cent, respectively – suggesting that the N.L.F. resolutions embodied the crux of the Liberal position on these questions. The programme did not capture the full spectrum of land, parliamentary or registration measures on the platform – non-Newcastle proposals in these areas were mentioned in 47.9 per cent, 47.3 per cent and 59.5 per cent of addresses, respectively – but it appears that candidates were interested in labour reform in a way the N.L.F. was not. Indeed, two weeks prior to the Newcastle conference, Schnadhorst informed Gladstone that, in deciding upon ‘the subjects which require treatment’, he and his colleagues were ‘avoiding altogether discussing the legal hours question’, on which opinion was ‘so much divided’; it was therefore felt ‘more necessary that sympathy should be expressed with all efforts to raise the worker’.⁹⁴ Yet of the addresses that mentioned labour in 1892, just over half (56.3 per cent) tackled the legislative restriction of working hours. The proportion of addresses doing so was marginally higher in the counties and provincial boroughs in 1892 than in 1895, while that in urban boroughs was 6 per cent higher and that in London nearly double. However, the hours question aside, Liberal language on labour was nebulous, with no individual proposal appearing in the top ten sub-issues and the most prominent – poor law reform – in a third of addresses, fewer even than Welsh disestablishment. It was followed by a generic wish to improve the ‘condition of the working classes’ (26.6 per cent), the need for sanitary housing conditions (19.2 per cent) and old-age pensions (17.5 per cent). From 1892 to 1895 the proportion of Liberal addresses mentioning employers’ liability more than tripled in London and the boroughs and quadrupled in the counties, again most likely due to the Lords’ handling of the matter. Although Readman indicated that old-age pensions received comparatively little attention in 1895 relative to other policies, the figures still doubled in London and provincial boroughs, increased by one-third in the counties and more than tripled in urban areas.⁹⁵ If the Liberal platform on labour was indeed more programmatic in 1895 it was not so on account of the Newcastle programme. Lawrence argued that a lack of innovation in the late 1890s on labour questions was ‘testimony to the party’s determination to shed the legacy of programmatic politics’, but labour formed no discernible part of the programme it later strove to disown.⁹⁶

Where did Ireland figure in Liberal rhetoric? Some historians, like Richard Shannon, have argued that ‘Home Rule did not feature greatly’ in 1892.⁹⁷ Yet Liberals made little attempt to relegate it to the background when compiling their addresses. Nearly two-thirds placed the issue at their head – when taken together with the government’s Irish record, this increases to three-quarters. Ireland was of greater importance in 1892 than 1895, when the proportion of addresses dealing with Ireland first halved in the counties, fell by a third in provincial boroughs and by nearly two-fifths in London. The overall percentage of addresses mentioning Ireland decreased in urban areas and the counties across the two elections.⁹⁸ Home Rule itself featured in 96.7 per cent of Liberal addresses in 1892. Nearly a quarter claimed that Irish Home Rule would effect a closer union or, in the words of

⁹⁴ Brit. Libr., Additional MS. 44295 (25 Sept. 1891), fo. 258.

⁹⁵ Readman, ‘1895 general election’, p. 492.

⁹⁶ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p. 217.

⁹⁷ Shannon, *Age of Salisbury*, pp. 374–6. Shannon’s comments are based on a reading of post-election periodical articles by defeated Conservative candidates, as opposed to election addresses or speeches.

⁹⁸ Readman, ‘1895 general election’, p. 470.

Oldham's J. T. Hibbert, 'a real connection of interest and affection in the stead of the present hollow and sham system'.⁹⁹ However, the language of the 'Union of Hearts' does not appear to have had the transformative effect or longevity Biagini credited it with, for the proportion of addresses stating that self-government would 'bind that nation in closer alliance to ourselves' fell by two-thirds from 1886,¹⁰⁰ and the number of candidates using the phrase 'Union of Hearts' decreased from a mere thirteen to three. The broader, simpler assertion that the policy was a measure of justice maintained a more consistent position, featuring in 23 per cent and 20.8 per cent of addresses in the respective contests. Biagini argued that the crisis 'made post-1886 radicalism particularly passionate and emotional' but justifications of Home Rule in 1892 were dispassionate and unemotional.¹⁰¹

There was an absence of rhetorical flourish to the Liberal proposition. For example, in Chesterfield, Thomas Bayley stipulated that the 'power to be assigned to the Irish Parliament be strictly defined and limited to purely Irish affairs', while in the Isle of Wight, Sigismund Mendl made explicit which matters should be outside 'the competence of the Irish Parliament' and the necessary 'safeguards for the maintenance of the integrity of the Empire, the Supremacy of the Imperial Parliament' and religious freedom.¹⁰² More than two-thirds of the addresses which mentioned Home Rule afforded some explanation as to the shape it would take, perhaps to mitigate against allegations that Liberals sought to keep electors in the dark. Candidates were more explicit than six years earlier, with the percentage specifying that its grant would be in the form of an Irish parliament increasing from 17.7 per cent to 28.4 per cent and the proportion describing it merely as the control of Irish affairs falling from a third to a quarter; only 7.9 per cent of addresses equated Home Rule solely to local self-government. Half the addresses expressed a desire for appropriate safeguards, the most prevalent being that the supremacy of the imperial parliament be maintained (41.4 per cent). A typical address might therefore describe Home Rule as 'devolution upon a Parliament in Dublin of such matters as the Imperial Parliament may decide to be of purely Irish interest, with safeguards for the integrity of the Empire and the retention in the hands of the Imperial Parliament of all Imperial affairs'.¹⁰³ Emotive language was perhaps better directed toward condemning the government's conduct in Ireland. More than half of Liberals (53.9 per cent) asserted that Unionists swept into office on a tide of Irish promises they later broke, with two-thirds of this group alleging that, 'notwithstanding the pledges which were so freely given ... the most vindictive and drastic Coercion has been meted out'.¹⁰⁴ The 'Tory Coercionist Government'¹⁰⁵ had 'not given equal laws' but 'shackled that Country with a Coercion Act'¹⁰⁶ cruelly administered and 'directed against opinion, against combination, against the freedom of the Press, and against free speech'.¹⁰⁷ Such legislation would 'degrade Civil Liberty' and 'bring upon the British Nation the condemnation of all civilised people'.¹⁰⁸ Even then, the choice could be put in plain terms: there was 'no middle course between what is called Home Rule and a continuation of the system of Coercion'.¹⁰⁹ Candidates

⁹⁹ N.L.C. Coll.

¹⁰⁰ N.L.C. Coll., Herbert (Birmingham Central).

¹⁰¹ Biagini, *British Democracy*, pp. 4, 42.

¹⁰² Both N.L.C. Coll.

¹⁰³ N.L.C. Coll., Bonham Carter (Petersfield).

¹⁰⁴ B.L. Coll., Hodgson (Kingston), vol. iii, fo. 683.

¹⁰⁵ N.L.C. Coll., Conybeare (Camborne).

¹⁰⁶ B.L. Coll., Whitbread (Bedford), vol. v, fo. 1346.

¹⁰⁷ B.L. Coll., Hoare (West Cambridgeshire), vol. iii, fo. 670.

¹⁰⁸ B.L. Coll., Gardner (Saffron Walden), vol. ii, fo. 487; N.L.C. Coll., Wilson (Pontefract).

¹⁰⁹ N.L.C. Coll., Neil (Newton).

stressed that the Tories had ‘no policy for Ireland but perpetual coercion’,¹¹⁰ whereas the Liberals – opposed to ‘government of Ireland by exceptional and coercive legislation’¹¹¹ – would end ‘the long alienation of the Irish people’ by recognizing their entitlement to ‘a Parliament of their own, wherein they can manage their domestic affairs’.¹¹²

It is telling that Home Rule was treated as both an impediment to and enabler of the remainder of the Newcastle policies. A quarter of addresses approved Home Rule as a means for unblocking the way – more than twice as many as in 1886 (11.3 per cent) – as prevalent a concern as closer union or justice to Ireland. Looking beyond Britain’s ‘duty to Ireland’, there stood ‘the Newcastle programme in its integrity’.¹¹³ Candidates could either warn that ‘until a satisfactory settlement is arrived at ... little or no progress’ could be made with the rest of the ‘Liberal Programme’,¹¹⁴ or reassure electors that although ‘Ireland stands first in the order of our programme’ it would ‘not prevent other important measures being brought forward’.¹¹⁵ Andrew Clarke, for example, ‘placed this question first’ in his address to Chatham ‘because until it has been settled upon a lasting basis, needed reforms ... will continue to await in vain the due consideration of Parliament’.¹¹⁶ George Warmington employed a similar tactic in Stratford-on-Avon but a subtle difference in emphasis made his message a more positive one and Home Rule’s capabilities more expansive: he sought an immediate solution ‘not merely to satisfy the demands of Justice, but also to clear the way for those far-reaching Reforms which make up the Liberal Programme’.¹¹⁷ For some candidates, the programme was a dual one. Robinson Souttar put it to Oxford that ‘The Newcastle Programme ... sets forth the principle of Home Rule proposed for Ireland, and many of the measures proposed for England’.¹¹⁸ James Stansfeld and Thomas Shaw’s joint address to Halifax presented Liberals as having ‘two great objects in view’: the first, ‘to do justice to Ireland’; the second, ‘to carry out great reforms of a popular and democratic character’, as ‘embodied in what you know as the Newcastle programme’ – although the latter could ‘only be carried under favourable conditions’.¹¹⁹

Liberals in 1892 were united, not divided, in their appeal to the programme’s provisions and in their application of programmatic language. With the exception of Home Rule’s place at its head, the lack of rigidity to the Newcastle programme illustrates both the utility and the limits of programme politics. That there was a consistency to the policies elevated by candidates indicates a high degree of acceptance as to their place in electioneering rhetoric; that these policies did not map easily on to the order in which they were prescribed at Newcastle suggests that the ‘programme’ was interpreted as a document that encapsulated the core of Liberal policies in which candidates were interested, rather than as one which provided a definitive template and sequence for their realisation. ‘The Newcastle programme’ was a potent election cry, but how far it afforded a programme for government or a legislative roadmap is debateable. Home Rule was far from relegated, but it was not allowed to dominate. However, that it was potentially problematic is clear from the fact that Liberals strove to portray it alternately as the

¹¹⁰ N.L.C. Coll., Channing (East Northamptonshire).

¹¹¹ B.L. Coll., Pryce (Abingdon), vol. iv, fo. 1023.

¹¹² B.L. Coll., Taylor (Bolton), vol. v, fo. 1257; N.L.C. Coll., Baptie (Bath).

¹¹³ N.L.C. Coll., Leake (Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth).

¹¹⁴ N.L.C. Coll., Pyman (Whitby).

¹¹⁵ N.L.C. Coll., Plowden (Wolverhampton West).

¹¹⁶ N.L.C. Coll.

¹¹⁷ B.L. Coll., vol. v, fo. 1333.

¹¹⁸ N.L.C. Coll.

¹¹⁹ N.L.C. Coll.

gateway to or *primus inter pares* in the Newcastle programme. That Ireland occupied this awkward position is indicative of the fact that however valuable a rhetorical asset 'the Newcastle programme' and however useful a campaigning tool the interchangeability of its individual policies proved to be, Home Rule was, essentially, immutable and immovable.

★

If Home Rule was conspicuous at the front of the Liberal platform as the object necessary for unlocking a wider corpus of measures, Ireland was arguably better integrated *into* the Unionist appeal. It featured in three interlocking guises. Opposed to its repeal, the government had shown the Union to empower the good governance of Ireland; unimpeded by Home Rule, they had and would continue to pass beneficial legislation for the whole United Kingdom; shackled to the Home Rule albatross, their opponents were incapable of anything other than attachment to the one policy, which they stood no chance of passing. Two-fifths of Unionist addresses presented a choice of Home Rule or the passage of useful legislation, and one-tenth implored electors to prefer a 'record of *performances*' to a 'programme of *promises*'.¹²⁰ Unionists could argue interchangeably that Liberals tried to divert attention away from the main issues by 'dangling' bait before the electorate 'to catch votes' and that Ireland was 'the issue insisted upon by Mr. Gladstone'.¹²¹ The Gladstonians might have 'tacked on to their Irish policy a programme of promises', but they admitted 'that this programme must wait'.¹²² It was thus that Henry Chaplin, president of the Board of Agriculture, declared that although the Liberals had 'published a pretentious programme ... with much ostentation and parade', it was 'notorious that none of the measures ... can be dealt with or accomplished so long as the leader ... continues to pursue the chimera of Home Rule'. The 'programme of the Ministry' was 'much more modest' – indeed, its merit lay in its being 'simple in the extreme'. It was 'to do in the future as ... they had done in the past'.¹²³ As Patrick Lyon, the Conservative candidate for Stockport, put it, 'Unionists are free to attend to English wants' and they had already 'proved beyond doubt that they *can* legislate for England sympathetically, wisely, and well'.¹²⁴ Voters should 'make deeds done' their 'augury of a happy future rather than vain, empty, and illusory promises';¹²⁵ if they wanted 'progressive legislation such as has been passed ... to go on for [their] benefit', they would support the government.¹²⁶ The circularity of this narrative threw into relief the alleged disparity in the parties' respective positions. Two-fifths of Conservative and of Liberal Unionist candidates made recourse to the premise that by voting for a Liberal, electors would license Home Rule blocking the way (see [Tables 2 and 3](#)). Equal proportions of Conservative and Liberal Unionist addresses emphasized that the government had 'not allowed Ireland to block the way of British Reforms' (13.8 per cent and 13.3 per cent).¹²⁷

The Unionist component of 'positive Unionism' was treated as 'positive' in its own right, with 37.6 per cent of Unionist addresses asserting that Ireland's condition had been

¹²⁰ B.L. Coll., Mowbray (Prestwich), vol. iv, fo. 929.

¹²¹ B.L. Coll., Field (Eastbourne), vol. ii, fo. 436; Pym (Bedford), vol. iv, fo. 929.

¹²² N.L.C. Coll., Balfour (Leeds Central).

¹²³ B.L. Coll., vol. i, fo. 261; *The Times*, 20 June 1892, p. 8.

¹²⁴ N.L.C. Coll.

¹²⁵ N.L.C. Coll., Shepherd-Cross (Bolton).

¹²⁶ N.L.C. Coll., Lawrence (Bury).

¹²⁷ N.L.C. Coll., Wodehouse (Bath).

transformed. The 1886 parliament had been 'returned to maintain the Union and restore the authority of the law',¹²⁸ having ruled with a 'just and generous but resolute hand',¹²⁹ Unionists could congratulate themselves on six years' 'splendid work'.¹³⁰ Markers of success included a reduction in agrarian crime, pauperism and emigration, and an increase in trade and savings deposits.¹³¹ Ireland was the aspect of the government's record most celebrated by Liberal Unionists, and second only to Salisbury's foreign policy among Conservatives. The narrative was simple: the government had understood that 'an exceptional condition of circumstances demanded exceptional treatment',¹³² thanks to Arthur Balfour's chief secretaryship, 'agrarian outrage and intimidation have practically ceased to be',¹³³ and the 'loyal and respectable Irish are enabled to live and carry on their business peaceably'.¹³⁴ The government's reputation for restoring law and order was the third most popular sub-issue among Conservatives and fourth among Liberal Unionists. Having rescued Ireland from anarchy, there followed the 'timely and judicious provision of Remedial Measures'.¹³⁵ The government was praised in 13.7 per cent of Unionist addresses for 'solving the Land Question by enabling the tenants of Ireland to become owners of their holdings', 'without unduly pledging British credit'.¹³⁶ Now 'tranquil', Ireland was capable of receiving an appropriate 'concession' of local government, which would 'complete a course of legislation which should leave no legitimate grievance unredressed'.¹³⁷ Of the Unionist addresses which referred to the government's Irish record, 22 per cent discussed its proposal for Irish county and district councils, read a second time in May 1892. In 1886, Liberals were almost wholly uninterested in Irish local government (6.5 per cent), but their former colleagues strove to present it as a genuine alternative to Home Rule (64.8 per cent), and a quarter of Conservatives argued that Ireland should receive treatment equal to but no more generous than the rest of the United Kingdom. The bill's introduction had therefore shown that 'the Unionist party are desirous of extending within safe limits ... the principles of Local Government now applied to Great Britain' through the county councils.¹³⁸ Half of Liberal Unionist and a third of Conservative addresses stressed candidates' readiness to pursue a similar measure in the new parliament. Two-fifths of these Conservatives, and 44.7 per cent of these Liberal Unionists recommended that it be on the lines of legislation already enacted for the rest of Britain, England and/or Scotland (Wales never merited separate mention). This would surely 'satisfy to the full any legitimate demands that can be made for the management of Irish local affairs by the Irish themselves'.¹³⁹

Electors were presented with two choices: return the government and expect 'a continuation of that beneficial legislation and administration'; return Gladstone and not only 'throw Ireland again into disorder' but also 'impede the continuity of that wise and steady policy' under which Britain had 'prospered'.¹⁴⁰ As Charles Maconda implored the

¹²⁸ B.L. Coll., Fulton (North West Ham), vol. ii, fo. 485.

¹²⁹ N.L.C. Coll., Hardy (Ashford).

¹³⁰ N.L.C. Coll., Yates (Manchester North).

¹³¹ See, e.g., B.L. Coll., Dyke (Dartford), vol. ii, fo. 415.

¹³² B.L. Coll., Agg-Gardner (Cheltenham), vol. i, fo. 1.

¹³³ B.L. Coll., Heath (Louth), vol. iii, fo. 631.

¹³⁴ B.L. Coll., Goldsworthy (Hammersmith), vol. ii, fo. 526.

¹³⁵ N.L.C. Coll., Webster (Isle of Wight).

¹³⁶ N.L.C. Coll., Fry (Bristol North); Lees (Oldham).

¹³⁷ N.L.C. Coll., Bain (Whitehaven).

¹³⁸ N.L.C. Coll., James (Bury).

¹³⁹ N.L.C. Coll., Bowles (King's Lynn).

¹⁴⁰ B.L. Coll., Ambrose (Harrow), vol. i, fo. 23.

electors of Rotherhithe, why ‘risk or spoil it all by madly following a “will-o’-the-wisp” to anarchy, bloodshed, and destruction?’ His advice was ‘Let well alone’.¹⁴¹ The Liberals were presented as ‘incongruous and reckless experimentalists, pledged to the pursuit of a wild and undefined policy’.¹⁴² Why ‘risk the certainty of seven years more of peace, order and progress?’¹⁴³ Had voters ‘no English interests, no English reforms to attend to?’¹⁴⁴ A fifth of Unionist addresses reminded constituents that Home Rule had been rejected once and a similar proportion claimed that Gladstone ‘deliberately kept’ the country in ‘absolute ignorance’ regarding his new scheme,¹⁴⁵ expecting them to ‘blindly trust him’.¹⁴⁶ Unionists referred to Home Rule in broad terms. Candidates declared that they would ‘oppose any measure giving to Ireland a separate legislature’¹⁴⁷ and would instead ‘maintain that one Parliament and one only should make the laws for the people of Great Britain and Ireland’.¹⁴⁸ A Dublin parliament ‘would only be productive of ruin and disaster’¹⁴⁹ – a ‘misfortune to Ireland no less than to Britain’¹⁵⁰ – and was ‘not calculated to promote the happiness of the Irish people’.¹⁵¹ Electors should not believe the Liberal ‘fiction’ that they could ‘get rid of this question’ by Home Rule – it would inaugurate ‘an Irish Question more bitter, more lasting, more obstructive, than any that we have known’.¹⁵²

According to Cawood, with Chamberlain ‘tied to an exhausted Conservative ministry on the one hand and passive and unambitious whig allies on the other’, Liberal Unionists ‘in desperation’ fell back on ‘reminders of the threat posed by home rule to the empire’ and revived ‘the cause of Ulster’.¹⁵³ However, Unionists did not overwhelmingly fixate on particular hazards and the parties’ vocabulary on Home Rule was more amorphous – and shared – than is assumed. It focused more on the headlines than the specifics. The proportion of Liberal Unionist addresses drawing attention to imperial dangers dropped from 31.8 per cent in 1886 to 18.7 per cent – a pattern also seen among Conservatives (34.7 per cent to 18.5 per cent). Candidates at both elections were more likely to highlight the peril to the Union – although the incidence likewise decreased, from 47.7 per cent to one-third of Liberal Unionist and from 62.1 per cent to 30.3 per cent of Conservative addresses. Within this discourse, the language of risks was nebulous and there was again little between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives – the respective figures for the repeal of the Union were 4 per cent and 5.6 per cent; for the separation of Britain and Ireland, 6.7 per cent and 11.8 per cent; and, for the destruction of Westminster’s supremacy, 6.7 per cent and 2 per cent. Electors were alerted to the ‘calamity and ruin’ that would afflict ‘the Loyal Minority of our fellow subjects’ by 52 per cent of Liberal Unionists and 44.7 per cent of Conservatives¹⁵⁴ – but these figures were considerably lower than the three-quarters and four-fifths recorded for each party in 1886.

¹⁴¹ N.L.C. Coll.

¹⁴² N.L.C. Coll., Russell (East Berkshire).

¹⁴³ N.L.C. Coll., Heaton (Canterbury).

¹⁴⁴ N.L.C. Coll., Sitwell (Scarborough).

¹⁴⁵ B.L. Coll., Noble (Hastings), vol. iii, fo. 639.

¹⁴⁶ N.L.C. Coll., Darling (Deptford).

¹⁴⁷ *Man of Ross Advertiser*, 30 June 1892, p. 4, Biddulph (Ross).

¹⁴⁸ N.L.C. Coll., Foljambe (Rotherham).

¹⁴⁹ N.L.C. Coll., Willoughby (Boston).

¹⁵⁰ N.L.C. Coll., Dawin (Lichfield).

¹⁵¹ N.L.C. Coll., (Rochdale).

¹⁵² N.L.C. Coll., Emlyn (Manchester South).

¹⁵³ Cawood, ‘1892 general election’, pp. 353–4.

¹⁵⁴ N.L.C. Coll., Bailey (Hereford).

The proportion of Unionist addresses explicitly mentioning Ulster rose only slightly (6.9 per cent) over the course of the two elections and was comparable across the two parties (18.7 per cent Liberal Unionist; 16.6 per cent Conservative). Again, there was within this threat no one major bogey: 8 per cent of Liberal Unionist and 7 per cent of Conservative addresses declared Home Rule an injustice to Ulster; 12 per cent of Liberal Unionists and a tenth of Conservatives underscored 'the determined utterances of Ulster men';¹⁵⁵ and 10 per cent of Conservatives and 6.7 per cent of Liberal Unionists suggested that 'Home Rule means civil war'.¹⁵⁶ By contrast, a quarter of Conservatives and 28 per cent of Liberal Unionists utilized wider ranging assertions such as 'the Irish Loyalists would never consent to transfer their allegiance from the Parliament of the United Kingdom'.¹⁵⁷ David William Bebbington has claimed that an 'attempt to lever Nonconformity into Unionism [was] at the heart of' the 1892 campaign.¹⁵⁸ There were candidates who sought to attract 'serious and thoughtful Nonconformists' by imploring electors to remember 'the *practical unanimity*' of all classes of protestants in opposing 'the domination of a hostile majority',¹⁵⁹ but they were in a minority – a tenth of Liberal Unionist and 5.1 per cent of Conservative addresses mentioned protestant resistance. Just 5.3 per cent of Liberal Unionists painted Home Rule as 'Rome Rule' and 4 per cent foreshadowed the persecution of religious minorities. When aggregated, the religious dimensions of Home Rule were touched on in 16.4 per cent of the party's addresses. The rhetoric of Liberal Unionism should not be too readily conflated with Chamberlain's personal pronouncements, and greater attention should be paid to how closely the language of one wing of the Unionist alliance resembled that of the other. The Irish crisis introduced standardized rhetorics that were designed to be easily comprehensible and recognizable. The rhetorical value of Ireland to Unionist electioneering lay in an appeal to broad narratives, not in specifics.

Roberts has suggested that although the Conservatives 'made some attempt to target working-class support by trumpeting' the ministry's achievements in 1892, this 'sounded rather flat and the fanfare was reserved for the defence of the Union'. However, if Unionists did indeed strive to keep Home Rule 'centre-stage', the government's record by no means played understudy to the Union, instead effectively sharing equal billing.¹⁶⁰ The message in a nutshell was that the 'policy of *maintaining the Union* is compatible with *steady and continuous progress*' at home.¹⁶¹ Ireland featured in 94.1 per cent of Conservative addresses and the government's record in marginally more (98 per cent), and they were both the most consistently mentioned issues across constituency type. While 30.9 per cent had Ireland at their head, two-fifths opened with reference to the ministry's successes. Liberal Unionist addresses followed a similar pattern – 98.7 per cent mentioned Ireland and 94.7 per cent the government's record. As [Tables 2](#) and [3](#) show, eight of the ten most prominent Conservative and Liberal Unionist non-Irish sub-issues were items on the government's record. A quarter of Unionist addresses emphasized that, thanks to the 'wise and patriotic' administration of the government, legislation had been passed 'for the benefit of all classes'.¹⁶² One of the most prominent claims made by Conservatives

¹⁵⁵ B.L. Coll., Freeman-Mitford (Stratford-on-Avon), vol. iv, fo. 894.

¹⁵⁶ N.L.C. Coll., Bromley-Davenport (Macclesfield).

¹⁵⁷ N.L.C. Coll., Tyler (Great Yarmouth).

¹⁵⁸ D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870–1914* (London, 1982), p. 102.

¹⁵⁹ B.L. Coll., Lloyd (Wednesbury), vol. iii, fo. 808; Richardson (Brigg), vol. iv, fo. 1100; N.L.C. Coll., Willox (Everton).

¹⁶⁰ Roberts, "'Terrific outburst'", pp. 191–2.

¹⁶¹ N.L.C. Coll., Legh (Newton).

¹⁶² B.L. Coll., Lidgett (Plymouth), vol. iii, fo. 614.

Table 2. Top ten Conservative non-Irish sub-issues 1892.

Sub-issue	Percentage of addresses
Government record: peace with honour	64
Government record: free education	56.2
Government record: Ireland: law and order restored	52.8
Government record: county councils	45.8
Government record: allotments legislation	44.4
Government record: smallholdings legislation	42.7
Government record: taxation reduced (general references)	42.7
Home Rule vs useful legislation	39
Government record: Ireland: condition improved	37.9
Poor law reform	37.1

Table 3. Top ten Liberal Unionist non-Irish sub-issues 1892.

Sub-issue	Percentage of addresses
Government record: county councils	57.3
Government record: free education	57.3
Government record: peace with honour	56
Government record: Ireland: law and order restored	50.7
Government record: taxation reduced (general references)	45.3
Home Rule vs useful legislation	44
Government record: smallholdings legislation	40
Government record: allotments legislation	37.3
Registration reform (general references)	37.3
Government record: Ireland: condition improved	36

was that the government had reduced taxes and/or local rates (61.5 per cent), while more than half hailed the introduction of free education, and over two-fifths the creation of county councils and allotments reform. Over a fifth (22.2 per cent) noted at least one of the commissions appointed to investigate 'labour-capital relations', sweating and railway hours, with a similar percentage (23.6 per cent) citing coal mining legislation, and nearly a fifth noting changes to the Factory Acts. Liberal Unionists' treatment of all facets of the government's domestic accomplishments either approximately equalled or exceeded that of their Conservative allies. County councils and free education were the most admired items, the latter being touted as an 'example of the truly liberal views on which the Government have acted; a boon Mr. Gladstone's Government never offered'.¹⁶³ Nearly a fifth of Liberal Unionists (18.7 per cent) avowed that their party 'assisted the Unionist Government in securing' useful reforms;¹⁶⁴ legislation had been impressed with 'the stamp of Liberalism'¹⁶⁵ and was 'perfectly consistent with the policy of the old Liberal party'.¹⁶⁶ It surely also suited Conservatives to underscore that they enjoyed the 'support of the ablest of Mr. Gladstone's former Ministers', thus signalling that 'their policy is neither reactionary nor unpopular'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ N.L.C. Coll., Lorne.

¹⁶⁴ N.L.C. Coll., Rothschild (Aylesbury).

¹⁶⁵ N.L.C. Coll., Sullivan (Chester-le-Street).

¹⁶⁶ N.L.C. Coll., Coghill (Newcastle-under-Lyme).

¹⁶⁷ N.L.C. Coll., Warde (Medway).

It is interesting that while the Newcastle programme was ‘rural’ in much of its orientation, many of the government measures most frequently mentioned by Unionists were likewise rural, allotments and smallholdings being the obvious examples. Among Conservatives, local government reforms achieved greatest prominence in the counties, as did achievements in education and with the economy. It was thus that the Somerset Liberal Unionist Association could pronounce in an address to the county’s ‘Rural Voters’: ‘It is to Unionists, not Home Rulers, that you owe your right of voting for County Councillors, your allotments, payment of your school fees, improvement in the dwellings of the poor, in education, in post offices and savings banks, lower rates and lower taxes’.¹⁶⁸ That said, although the government’s record on land was emphasized by Conservatives to the greatest extent in the counties, it was more prevalent in urbanized than provincial boroughs. It was construed as capable of arresting the drift into large towns and cities and, with an interest in and attachment to the soil being restored, facilitating decongestion of the labour market. There was nonetheless little attempt to look forward when it came to land. The most prevalent land sub-issue – a pledge to cheapen and simplify sales and transfers – appeared in one-tenth of Conservative addresses and the next, a vague expression of desire to help agriculture, in 7.6 per cent. Liberal Unionists fared only slightly better, with a fifth of addresses stating that they would improve procedures for the sale of land, and a generic wish to reform the land laws appearing in 13.3 per cent.

If Unionists were content to rest on the laurels of the government’s rural record, Conservatives were better engaged when it came to labour problems. It is notable that whereas a higher percentage of Liberals referenced ‘labour’ as a broader issue, the individual ‘sub-issues’ in this category featured in more Conservative addresses. That the Liberal approach to labour in 1892 was unprogrammatic afforded Conservatives the room to outmanoeuvre their opponents on a range of policies, drawing on a set of reforms they claimed a Salisbury government was alone capable of delivering. Poor law reform, old-age pensions, arbitration boards and employers’ liability were each mentioned in a higher proportion of Conservative than Liberal addresses. Roberts suggested that positive Unionism formed more a part of the Liberal Unionist than the Conservative platform. Yet it is remarkable that while there was parity in the degree to which each party referred to certain policies, such as old-age pensions (25 per cent Liberal Unionist; 27 per cent Conservative) and employers’ liability (17.5 per cent to 16.3 per cent), there were measures on which the Conservatives came out ahead of their colleagues. Conservatives were twice as likely as Liberal Unionists to advocate reforming the poor laws (37.1 per cent to 18.6 per cent) and more than three times as likely to promise to check ‘alien’ pauper immigration (21.6 per cent to 6.7 per cent); the figures for the all-encompassing pledge to improve the condition of the working classes were 24.2 per cent to 18.7 per cent, and in favour of arbitration boards, 17.7 per cent to 14.7 per cent, respectively. If Chamberlain did indeed ‘trumpet positive Unionism’, he was, again, perhaps less typical of his own party in doing so than of the Conservatives.¹⁶⁹ Poor law reform and the subject of working hours were, moreover, more conspicuous among Unionist addresses in 1892 than in 1895, and conciliation boards were only marginally more prominent at the latter election. It is apparent that, as with its Liberal counterpart, key components of the Unionist platform were established in 1892.

¹⁶⁸ *Liberal Unionist*, Feb. 1892, p. 128.

¹⁶⁹ Roberts, “‘Terrific outburst’”, pp. 193–4.

However, in insisting that, in contrast to their own plentiful record, Gladstone would be unable to carry his heterogeneous catalogue of fantastical schemes, Unionists made little attempt, with the exception of labour, to compete on promises for the future. They could hardly seek to outdo the Newcastle programme when it already ‘committed to a vast deal too much’,¹⁷⁰ and its ‘profligate promises’ would,¹⁷¹ Home Rule regardless, ‘take at least a thousand years to carry out’.¹⁷² In a 26 June memorandum to Salisbury, Jesse Collings set out an electioneering strategy that bears striking resemblance to the narrative which unfolded in Unionist addresses. He claimed that Liberals were both ‘ignoring the Irish Question altogether, or as far as they possibly can’ and, ‘with an extended programme’, engaging in ‘unscrupulous outbidding of anything any responsible Government can offer’. Unionists should therefore impress upon electors that Home Rule remained ‘as firmly as ever the one point in Mr Gladstone’s programme, and for which, if he were again in power, everything else would be put aside’. Concurrently, the ‘beneficial and progressive legislation of the Government’ should be ‘perpetually detailed and kept to the front’ – it should, moreover, ‘be shown over and over again’ that ‘the measures in the present programme of the Government ... would be postponed indefinitely by Gladstonian success’. In a table, Collings juxtaposed the ‘policies’ of the ‘Unionist’ and ‘Gladstonian’ parties, the sole measure under the latter heading being Home Rule, ‘to which everything else is to be postponed’. Collings’s ‘Unionist’ column was considerably fuller and included five of the government’s ten most frequently hailed accomplishments. It comprised the following measures: local government (mentioned in 47.8 per cent of Unionist addresses), district councils (33.4 per cent), allotments (43.2 per cent), smallholdings (42.2 per cent), sanitary reform (8.8 per cent), ‘rural measures’ (unspecified by Collings), free education (56.1 per cent), technical education (11.8 per cent), reduced taxation (70.7 per cent), relief of local rates (23.2 per cent) and factory legislation (18.6 per cent).¹⁷³

The display of positive Unionism was nonetheless confined largely to an exposition of the government’s achievements. It is clear from Figures 3 and 4 that the reforms deliberated by Unionists were typically not those endorsed by the N.L.F. and that the proposals contained in the Newcastle programme were distinctly ‘Liberal’ ones. The only real exception was district/parish councils, which could be portrayed as the ‘extension and completion of local self-government’ already conferred in the shape of county councils.¹⁷⁴ The tactic outlined by Collings precluded interaction with the individual Newcastle policies, even to attack them. Even a manifestly easy target like the direct veto – the ‘Teetotal Tyranny’ of which allegedly entailed the arbitrary confiscation of property¹⁷⁵ – was absent from 92.1 per cent of Unionist addresses. Instead, it was convenient for Unionists to dismiss the ‘vague promises and crude schemes which fill the programmes of our political opponents’.¹⁷⁶ As Arthur Greenwood put it to the electors of West Leeds, ‘the chance of their programme being proceeded with is so remote that its discussion is altogether premature’.¹⁷⁷ Unionists did not solicit votes upon ‘promises of ill-considered

¹⁷⁰ *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 18 June 1892, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 13 June 1892, p. 4, Cust (Stamford).

¹⁷² *Maidstone Journal*, 1 Dec. 1891, p. 5, Boscawen (Tonbridge).

¹⁷³ Hatfield House, 3M/E, correspondence with Viscount Wolmer, included in fo. 98, pp. 2–5 of memorandum.

¹⁷⁴ *Marlborough Times*, 2 July 1892, p. 5, Story-Maskelyne (North Wiltshire).

¹⁷⁵ B.L. Coll., pamphlet, N.W. Bethnal Green, vol. i, fo. 73; N.L.C. Coll., Napier (Cockermouth).

¹⁷⁶ N.L.C. Coll., Coddington (Blackburn).

¹⁷⁷ N.L.C. Coll.

change, but upon the work of the Government'.¹⁷⁸ They instead expected electors to 'trust men who can point to so many triumphs to finish their work'.¹⁷⁹

In keeping with the narrative communicated during the election, it suited defeated Unionist candidates to affirm that Home Rule 'had no more to do with the result ... than rival theories as to the personality of Shakespeare',¹⁸⁰ for 'it would require Mr. Gladstone's unlimited powers of self-deception to maintain that the average elector' voted against Unionists because they 'believed Home Rule to be the one thing needful'.¹⁸¹ 'The utmost' that could be said, Edward Dicey concluded, was that electors 'signified their readiness to accept Home Rule, if its acceptance is the necessary price of the Liberals being in office'. Dicey attributed the Unionists' 'failure' to two causes: they had 'not carried home to the mass of our fellow-countrymen' their conviction that 'the repeal of the Union is a matter of life or death to England' and they had 'allowed' themselves to be 'outbidden' on 'questions which really interest the masses'.¹⁸² As William Thackeray Marriot complained, the election showed that 'however well a Government may have managed the affairs of the nation, that fact alone is not sufficient to secure a renewal of confidence'.¹⁸³ As it turned out, however, Unionists could feel themselves vindicated and their prophecies borne out by the experience of Gladstone's final administration. During the second Home Rule bill's convoluted committee stage, Chamberlain taunted Liberals as to what chance they thought there would be 'for any part of the Newcastle Programme during the next three years'. Sir Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, the Conservative member for Sheffield Ecclesall, could easily claim that the government's attempt to guillotine the committee sessions was because 'the Radical wirepullers ... knew that the elections were won on the Newcastle Programme, and felt that some of [its] items ... must be dealt with before the Session was over'.¹⁸⁴ It was one thing to win an election on a programme, it was another to implement its provisions.

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When the Lords assembled in August 1895 to debate the Queen's Speech prepared by the new Conservative-Liberal Unionist coalition, the now ex-prime minister, Rosebery, reflected on the verdict the country had delivered against his party. He was 'not one of those who have greatly believed in or greatly criticized that very long list of reforms ... adopted by the Liberal leaders in 1891', but he now thought it 'a strategical mistake to condense the creed of a lifetime into the manifesto of the moment'. This was an error 'the Liberal party is not likely to repeat'.¹⁸⁵ That January, in his first and only speech to the N.L.F. as premier, Rosebery had defined the 'first and most important function' of the Federation to be 'to thrash out the various issues that lie before the party'; the second was the 'more delicate and difficult operation' of 'winnowing'. The 'vast programme of measures' 'inherited' by his administration had clearly failed to sort out the chaff, for it 'would require many energetic years' for 'a strong Government' to carry out. The following year, Rosebery attributed the 'fall' of his government to its desire 'to fulfil all the pledges that it had given in Opposition' – it had 'given too many', and this

¹⁷⁸ N.L.C. Coll., Addison (Ashton-under-Lyne).

¹⁷⁹ N.L.C. Coll., Barnes (Chesterfield).

¹⁸⁰ C. Whitmore, 'The real radical programme', *National Review* (Aug. 1892), pp. 744–5.

¹⁸¹ A. A. Baumann, 'The general election: a bird's-eye view', *National Review* (Aug. 1892), p. 737.

¹⁸² E. Dicey, 'The verdict of England', *Nineteenth Century* (Aug. 1892), pp. 335, 342.

¹⁸³ W. T. Marriot, 'The political outlook', *Fortnightly Review* (Aug. 1892), p. 261.

¹⁸⁴ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, xiii, col. 1549 (20 June 1893); xiv, col. 428 (30 June 1893).

¹⁸⁵ *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1895, p. 5.

was ‘partly owing’ to the decisions made by the N.L.F.¹⁸⁶ Rosebery’s determination to dispense with programme politics is indicative of how problematic it became after the 1892 election. According to Matthew, men of Rosebery’s ilk regarded the Newcastle programme as ‘surrender to “the faddists”’, whose influence was symptomatic of the Liberals ceasing ‘to be a national party’. Biagini has observed that the programme led ‘to a serious debate within the NLF and the parliamentary party about the role of mass organisation’ and to ‘a rejection of the notion of “programme” politics, which many felt had been “imposed” on the party by the Federation’. However, his comments, like most on the rise and fall of programme politics, concern the high political setbacks of 1895 and do not extend to consideration of how the N.L.F. itself sought three years later to disclaim any such responsibility.¹⁸⁷ By the mid 1890s, an uneasiness over programme politics reached beyond the leadership and to the ‘faddists’ themselves.

The N.L.F.’s January 1895 meeting saw the beginnings of an official volte-face, when its president, Robert Spence Watson, decreed the annual conference ‘primarily a meeting to receive the report, and to elect officers’. He explained that each year the General Purposes Committee asked federated associations to ‘send up ... the subjects which their members felt were most important’ – the ‘series of resolutions’ the committee afterwards proposed was nothing more than ‘their reports of what they had ascertained to be the immediate wishes of the party’.¹⁸⁸ The critical departure in what was essentially an attempt at de-caucusing the caucus came in March 1898, when, in a section on ‘Programme Making and Liberal organisation’, Spence Watson’s annual report testified that ‘the Federation has steadfastly refused to formulate a political programme’, and that ‘no Newcastle Programme was ever framed by the Federation or by anyone connected with it, no programme whatever was presented at ... Newcastle or any other meeting’. He laid responsibility at Gladstone’s door: the reforms had ‘been demanded at previous meetings’, but ‘received a special significance’ when, ‘to the surprise of everyone’, Gladstone ‘took up *seriatim* the resolutions ... and gave them the weight of his direct approval’. It was the newspapers which first ‘spoke of “the Newcastle Programme”’, and, as ‘the name stuck and entered into common use’, it acquired ‘a certain convenience’. They ‘never dreamed’ the resolutions ‘would be made a programme, or could be made a programme, in the dangerous sense’. They ‘objected to the term “programme”’ when it was used ‘to drum men out of the party’: Spence Watson was disquieted at the Federation having ‘been asked in constituencies about to be fought whether they could accept so-and-so, because he did not hold to such-and-such an item of the Newcastle programme’.¹⁸⁹ As he stressed to Herbert Gladstone, ‘there was a real danger in the idea that the resolutions ... were to be bound together so as to force, as it were, a test or crisis of true Liberalism’.¹⁹⁰ Spence Watson’s selective amnesia as to how swiftly local associations ‘spoke’ of a Newcastle programme and to how the appeal was articulated in 1892 aside, in his narrative, the Federation was less the promulgator of true Liberalism – nor quite the repository thereof – and more the unsuspecting, passive recipient of official sanction. This ran counter to the ethos envisioned by Chamberlain when he declared at the N.L.F.’s foundation in 1877 that ‘the special merit’ of ‘the new machinery’ was the principle of ‘the direct participation’ of the party’s members ‘in the

¹⁸⁶ *Daily News*, 19 Jan. 1895, p. 5, 28 Mar. 1896, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ H. C. G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: the Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Élite* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 126–7; Biagini, *British Democracy*, p. 309.

¹⁸⁸ Liberal Publication Department (hereafter L.P.D.), *Proceedings in conjunction with the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Federation ...* (1898), pp. 57–8.

¹⁸⁹ L.P.D., *Proceedings in conjunction with the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the Federation ...* (1898), pp. 40–55.

¹⁹⁰ Brit. Libr., Add. MS. 46057, fo. 15 (12 March 1898).

direction of its policy and in the selection of those particular measures of reform to which priority shall be given'.¹⁹¹ If the Newcastle programme represented the apotheosis of this principle, Spence Watson's 1898 report signalled its demise.

Spence Watson's backpedalling infuriated Herbert Gladstone, who, in a terse exchange with Schnadhorst's successor Robert Hudson, rejected the report as 'an inversion of the facts', for it was 'an error to try to prove that the Federation has never had anything to do with programmes'. He maintained that the 'Newcastle policy' was 'formulated by the Federation' and that Schnadhorst 'pressed it upon' his father 'as something essential for party interests'. In 'deference to others', his father 'gave in to his party then practically represented by the Federation', but with 'clear indications that it was for the future and others rather than the present and himself'. This was a programme of the caucus, enforced through wire-pulling. Hudson countered that as, 'for a long time past, the Federation has been attacked for spinning Programmes to the embarrassment of the Party, it was sought ... to show that from the time of its foundation ... the Federation has deliberately eschewed Programme-making'. They had 'not said ... that the Newcastle Programme has been, or is, an evil'; rather, they wished 'to draw a line between the functions of the Federation & the rank and file of the party, and the function of the leader', and likewise between programmes 'drawn up by various bodies' and the 'authoritative Programme on which the party will fight at the next election whenever that Programme is formulated and put forward by the leaders'.¹⁹² By this reading, the N.L.F. was no longer the caucus of caucuses – nor had it ever been – but one of many, responsibility for shaping policy being ceded to and firmly associated with the role of party leadership. The 'embarrassment' would no longer be the N.L.F.'s. Biagini argued that 'the policy aims', 'the set of practical demands and humanitarian standards' articulated by the Newcastle programme 'contributed to the making of "New Liberalism"'.¹⁹³ Yet if Newcastle Liberalism was a bridge between Gladstonian Liberalism and New Liberalism, it was a bridge the N.L.F. went out of its way to burn, by abnegating 'Caucus' Liberalism.

As Biagini has suggested, the Newcastle programme was to an extent a product of a certain 'approach to the running of the party'.¹⁹⁴ Gladstone had imposed a policy and, in response, the N.L.F. imposed a programme. In 1898, the Federation handed the baton back, the process coming full circle. Home Rule had in 1886 been less a vote winner than a caucus winner, with local associations at the forefront of the battle to establish authoritatively 'opinion', both 'public' and party. The caucus secured and orchestrated the demonstration of rank-and-file allegiance, and was complicit in the prescription of single-issue politics before it was instrumental in the promulgation of programme politics.¹⁹⁵ In a June 1886 interview with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Schnadhorst had predicted that as a result of the crisis 'the machine' would be 'stronger, more powerful, more representative, and more formidable than ever'.¹⁹⁶ The Newcastle programme, the product of the caucus and its ascendancy, helped produce a resurgence in 1892. Its provisions were portrayed as having first distilled and then themselves assumed the status of Liberal creed. Commenting upon the events of October 1891, the *Daily News* explained that the 'chief object' of the N.L.F.'s annual gathering was 'to give formal, authoritative, and representative expression to the views of the Liberal party in the constituencies

¹⁹¹ J. Chamberlain, *The Caucus: a New Political Organization* (Birmingham, 1878), p. 133.

¹⁹² Brit. Libr., Add. MS. 46020, fos. 10–11, 15–16 (9, 10 March 1898).

¹⁹³ Biagini, *British Democracy*, pp. 314–5.

¹⁹⁴ Biagini, *British Democracy*, p. 187.

¹⁹⁵ See Lloyd-Jones, 'A new British history of the Home Rule crisis'.

¹⁹⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 June 1886, pp. 1–2.

on the urgent topics of the hour'. Local associations having done the deliberating, the Federation 'gathers up the prevailing sentiment of the great multitude of Liberals, and precipitates it in the form of resolutions which constitute a Liberal programme'.¹⁹⁷ The practice described was by design a democratic dialogue, its results by their programmatic authoritativeness legitimating the activities of both the N.L.F. and the local machinery, and its connectedness to all levels of Liberal opinion ensuring for it a vital place in the legislative process. The N.L.F.'s January 1893 conference was apprised that the General Purposes Committee did not intend that year 'to frame a new programme', for 'the result of six years' deliberation had been crystallised into the completeness of the Newcastle programme', and they 'stood by' and 'reiterated that document'. Spence Watson, in sharp contrast to his position five years later, stated that they had in 1891 'formulated a number of propositions which they believed expressed the immediate will of the people'; 'the Newcastle programme' was 'a great one, worthy of a great party' and had been 'remitted to the Government with the goodwill of the Liberal party'. Crucially, as the president of the Brighton association put it, the party had in 1892 'received a mandate to carry out as far as they could the whole of the measures included in the Newcastle programme'.¹⁹⁸ The N.L.F. in 1893 thus asserted its centrality first in bringing about the programme upon which victory was delivered and second in ensuring its proper implementation. The failure to fulfil the programme's promises represented a loss, then, not just for Liberal government but for the caucus. The caucus was not, as suggested to Schnadhorst by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 'played out' in 1886, but by the mid 1890s each of the alternate caucus models – a 'parliament outside parliament' or a "machine" to deliver electoral victory¹⁹⁹ – looked increasingly tenuous. March 1898 saw the death of Gladstone and perhaps also the death of 'caucus' politics as politicians and activists of the later nineteenth century had known it.

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This article has considered the meaning of Liberalism and Unionism as communicated in the nationalized electioneering rhetoric of 1892. The dominant narrative of electoral politics in the 1890s has been largely 'negative'. Disoriented by the advent of Home Rule, an increasingly sectional and divided Liberal party is deemed to have descended into a muddle of faddism from which it would take a decade to emerge. The Newcastle programme has become conflated with, and a synonym for, programmatic politics more generally. Unionists, and the Conservatives in particular, were, without too much effort, seemingly the happy beneficiaries of Liberal incompetence, which they then sought to exploit through 'undemocratic' electioneering tactics. This reading has undergone substantial revision in the case of the decade's latter half, although it is Conservative, more so than Liberal electioneering, that is now regarded in a more broadly 'positive' light. This article has sought to further this revisionism, by locating the 'positive' in both the Conservative and the Liberal platforms of the early 1890s.

The Newcastle programme was not a rag-tag collection of ephemeral fads but rather a malleable vessel containing the core of reforms in which Liberals were interested; simultaneously, in its embodiment of these measures, it was in itself the nucleus of the party's platform. The problems of the programmatization of politics and the democratization of party organization were both bound up with the fall-out from Home Rule's adoption,

¹⁹⁷ *Daily News*, 3 Oct. 1891, p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ L.P.D., *Proceedings in conjunction with the Fifteenth Annual Meeting ...* (1893), pp. 30–4, 39.

¹⁹⁹ Biagini, *British Democracy*, p. 181.

but the correlation was not a straightforwardly linear one. The programme is neither symptomatic of, nor the explanation for, the strange death of Liberalism in England. Unionists sought to exhibit their reformism not by outbidding their opponents but by outmanoeuvring them. If they could illustrate, first, their own accomplishments and then that, thanks to both the cumbrousness of the Newcastle programme and the negating effects of Home Rule's place at its head, the Liberals could not possibly be the key to a reformist future, Unionists could prove their value to the electorate. Where 'the Newcastle programme' was shorthand for a cluster of policies, the government's record was in many respects treated as constituting a policy in its own, and one that Unionists were allowed to promote with impunity. This however meant that positive Unionism in 1892 was reflexive rather than forward thinking. With the exception of labour – the Liberal appeal on which was not programmatized – Unionists were outbid when it came to the promise of future reforms; although the parties' respective positions on labour were perhaps a sign of what was to come toward the close of the decade. If the Liberals won in 1892, it is also fair to say that the Unionists lost. The Unionist platform may have been a positive one, but it was not, at this stage, a winning one. Where 1892 was for Unionists a retrospective on Salisbury's administration, Newcastle Liberalism ensured that the Liberals looked like a viable alternative for the future. When that future failed to materialize, even the N.L.F. sought to distance itself from programme politics, clamouring to decaucusize and deprogrammatize. If the party did not win in 1892 because, or even in spite, of Home Rule, then it was Newcastle Liberalism that delivered it a pyrrhic victory.