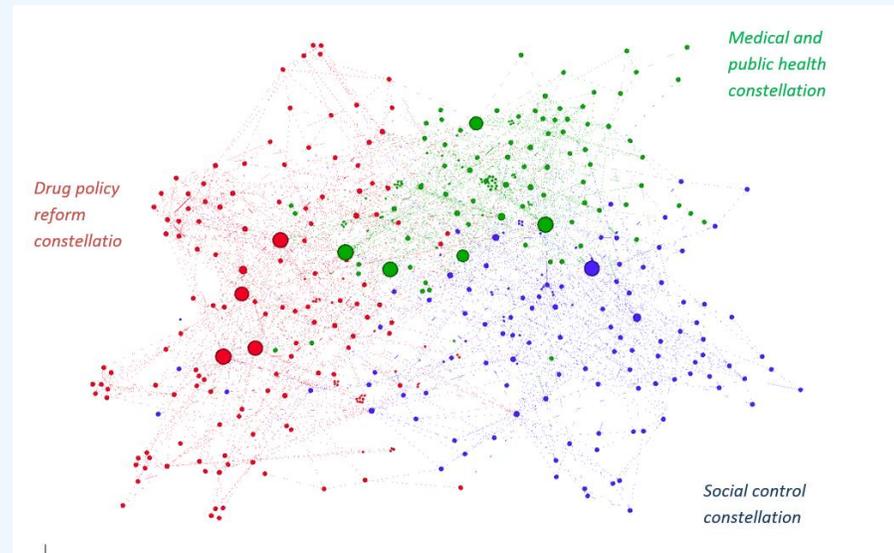


Explaining the UK's drug strategy for 2021-2031

The Policy Constellation Approach

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Conflict statement

- This research was not funded (thanks for study leave from the University of Kent)
- I have no financial conflicts of interest to report
- I am a participant in the policy field I observed for this study



This presentation

- Research questions:
 - **How can we explain the decisions made in the new UK drug strategy?**
- The strategy
 - **Old themes: reduce supply, prevent use, treat users**
 - **New money: £533 million to spend on treatment in England**
- Theory
 - **The Police Constellations Approach**
- Methods
 - **Critical realist discourse analysis**
 - **Two-mode social network analysis**
- Findings
 - **The most powerful social actors cluster around public health and social control**
 - **They overlap in a dominant, hybrid, medico-penal constellation**
 - **Important effect of the savvy social power of Dame Carol Black**

The Policy Constellations Approach

- Policy constellations

set of social actors (individuals and organisations) who come together in deploying various forms of socially structured power to **pursue the institutionalisation in policy of shared moral preferences and material interests**. Constellations are not stable groups with fixed rules or memberships. They are **fluid sets of actors who gravitate towards each other on the basis of shared preferences and norms**.

Implications

- Policy actors will tend to cluster together around shared policy preferences
- These constellations will overlap when their normative preferences are compatible.
- They will not collaborate with policy constellations with whom their normative preferences clash
- The most successful positions in policy debates will be those that suit the normative commitments of the most structurally powerful constellations

Policy constellations and *power*

- Political

- **Institutional**
- **Legal**
- **Coercive**

- Social

- **Economic**
- **Campaigning**
- **Media**
- **Convening**
- **Epistemic**
- **Affective**



**Savvy social
power**

Methods for studying policy constellations

Critical realist discourse analysis.

- Analysis of texts and images to identify recurring narrative, tropes, factoids and policy positions
- Assumes these discursive elements relate to an external world that has some reality outside discourse.
- Assumes there are underlying generative mechanisms that produce this reality and discourse.

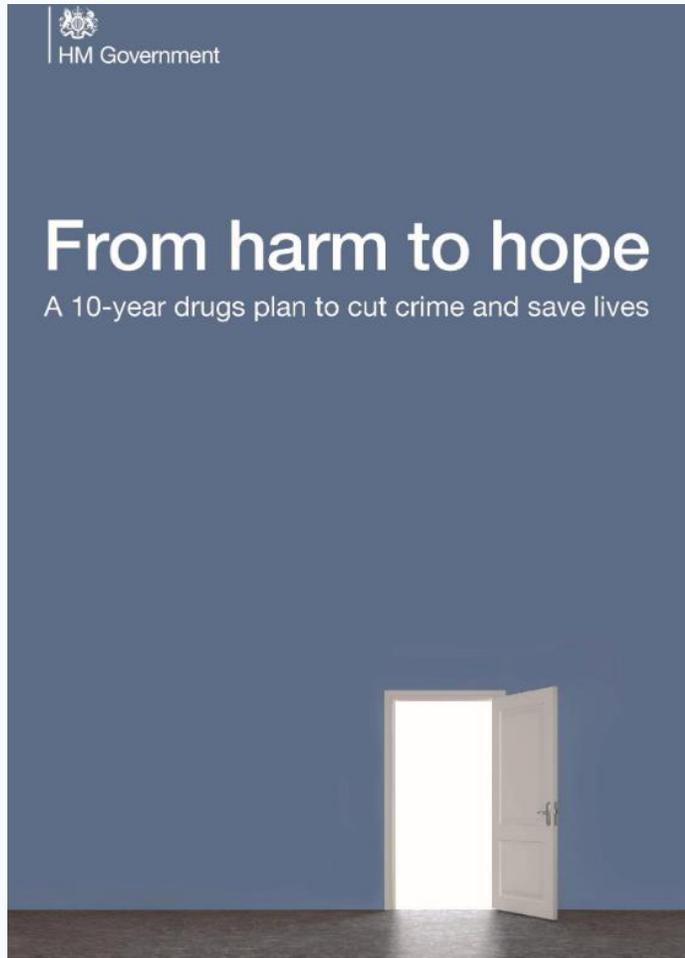
Two-mode social network analysis (SNA)

- Mapping the connections between:
 - Policy actors (mode 1)
 - Policy positions (mode 2)
- If theory correct, then it will be possible to identify constellations that cluster around shared normative bases.

Data

- 149 policy documents (2015-2021)
 - Interviews with 21 policy actors
- Auto-ethnography of >10 years of my work in UK drug policy making

'From harm to hope': the UK drug strategy



Dramatis Personae

PM Boris Johnson



Professor Dame Carol Black



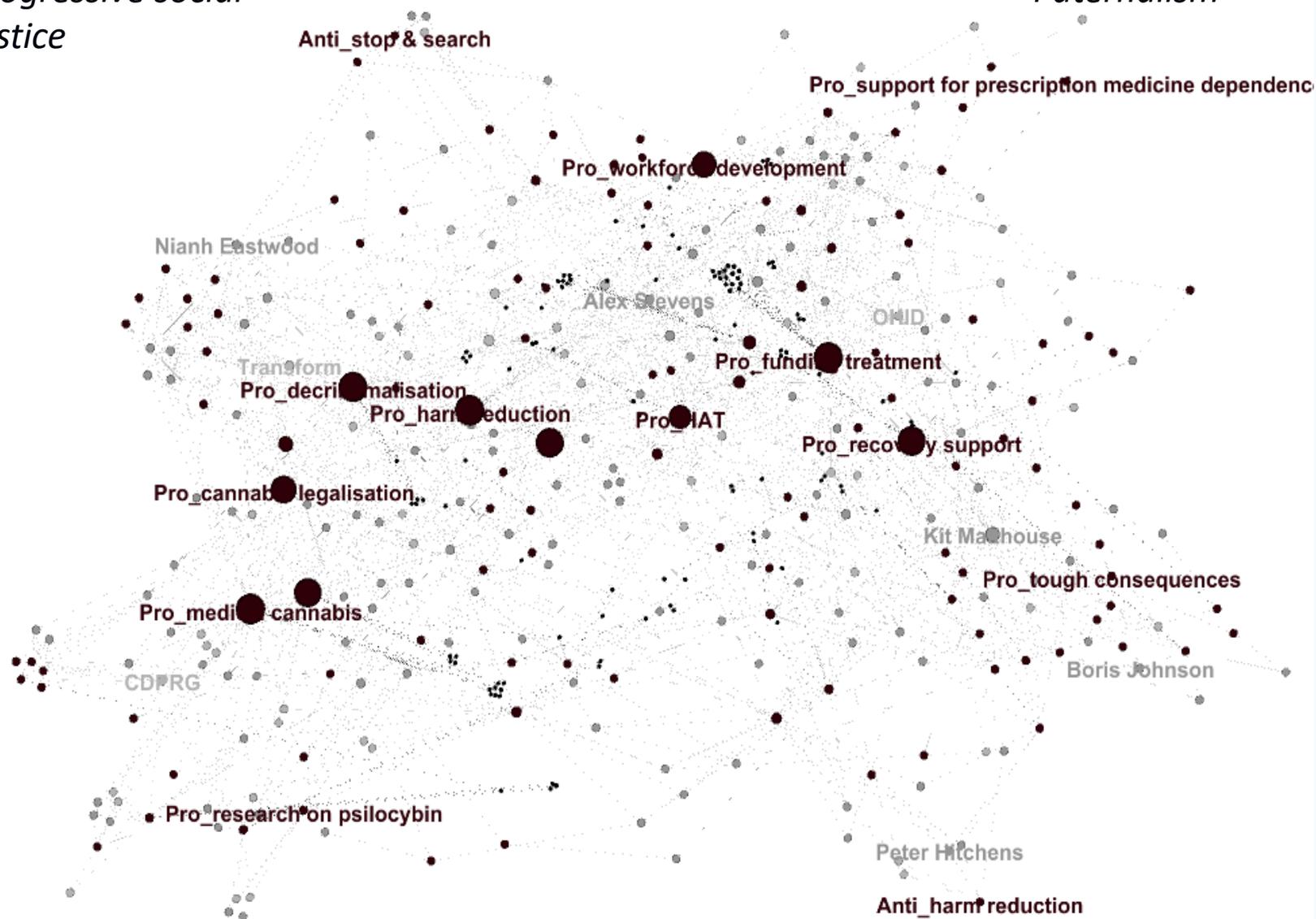
... and a 'policy zoo'

*Progressive social
justice*

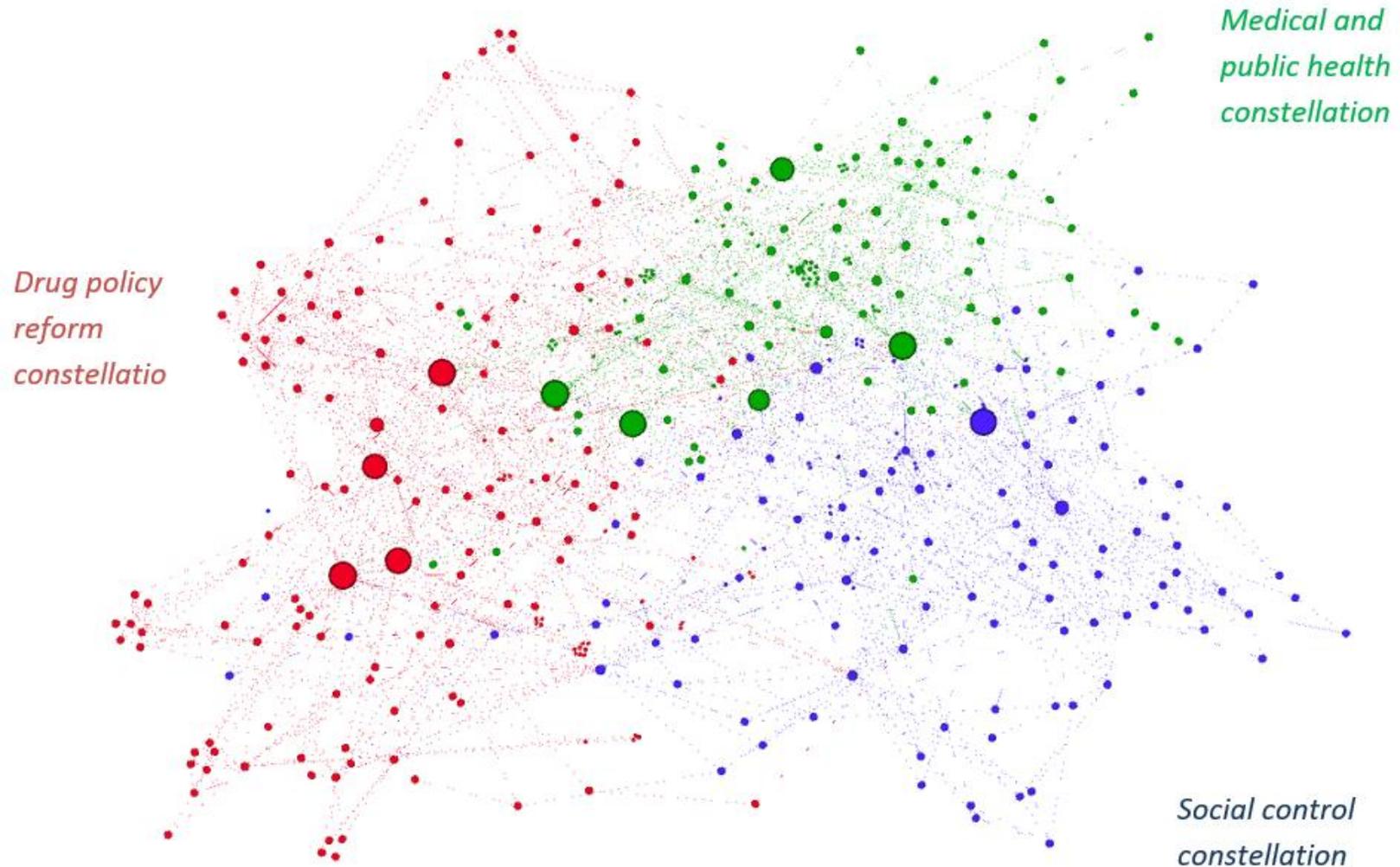
Paternalism

Liberty

Traditionalism



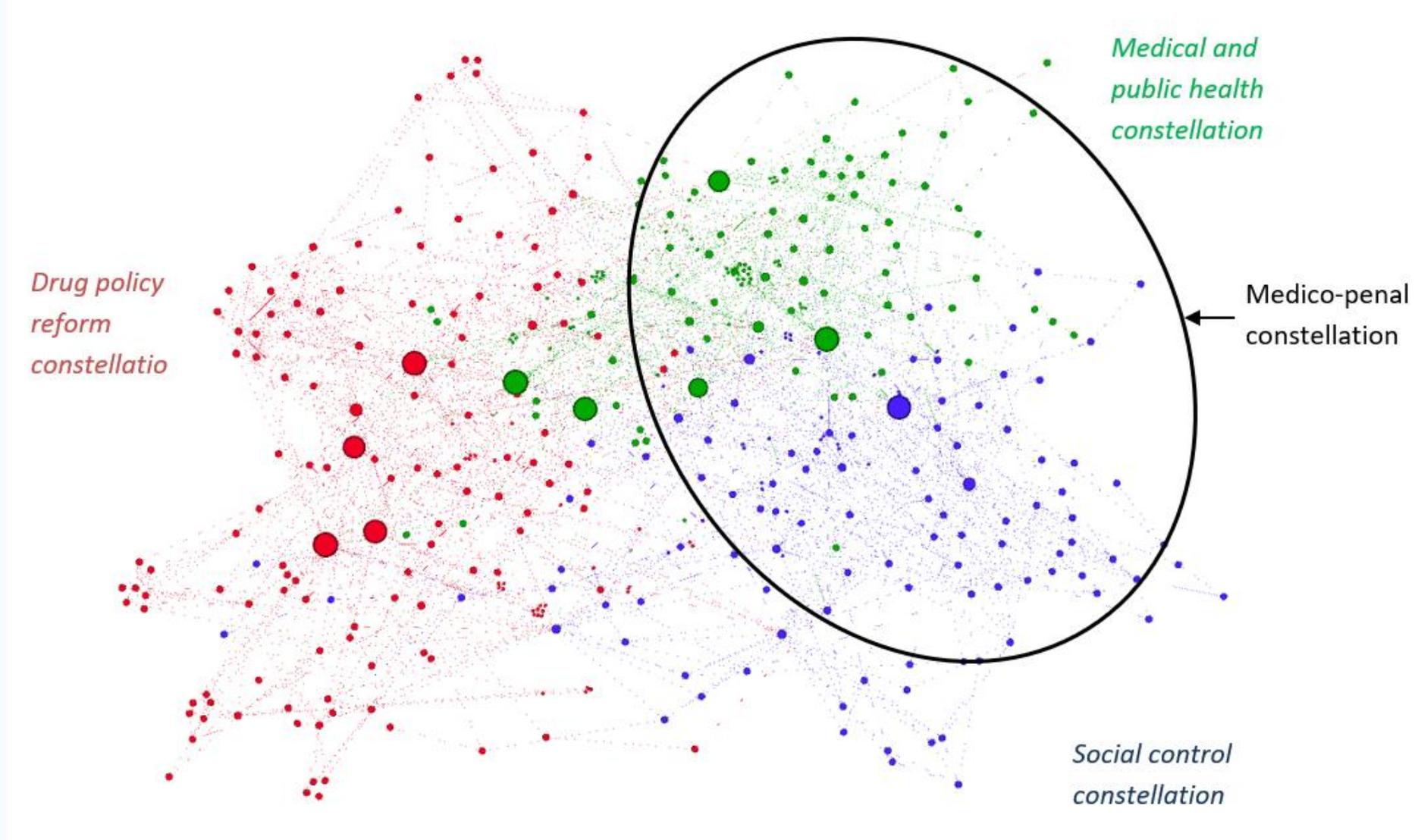
UK policy constellations: 3 macro constellations



Forms of power across constellations

Constellation	Social control	Public health	Drug policy reform
Political power	X		
Economic			X
Campaigning			X
Media	X		X
Convening	X	X	
Epistemic		X	X
Affective	X	X	X

UK policy constellations: 3 macro constellations



The savvy social power of Carol Black

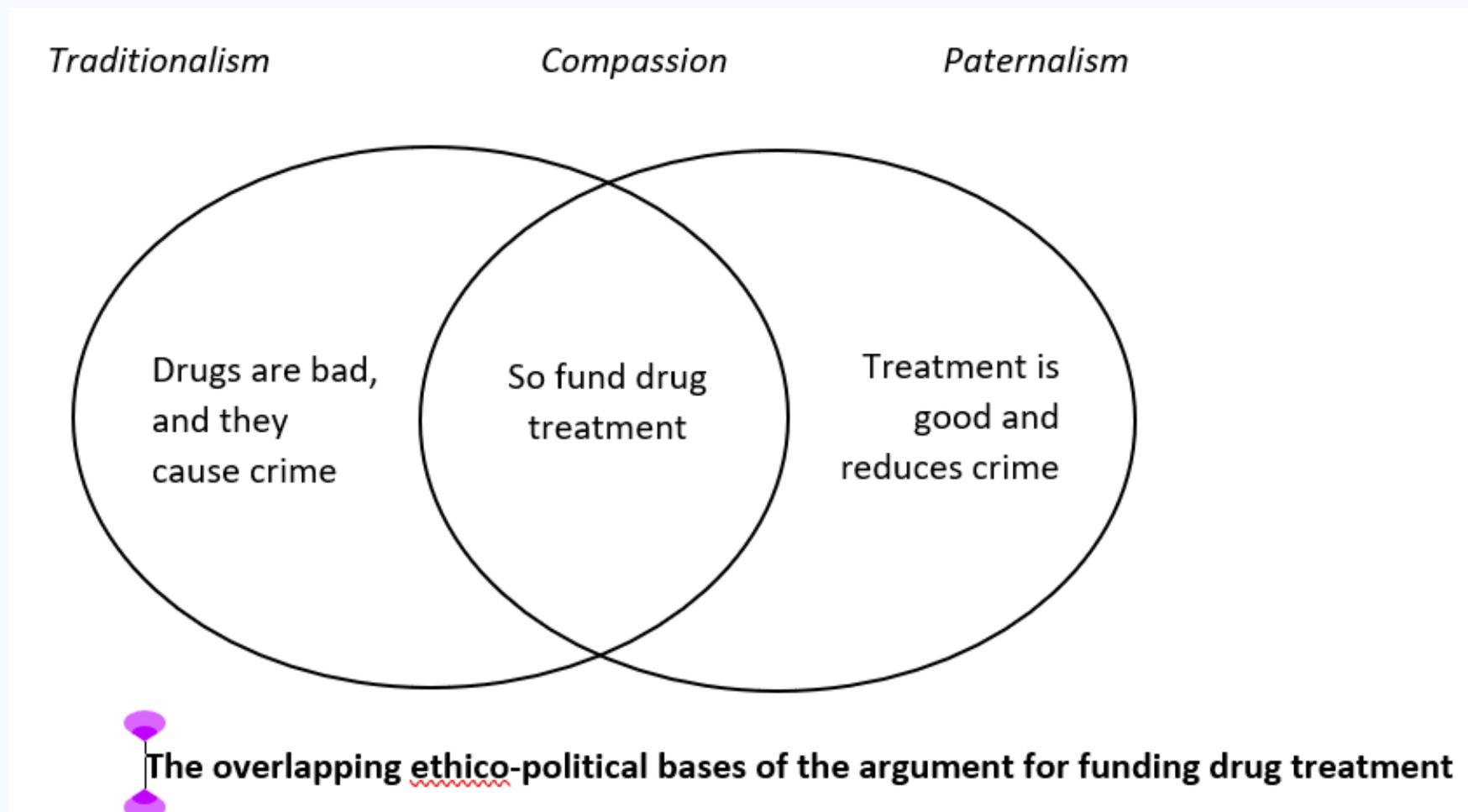
“I have worked for two years to bring people and departments together. I would never claim that it's the best way to do this.

I wanted people who've been addicted and who've now come through it and want to be part of the system to be much more part of the recovery process.

So if there were things I wanted to push them to make this a chronic condition... I'll keep bugging them to do that. I'm passionately interested in making this better.”



A resurrected policy narrative



Conclusion: explaining the drug strategy

- **The most powerful social actors cluster around public health and social control**
- **They overlap in a dominant, hybrid, medico-penal policy constellation**
- **Carol Black used her savvy social power to bring these actors together around a persuasive, shareable narrative**



A drug policy that reprised old themes, but brought new money, while reaffirming the institutional power and legitimacy of the dominant social actors.

Note exclusion of the drug policy reformers, and absence of people who use drugs.