

Is Ed Red? Candidates and Electors in Labour's 2010 Leadership Elections

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I analyse the preference data of Labour MPs and MEPs in that party's leadership election of 2010. I show that the primary dimension of competition is a left-right dimension, and that the second dimension of competition is a valence dimension, separating 'nice' (unthreatening) from 'nasty' (electorally competitive, potentially divisive) candidates. In both cases, the eventual leadership winner, Ed Miliband, is located close to the (dimension-by-dimension) median voter in the Labour party.

Between the 1st and 22nd September 2010 the Labour party chose Ed Miliband as its new leader, narrowly rejecting his brother David. This was the fifth contested leadership election since the introduction, in 1981, of an electoral college composed of members of parliament (and members of the European Parliament), trades unions and other affiliated organisations, and constituency labour parties (Quinn, 2004, 333, 337), and only the second to be fought using the alternative vote system.

This election was, in certain respects, relatively commonplace. Comparatively, such elections are common. Almost half of party leaders in established democracies are now selected through processes that involve some degree of participation of party members (Kenig, 2009a, 437). Considering British parties only, all major British parties now select their leaders through (more or less) inclusive elections (Quinn, 2004; Denham, 2009; Alderman and Carter, 2000). Institutionally, no single part of the system used was unique: weighted electoral 'colleges' are also used in the Japanese Liberal Democratic party and

the Canadian New Democratic Party (Kenig, 2009a, 437), and the latter also gives special weight to the votes of trades unionists (Cross and Blais, 2009). Electorally, the contest was roughly as competitive as we might expect given the nature of the electorate.¹

Yet this election is still worthy of study because of the transparency with which it was conducted, and because of its multiple electoral colleges. In an unprecedented decision, the Labour party revealed the full preference orderings of all members of parliament (MPs) and members of the European parliament (MEPs). This kind of preference data allows us to investigate the dimensions underlying voting behaviour in the leadership election; to estimate the positions of MPs, MEPs, and candidates on these dimensions; and to map constituency party organisations and affiliated organisations on to these dimensions. It allows us both to address an issue which is rarely discussed – namely, the motivations of electors in leadership elections: but see (Quinn, 2010) – and one issue which has often been discussed – May’s curvilinear law of disparity (May, 1973) – but which has rarely been applied to leadership (s)election outside of the United States (Geer, 1988).

I begin by offering a basic description of the rules surrounding the leadership contest, before moving on to describe the publicly available voting records of MPs and MEPs. I then discuss how I have accounted for ‘missing’ information on MPs’ and MEPs’ preferences, and the particular multidimensional scaling method I use. I offer two analyses: one ‘one-dimensional’ analysis, and a second two-dimensional analysis. Both analyses suggest that the primary dimension of competition is a left-right dimension, and that Ed Miliband was located centrally on this dimension. The second dimension can be crudely

¹ That is, the effective number of candidates on the first round of voting (3.48) is close to the mean for ‘inclusive’ leadership elections of 3.6 (Kenig, 2009b). The effective number of candidates, ENC , is

$$ENC = \frac{1}{\sum V_i^2}$$

for candidates $i = 1, \dots, I$ and vote shares V_i .

labelled a 'niceness' dimension, in that it separates candidates whose campaigns, irrespective of their ideological position won plaudits from all sides (Diane Abbott and Andy Burnham) from candidates who had more edge and who were seen as potentially more divisive (Ed Balls and David Miliband). For each analysis, I map constituency and affiliate results on to these dimensions, allowing a comparison of positions at different levels within the party. These results tend to confirm May's curvilinear law of disparity – that middle ranking party officials will have more extreme positions than grass-roots or elite office-holders.

1 The contest

On the 10th May, Gordon Brown announced his intention to resign as leader of the Labour party. After a week's grace period, the party executive announced the timetable for leadership elections. On the 24th May, nominations opened. Nominations for the leadership had to be supported by 12.5% of the parliamentary Labour party, or 33 MPs. By the time the extended deadline had passed on the 9th June, five candidates – Diane Abbott, Ed Balls, Andy Burnham, David Miliband and Ed Miliband – had mustered the requisite number of nominations, although in Diane Abbott's case this was thanks to the withdrawal of another like-minded candidate in John McDonnell, and nominations from MPs who wished to see a more inclusive contest – including David Miliband.

The party used an alternative vote system with three equally weighted electoral colleges made up of (1) MPs and MEPs, (2) Labour party members, and (3) trades unions and other affiliated organisations ('affiliated members'). The results were announced on the 25th September at a special party conference. After the first round of voting, David Miliband had the most first preferences (37.8%), slightly ahead of his brother Ed. Diane Abbott had the fewest first preferences overall, despite being third most popular in the

Table 1: MPs' /MEPs' preferences, first five electors

MP	Abbott	Balls	Burnham	Miliband D	Miliband E
Ms D Abbott MP	1				
Rt Hon B W Ainsworth MP	5	4	3	1	2
Rt Hon D Alexander MP	5	3	4	1	2
Ms H Alexander MP			1	2	3
Ms R Ali MP	5	3	4	1	2
Mr G Allen MP				1	2

affiliated members college, and was thus eliminated first. Andy Burnham and Ed Balls were eliminated in the second and third rounds of voting respectively. Only in the fourth and final round of voting did Ed Miliband over take his brother David, thanks to transfers from those supporting Ed Balls. His victory was extremely narrow (50.65% of votes compared to 49.35%), and he was the most-preferred candidate only in the affiliated members college, losing by six to seven percentage points in the colleges of MPs and MEPs, and Labour party members.

2 The data

Very shortly after the results of the election were announced, the Labour party published the full preferences of all MPs and MEPs. The first five rows of this data are shown in Table 1. Although MPs and MEPs were not required to give a full preference ranking, 121 of 266 electors either gave a full preference ranking, or ranked all but one candidate. Only a minority (61/266) provided only one preference.

These preferences can be used as if they were completely sincere – largely because few of the arguments for insincere voting seem very convincing. Electors *might* give some candidate(s) a higher rank than they would do if they were voting sincerely because they believe that by so doing, they will end up with a candidate that they can live with.

Strategic voting of this kind is possible with the alternative vote, but it is risky, and requires highly sophisticated voters who are willing to vote “in such a way as to eliminate in the early rounds a candidate with substantial later round strength who could defeat that candidate, and to leave in the competition only candidates whom that candidate can defeat in later rounds of voting” (Grofman and Feld, 2004, 652). Given that it was always likely that the last round of voting would be between the Miliband brothers, it seems unlikely that electors would have voted tactically in this way.

Or, electors *might* also give some candidate(s) a higher rank than they would do if they were voting sincerely because they believe that by so doing, they will secure benefits from the eventual winner – for example, a plum (shadow) ministerial role. However, entry to the shadow cabinet is determined by competitive election, not by the leader; and posts outside of the shadow cabinet are of less worth.

Or, electors *might* truncate their sincere preference schedule so as to preserve maximum ambiguity about their stance within the party – and by so doing, improve their odds of future office or minimize the risk of offending people. This difficulty can be dealt with by imputing missing preferences, which I now discuss.

In order to impute missing preferences, I created multinomial logistic models of candidate choice for each preference rank, predicting the second preference on the basis of the first preference, the third preference on the basis of the second preference, and so on. I then imputed missing preferences based on the predicted probabilities which emerged from these models, discounting candidates who the elector had already ranked. Because these are probabilities, not deterministic rules, I created five hundred replicate data sets, and averaged my results out over all data-sets.

This way of imputing missing preferences assumes that electors who gave their first

preference to David Miliband and then stopped would, if pressed, demonstrate the same preference ordering as electors who gave their first preference to David Miliband and then proceeded to rank the remaining candidates. This assumption might be challenged, and there are other ways of imputation which do not make this assumption. One might, for example, impute missing preferences randomly. Random imputation did not, however, give noticeably different results on average (though obviously the variation of the results was much greater).

3 The method

Preference data of the kind shown in Table 1 can be analysed using multidimensional scaling techniques. Multidimensional scaling (MDS) takes a large number of distances between objects, and attempts to reduce the complexity of those distances and position those objects in a low-dimensionality space. In some cases, the distances are intuitive, and the results uninformative: multidimensional scaling can takes distances between sets of UK cities, and map those points as they appear on a map of the UK – information which is almost invariably easier to obtain than information on the raw distances themselves. In the present case, where the ‘objects’ are electors, the distances are partly intuitive – we understand that an elector who ranked the five candidates {Abbott, Balls, Burnham, Miliband D, Miliband E} as {1,2,5,4,3} is very different from an elector who ranked them {5,4,1,2,3} – but it is by no means easy for us to translates those intuitions about distances between *electors* into statements about the positions of different *candidates*.

MDS software² produces the ‘best’ configuration of points for a given dimensionality,

² I used the `smacof` package for the R statistical environment. Notes on the imputation procedure, and the source code used, can be found on my website.

where the 'best' configuration is one which does least violence to the matrix of distances between objects (has least 'stress'). The researcher must still exercise discretion over the choice of dimensionality and how to interpret the configuration. Choosing to map objects along one dimension is extremely parsimonious, but may conflate relevant differences. Choosing to map objects in four dimensions allows many more relevant differences to be shown, but at the cost of easy comprehension. Here, I present separate results for one-dimensional and two-dimensional solutions. Whilst a two-dimensional solution (*ex hypothesi*) accounts better for the observed pattern of distances, the one-dimensional solution matches better our ordinary preconceptions of party politics as primarily, if not exclusively, operating along a single dimension running from left to right.

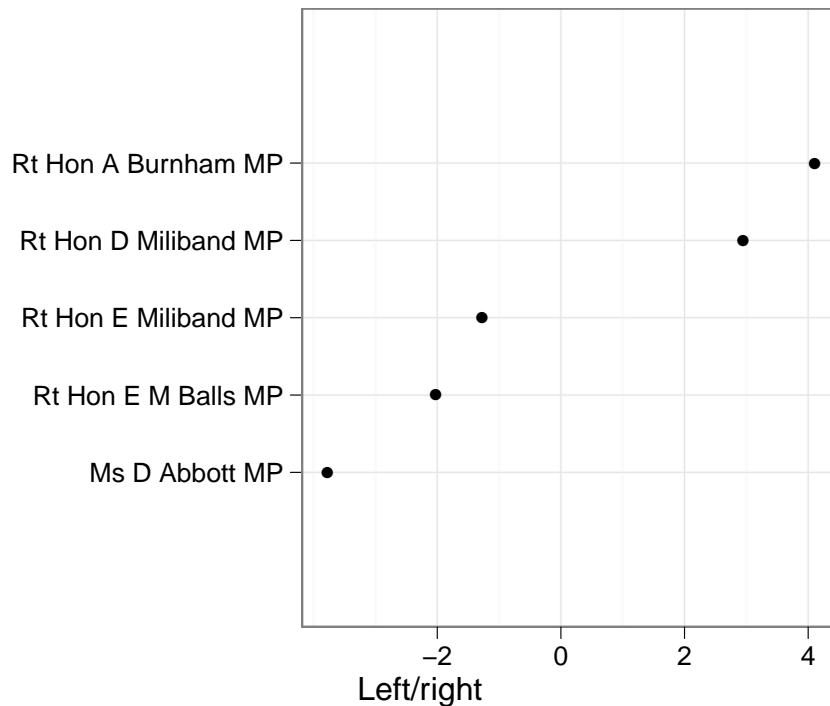
Discretion must also be exercised in interpreting the final configuration of points. Although MDS techniques are guaranteed to find the lowest stress configuration of points, there is no guarantee that this final configuration will be the right way round (or up). One can rotate a given configuration of points through any angle without changing the 'stress' of the solution. To take the UK cities example given above – MDS may recover perfectly the relative location of cities, but give an upside-down map, with Northern cities to the South, and vice versa. In many cases the default configuration is easily interpretable – but since political analysis usually operates with strong notions of left and right, I have flipped points so that Diane Abbott is always to the right of Andy Burnham, and have rotated the two-dimensional solution so as to maximize the similarity between the one-dimensional and two-dimensional solutions.

4 The results for the one-dimensional solution

Figure 1 plots the positions of the candidates along the recovered dimension. If, as I argue, the recovered dimension runs from left to right, then the ordering of the candidates is, I would suggest, relatively uncontroversial. Diane Abbott is a member of the Socialist Campaign Group and has “always been unambiguously of the left” (McElvoy, 2010). Andy Burnham, conversely, was described as “coming from the right wing of the party” (Prince, 2010), “a Roman Catholic... enthusiastic about promoting marriage and likely to be firm on law and order” (Riddell, 2010). Ed Miliband was widely perceived as being to the left of his brother, largely on the basis of the trepidation with which he was viewed by many arch-Blairites. That leaves only Ed Balls, who is difficult to place. For the Economist, “his mix of social democracy and a hard line on crime and immigration is evocative of the Old Labour Right, once the spine of the party” (Economist staff, 2010) – and yet his economic policies, arguably his strongest suit, seemed to be Keynesian red in tooth and claw.

Only the relative positions of the candidates might give succour to those who believe Ed Miliband to be particularly left-wing. There is a considerable gap between the two Milibands, and the figures reported here suggest that David Miliband, in political terms, has more in common with Andy Burnham than with his own brother. Perhaps because of the high stress of a one dimensional solution, it is difficult to interpret candidates’ positions as being truly on the same metric as MPs’ positions, and thus evaluate Ed Miliband’s position vis-à-vis the rest of the parliamentary party. If instead we concentrate on Ed Miliband the elector (the two are distinct in this analysis), then we find that his position can hardly be described as extreme: he is the 115th left-most elector, though his estimated position is indistinguishable from both the 94th left-most MP (Frank Field) and the 126th left-most (Steve Rotheram). If his true position were closer to the latter,

Figure 1: Candidates' positions in one dimension



he would be almost exactly at the median position of the parliamentary party.

As far as the parliamentary party is concerned, Table 2 shows the ten most left-wing M(E)Ps, the ten most right-wing M(E)Ps, and the ten most centrist M(E)Ps within the party. Of the ten left-most MPs, all but Khalid Mahmood are current or former members of the Socialist Campaign Group within the party. These MPs are relatively heterogeneous as far as their first preferences are concerned.

It is harder to identify notable right-wingers within the party amongst the MPs listed in Table 2. Although not shown in the table, a number of former Cabinet ministers who are routinely described as being on the right of the party do indeed have high scores on the recovered dimension: Gerald Kaufman (no. 230), Jack Straw (no. 238), and David Blunkett (no. 254) are three examples. One notable exception, placed purely on the

Table 2: Left, middle and right MPs

No	MP	Median	FirstPref	No	MP	Median	FirstPref	No	MP	Median	FirstPref
1	K Clark	-0.60	Abbott	128	I Mearns	1.00	Miliband D	257	G Sutcliffe	1.80	Burnham
2	K Hopkins	-0.60	Abbott	129	M T Perkins	1.00	Miliband D	258	H A Blears	1.80	Burnham
3	M Wood	-0.60	Abbott	130	N Smith	1.00	Miliband D	259	H Alexander	1.80	Burnham
4	K Mahmood	-0.60	Balls	131	A McGuire	1.00	Miliband D	260	R C D Ffello	1.80	Burnham
5	M Caton	-0.60	Miliband E	132	T Hunt	1.00	Miliband D	261	A P Miller	1.80	Burnham
6	M Meacher	-0.60	Miliband E	133	A Eagle	1.00	Miliband D	262	J E Benton	1.80	Burnham
7	J McDonnell	-0.20	Abbott	134	M Creagh	1.00	Miliband D	263	K Turner	1.80	Burnham
8	J Corbyn	-0.20	Abbott	135	A Michael	1.00	Miliband D	264	T Docherty	1.80	Burnham
9	D Abbott	-0.20	Abbott	136	G Howarth	1.00	Miliband D	265	J A Hilling	1.80	Burnham
10	L Riordan	-0.20	Abbott	137	R Cooper	1.00	Miliband D	266	A Burnham	1.80	Burnham

basis of his single preference for David Miliband, is Dennis Skinner (no. 181). The statements given by Skinner at the time he made his support public all suggest that this choice was made purely on the basis of David Miliband's presumed greater electability. Voting behaviour like this is the strongest evidence against interpreting the dimensions recovered by this kind of analysis as revealing positions in political space rather than calculations of expediency – but thankfully Skinner-type examples seem rare: members of the Socialist Campaign Group are significantly to the left of all other MPs ($p < 0.001$).

I turn finally the positions of constituency Labour parties and affiliated members. The Labour party provided information on the share of the vote won by each of the five candidate in each CLP and in a number of affiliated organisations. This data is obviously not directly comparable to the preference data available for MPs and MEPs. I therefore mapped these vote shares in to the same space as MPs and MEPs by using five anchor CLPs: namely, the constituencies of the five leadership candidates. Considering just CLPs, each candidate received their highest vote share in their home constituency, making these natural points to use to scale the two results.³ I then ran a simple linear regression on the first dimension using the vote shares of four of the five candidates as the independent variables.⁴

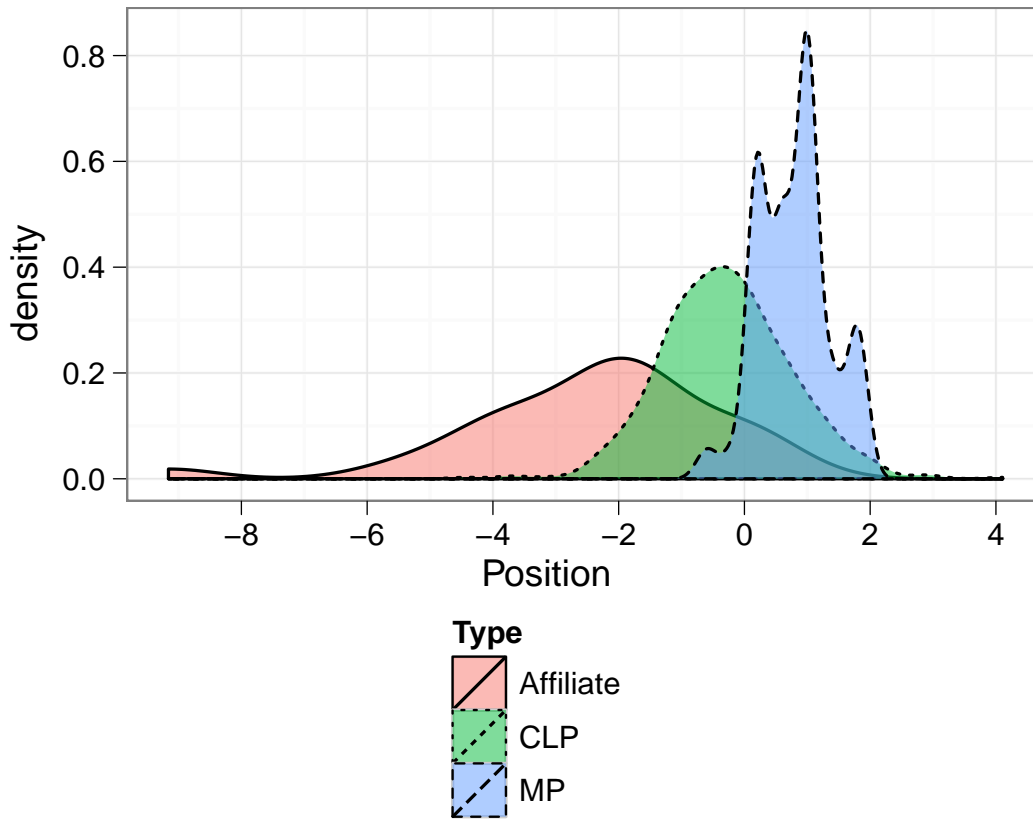
Figure 2 show the density plots of MPs and MEPs alongside the densities of CLPs and affiliated organisations. The median CLP (Broxtowe CLP; -0.34) is considerably to the left of the median MP (1), although a score of constituency parties (including Jarrow, South Shields, Leigh, and Sedgefield) are to the right of any Labour MP. CLPs represented by Labour MPs are somewhat to the right of CLPs without Labour MPs (-0.45 as

³ Diane Abbott received a higher vote share amongst ASLEF members than she did in her own constituency.

⁴ Including a fifth candidate is unnecessary because the share of valid votes necessarily sums to 100%. The equations for the first dimension is as follows:

$$x = -2.8 - 18.1 \times \text{Abbott} - 1.6 \times \text{Balls} + 8.6 \times \text{Burnham} + 7.3 \times \text{Miliband D}$$

Figure 2: Density plot of MPs, CLPs, and affiliates



against -0.04), and the difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

It was the position of affiliate organisations – trades unions in particular – which attracted considerable interest after it became clear that Ed Miliband would not have won without the support of the trades unions. Aslef, the Musicians’ Union, and the TSSA are all to the left of the most left-wing CLP; all other unions (BECTU, SERA, CWU, Unite, Unison, UCATT, GMB, and the BFAWU) with the exception of USDAW and Community are to the left of the most left-wing MPs. Only three non-union affiliated organisations are to the right of the most left-wing MPs: the Northern Ireland Labour party, Black Asian Minority Ethnic Labour, and the Jewish Labour movement. Figure

2 clearly shows the left-leaning tendency of affiliated organisations.

The results of the analysis of one dimension suggest that

- the recovered dimension runs from left to right;
- that, if we assume that affiliate members are higher in the party hierarchy than ordinary members but less high than MPs, the positions on this dimension follow May's curvilinear law of disparity, with middle-ranking party members more 'extreme' in their positions;
- that an inclusive method of selection, compared to selection by the parliamentary party alone, resulted in the election of a more left-wing candidate.

However, I have at the same time indicated that

- the fit of this one-dimensional solution is poor;
- this solution makes it difficult to place candidates and electors on the same metric.

5 The results for the two-dimensional solution

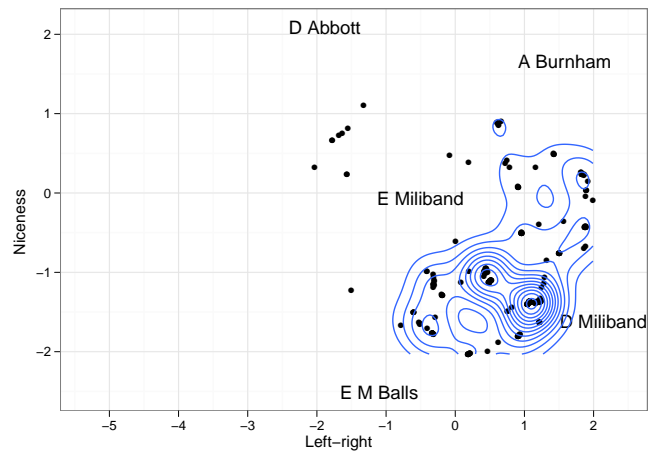
The candidates' positions in two dimensions, as well as the positions of MPs and MEPs, are plotted in Figure 3a. The biggest change comes from the positions of the two extreme candidates in the previous analysis, Diane Abbott and Andy Burnham, who have now moved to positions indistinguishable on the first dimension from those of their nearest competitors, Ed Balls and David Miliband. Both candidates do, however, take up leading positions on the second dimension, whilst Ed Miliband remains the middle candidate on both.

It is harder to attribute a substantive ideological content to this second dimension. Rather, the dimension seems to reflect differences between the candidates and their electoral appeals. Following Leo Durocher⁵ and given the fact that Diane Abbott and Andy Burnham finished last in the first and second rounds of voting, I have labelled this dimension the niceness dimension: Abbott and Burnham are both comparatively nice, whilst Ed Balls is comparatively nasty. Consequently, MPs, MEPs or CLPs who are to the top of this dimension are content to have a nice leader at the cost of a certain incisiveness, whilst those at the bottom of this dimension would rather have a leader who was harder hitting.

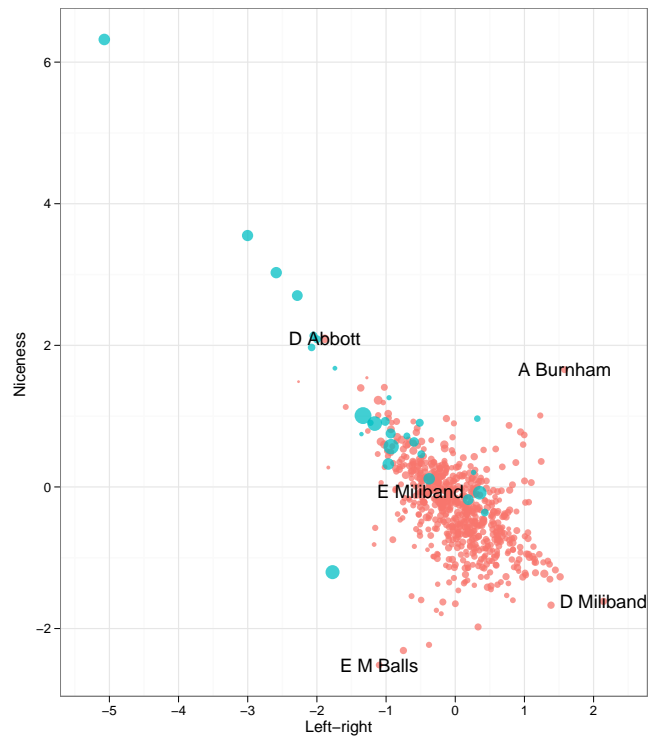
MPs' and MEPs' positions are shown on the same graph as candidates, together with contour lines which show the density of their positions in two dimensions. The two most prominent peaks are one vertiginous peak of David Miliband supporters, somewhat to the north and left of their preferred candidate's position, with a second, opposing peak of Ed Miliband supporters to the south and right of their preferred candidate. Running off to the north and right and south and left of these two peaks are pools of support for Ed Balls and Andy Burnham, leaving only a scattering of rather isolated Diane Abbott supporters in the top left quadrant. Although David Miliband is closer to the median voter on the first, left-right dimension, Ed Miliband is closer to the median voter on the second dimension.

In terms of significant differences within MPs, some of the patterns of association found previously seem to have reversed themselves. MEPs are now significantly to the left of MPs (-0.73 versus -0.50; $p < 0.05$); Privy councillors are now significantly to the left of all other MPs and MEPs, though the effect is only just significant at conventional levels (-0.76 versus 0.47; $p < 0.05$). There are no significant differences as far as the second

⁵ Durocher was a baseball coach who was quoted as saying of his competitors, the New York Giants: "Take a look at them. They're all nice guys, but they'll finish last. Nice guys. Finish last."



(a) MPs/MEPs



(b) CLPs and affiliates

Figure 3: Position of MPs, MEPs, CLPs, and Affiliates

dimension is concerned.

The positions of CLPs and affiliated organisations are shown in Figure 3b, with affiliated organisations plotted as circles and constituency Labour parties as triangles.⁶ In both cases the size of the symbol is scaled to the log of the number of votes cast, so that organisations with larger turnout appear larger on the plot. The extreme positions of some of the unions are immediately made clear by the figure, with Aslef, the Musicians' Union, Bectu, and the TSSA all taking up positions in the top left hand side of the figure. The CWU appears somewhat isolated in its position in the bottom left quadrant; the union did support Ed Balls in his leadership campaign. What is important to note, as far as the constituency Labour parties are concerned, is how close Ed Miliband is to the median CLP on both dimensions. As far as the positions of CLPs themselves is concerned, CLPs without a sitting Labour MP continue to be significantly more to the left than constituencies with a sitting MP, though there is no such relationship as far as the second dimension is concerned.

We can test whether May's law of curvilinear law of disparity holds for the two dimensional analysis by proceeding dimension-by-dimension. On the first dimension, MPs and MEPs are on average to the right of the global median for this dimension (+0.5), whilst affiliates are most to the left of the median (-1.38), with constituency Labour parties in between. On the second dimension, MPs and MEPs are on average to the bottom (the 'nastier' end of the dimension) of the median (-0.51), whilst affiliates are much higher than the median (+1.6), with constituency Labour parties again in between.

⁶ I have mapped constituencies on to the recovered dimensions in the same way. The relevant equations are:

$$x = -1.3 + -7.4 \times \text{Abbott} - 2.9 \times \text{Balls} + 4 \times \text{Burnham} + 4 \times \text{Miliband D}$$

and

$$y = 0.4 + 17.6 \times \text{Abbott} - 6.8 \times \text{Balls} + 2.2 \times \text{Burnham} - 3.5 \times \text{Miliband D}$$

6 Discussion

Thus far I have provided estimates of candidate MP, MEP, constituency Labour party and affiliate organisations' ideal points in one and two dimensions using MPs' and MEPs' publicly available preference orderings and information on constituency and affiliate member voting patterns I have argued that the first recovered dimension in each case is a left-right dimension. I have argued that the second dimension is a "niceness", separating 'nice' candidates from 'nasty' ones – or at least, separating nice candidates from those more willing to take the fight to the Conservatives. In both cases, and for both recovered dimensions, I have demonstrated that the positions of affiliate members are more extreme than the positions of either MPs and MEPs or constituency Labour parties.

These findings matter for our interpretation of British party politics. Shortly after the results of the leadership election, the *Sun* branded Ed Miliband as 'Red Ed'.⁷ Portraying a Labour leader as being in hock to the unions is hardly new – John Major attempted the same feat following Tony Blair's election in 1994 – and is unlikely to have been meant seriously. Yet the nickname hides a serious question: where on the left-right spectrum does Ed Miliband stand, both in relation to his party and to the wider electorate? The results presented here show that Ed Miliband is located firmly at the centre of the Labour party, considered broadly to include the parliamentary Labour party, ordinary party members, and affiliated organisations. Consequently, branding Ed Miliband as 'Red Ed' is about as useful a descriptor as branding the entire Labour party as 'red'.

These findings add to our knowledge of party leadership elections. [Quinn \(2010\)](#) has argued that the study of leadership elections has typically ignored motivation – and yet goes on to cast his analysis in terms that essentially ignore the role of the pursuit

⁷ "Fury over our name", *The Sun*, 27th September 2010, p. 6.

of policy objectives in such elections. By contrast, my analysis shows that policy objectives, at least for MPs and MEPs, were paramount, in that they constitute the first recovered dimension in an analysis of MPs and MEPs' preference data. Non-policy considerations, in particular considerations relating to political competition and niceness, are secondary, but do distinguish between candidates, MPs, and Labour party affiliates. Thus, there is little difference, in policy terms, between a Burnham and a David Miliband – but the former is a 'nice', unaggressive, electorally uncompetitive candidate in the way that the second is not.

These results are both important for theory, and our consideration of May's curvilinear law of disparity in leadership elections, but are also substantively interesting: they show that the Labour party, collectively, chose a leader who was fairly close to the dimension-by-dimension median, though probably to the left of the median British voter. The question of whether such leadership choices ultimately impair electoral performance is, of course, a matter for further research (Cross and Blais, 2009).

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