The Elites in Revolt? Understanding Brexit Dynamics through Electoral System Incentives and Anti-Establishment Cooptation

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Abstract

This thesis aims at understanding why anti-establishment forces manifest differently between countries due to organizational and partisan constraints, using an exploratory case study. Specifically, it aims to understand the role of electoral systems and how the spatial positionings of various political actors determine the channels through which anti-establishment politics emerges, namely whether it emerges through anti-system parties, hitherto mainstream parties, or both, and how such discourse and strategic positioning can persist. This thesis explores how partisan politics and institutions intersect, driving the behaviour of both 'challengers' and mainstream actors.

Working from a theoretical perspective informed by rational choice, more specifically spatial modelling literature and the mutually assured autonomy game, electoral systems and the strategic positioning of political candidates and parties are understood to be crucial in determining the anti-establishment outcomes that manifest. To examine this dynamic, I establish a theoretical framework that explains why anti-establishment politics manifests in different ways depending on electoral systems (the independent variable). Using this theoretical model, I then examine the case of the British Conservative Party and its strategic interactions with challenger parties, namely the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and Brexit Party, throughout the 2010s using process tracing approach and a high-level analytical narrative. The key hypothesis is as follows: majoritarian electoral systems, where disproportionality is high, are more likely to experience the capture or mainstreaming of anti-establishment rhetoric than countries with proportional systems because of the increased relative importance of electoral system incentives. This thesis concludes with a discussion of how well the case matches theoretical expectations, implications of these findings, and new avenues for research.

Résumé

Cette thèse vise à comprendre pourquoi les forces anti-establishment se manifestent différemment entre les pays en raison de contraintes organisationnelles et partisanes, à l'aide d'une étude de cas exploratoire. Plus précisément, il vise à comprendre le rôle des systèmes électoraux et comment les positionnements spatiaux des différents acteurs politiques déterminent les canaux par lesquels émerge la politique anti-establishment, à savoir si elle émerge à travers les partis anti-système, jusqu'alors majoritaires, ou les deux, et comment un tel discours et un tel positionnement stratégique peuvent persister. Cette thèse explore la façon dont la politique et les institutions partisanes se recoupent, entraînant le comportement des « adversaires » et des acteurs principaux.

Ce travail utilise une perspective théorique éclairée par le choix rationnel, plus spécifiquement la littérature de modélisation spatiale et le jeu d'autonomie mutuellement assurée. Les systèmes électoraux et le positionnement stratégique des candidats et des partis politiques sont considérés comme essentiels pour déterminer les résultats anti-établissement qui se manifestent. Pour examiner cette dynamique, j'établis un cadre théorique qui explique pourquoi la politique anti-establishment se manifeste de différentes manières en fonction des systèmes électoraux (la variable indépendante). À l'aide de ce modèle théorique, j'examine ensuite le cas du Parti conservateur britannique et de ses interactions stratégiques avec les partis challenger, à savoir le Parti de l'indépendance du Royaume-Uni (UKIP) et le Parti Brexit. L'hypothèse centrale est la suivante : les systèmes électoraux majoritaires, où la disproportion est élevée, sont plus susceptibles de subir la capture ou l'intégration de l'anti-scrutin la rhétorique de l'établissement que les pays dotés de systèmes proportionnels en raison de l'importance relative accrue des incitations au système électoral. Cette thèse se termine par une discussion sur la façon dont cette étude de cas correspond aux attentes théoriques, les implications de ces résultats et les nouvelles pistes de recherche.

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Introduction

Across the world, there has been a tremendous growth of anti-establishment sentiment over the past 40 years, evidenced by the decline of mainstream centre parties and the rise of extreme and anti-system alternatives (Schedler 1996; Abedi 2004). Frozen party systems have 'thawed' due to changing political opportunity structures such as partisan dealignment, dissatisfaction with parties 'chasing the centre', and exogenous shocks such as economic and migration crises (Roberts 2017). Globalisation has produced winners and losers, and these divisions are being successfully exploited by actors that appear "to give a voice to the fears of 'ordinary, decent people'" in contrast to an unresponsive and disconnected political establishment (Hobolt and Tilley 2016, 1273). However, anti-establishment sentiment has had varying effects across different states. While challenger parties have fragmented many European party systems, other states have seen a rise in anti-establishment discourse occurring within the confines of mainstream parties. While economic and cultural grievances are common 'demand-side' explanations of the anti-system surge, also important is how these demand explanations interact with organizational and partisan factors and how these elements collectively influence how anti-establishment politics differs between states.

This thesis aims at understanding why anti-establishment forces manifest differently between countries due to organizational and partisan constraints, using an exploratory case study. Specifically, it aims to understand the role of electoral systems (how votes translate to seats) and how the spatial positionings of various political actors determine the channels through which anti-establishment politics emerge, namely whether it emerges through anti-system parties, hitherto mainstream parties, or both, and how such discourse and strategic positioning can

persist. This thesis explores how partisan politics and institutions intersect, driving the behaviour of both 'challengers' and mainstream actors.

Working from a theoretical perspective informed by rational choice, more specifically spatial modelling literature and the mutually assured autonomy game (as articulated by Holdo 2019a; Holdo 2019b), electoral systems and the strategic positioning of political candidates and parties are understood to be crucial in determining the anti-establishment outcomes that manifest. To examine this dynamic, I establish a theoretical framework that explains why anti-establishment politics manifest in different ways depending on electoral systems as the primary independent variable.[1] Using this theoretical model, I then examine the case of the British Conservative Party and its strategic interactions with challenger parties, namely the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and Brexit Party, throughout the 2010s using a process tracing approach that incorporates a macro-level analytical narrative. The findings suggest that the SMP electoral system played a clear role in conditioning the interaction between the dominant mainstream party and insurgent challenger, including strategic mutual legitimization, followed by agenda cooptation. This exploratory case is also used to propose additional refinements and considerations when testing the theorized model against other cases.

This thesis proceeds as follows. First, I examine party systems, spatial modeling, and electoral systems literatures to establish the theoretical antecedents to this research question and the state of existing research. I then establish key theoretical expectations, and a proposed causal sequence, when testing the key hypothesis: majoritarian electoral systems, where

[1] IV: Electoral Systems (distinguished by level of disproportionality) | DV: Anti-Establishment Politics (categorical), expressed through policies (namely with respect to Brexit).

disproportionality is high, are more likely to experience the capture or mainstreaming of anti-establishment politics or policies than countries with proportional systems because of the increased relative importance of electoral system incentives. In addition, electoral system incentives are hypothesised to be more important than spatial incentives in majoritarian democracies, as there is an intervening distorting effect (whereby established or new political actors are constrained from directly responding to emerging political demand) caused by the influence of strategic voting (and party responses to this). Third, I lay out the methodology used to examine the interaction between establishment and challenger parties. The following section then examines the case of the British Conservative Party during the 2010s and presents the results of the case study that measures the gradual adoption of anti-establishment policy positioning. The thesis concludes with a discussion of how well the case matches theoretical expectations, implications of these findings, and new avenues for research.

Chapter 1: Understanding Party Systems, Political Competition, and the Opportunity Space of Anti-Establishment Politics

To understand how electoral systems influence anti-establishment politics, in this section I examine party systems theories and spatial modelling theories as these literatures provide a framework for understanding anti-establishment challengers and the preceding conditions for their emergence and success. That is, the former allows for an understanding of historical and sociological factors at play, whereas the latter gets at specific systemic incentives. I then turn to a review of anti-establishment politics and related spatial modelling concepts to provide situating context for the theoretical framework established in Chapter 3. To conclude this review, I examine existing research on electoral systems and how these institutions influence party systems and party interaction generally.

Party systems and spatial modelling

The interaction, emergence, and decline of political parties and overarching party systems are well theorized by party systems literature. Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) seminal theory of cleavage structures and frozen party systems continues to provide a compelling framework for understanding the development of party systems, with various conflicts forming the basis of party divisions and cleavage bases varying between polities and changing over time. In understanding anti-establishment politics, it is notable that the authors state that social cleavages were movements of protest against the established elite in a wave of "emancipation and mobilisation" (1967, 23), and that party systems would 'freeze' barring major disruption and dissatisfaction. This freezing hypothesis was corroborated decades later (Mair 1997), but with the caveat that closed structures of party competition were opening and producing non-traditional government formations, setting up the possibility for cleavage destabilisation. It has also been

theorized that party responses to new divisions and social cleavages are constrained by past positionings on other cleavages (Hooghe and Marks 2018). As such, party system change (and by extension anti-establishment dynamics) is disruptive rather than incremental, with "extant political parties […] in constant motion as they seek to adapt their positions to the preferences of voters" (Ibid. 126). However, this is only to a point, as adaptations are constrained by the policy commitments of activists, the expectations of voters, and established social bases and constituencies.

Notably, cleavage theory still remains relevant in the assessment of party systems and understanding political change over longer timespans. For example, a growing cleavage between the "rulers and the ruled" helps explain the growing strength, and persistence, of anti-establishment politics in a European context (Hartleb 2015). In such a cleavage, parties aim to distinguish themselves based on their relationship with anti-establishment forces, the people, and for EU member states, the EU itself. Others, such as Ford and Jennings (2020) and Norris and Inglehart (2019) emphasize other socio-demographic developments that are, or are potentially generating new cleavages in Europe, such as education, mass migration, aging populations, and growing urban-rural disparities. As such, understanding sociodemographic forces, and underlying societal conflicts, remains a relevant and useful means of understanding broader party politics and party system changes. Moreover, such environmental changes, especially citizen-elite incongruence, also challenge the ability of mainstream parties to represent the interests of voters in certain dimensions, creating new opportunities and avenues for political competition (Bakker et al. 2020).

Moving beyond sociological underpinnings, political competition can also be understood through spatial models. There exists a rich literature on spatial modelling, in which political

parties can be understood as organizations seeking to maximise their political support, and thus locating themselves close to the centre of the issue space, specifically the median voter, to accomplish this as there is an assumption that more voters are located towards the median of the political distribution (Downs 1957, 115-117). Ultimately, the distribution of modal preferences in the competition space determines the equilibrium point (Ibid. 117-122): if there is a single mode, the system is in equilibrium when two parties have converged to proximate political positions. If there are two modes, the logic of spatial competition dictates that parties should locate themselves close to the median point (as it is generally assumed that they will not lose support as they would gain votes among voters located between a party's initial position and the median). The distribution of modal preferences can explain the emergence of multiparty systems, with parties having a specific programmatic or ideological niche, along with big-tent or catch-all parties that aimed to broadly distribute public goods to build larger coalitions. However, proportional representation generally leads to more competitive systems that better aggregate individual choices in contrast to skewed electoral systems (Schofield 1993). More parties are likely to emerge in electoral spheres with fewer barriers to entry, and consequently, parties (or coalitions) seek to increases votes until a subjectively-estimated minimum winning coalition is reached (Riker 1962). After this point is reached, parties will aim to maintain this state as it is a more efficient use of resources than increasing the coalition size further; the value of a winning coalition generally decreases with coalition size, as a 'valueless' coalition of winners and losers will be produced that nullifies any winner's victory.

If there is a single mode, parties will likely converge, and if an issue space is a standard left-right continuum (or one-dimensional issue space), parties will be more likely to follow median public opinion (Berton and Panel 2014). However, for multimodal issues, the calculus

becomes more complex. If a issue space, for example immigration, has multimodal preferences, larger parties will need to decide between maintaining a median position (convergence) or moving closer to one of the modes, with there being potential trade-offs in terms of public support. While parties would generally be able to maintain a median position as voters around a mode would still vote for a party close to the median if that vote minimizes the distance between an ideal point and the party location, if an extreme position becomes popular and the threat of significant abstentionism or defection is introduced, parties may be pulled towards the modes. If issues are defined over multiple dimensions, if there are several issues decided simultaneously, or if there is a significant threat of abstentionism, the median voter equilibrium may cease to dominate or even to exist (Mueller 1979; Rowley 1984). However, this does not mean that the median voter, or median mandate[2] theorems (McDonald and Budge 2005) are without merit; there may be certain institutional contexts, or situations where it is more pertinent. For example, if a single leading issue, that influences other dimensions, is primed, then the concept of the median voter, or minimum winning "coalitions" (or bases of support) become more relevant.

Expanding on Down's insights, spatial models have become more sophisticated; while unidimensional models can provide intuitive and comparable summaries of party positions on some issues, significant variance can be left unexplained though such simplifications (Albright 2010). As such, many scholars have introduced additional dimensions to the core Downsian logic to increase the descriptive value of such models, such as a second dimension that can represent a noneconomic positional cleavage on which voters hold different positions, or a

[2] The median mandate theory posits that the median voter's ideology should match the ideology of the median parliamentarian and median government party, affecting policy accordingly. Consequently, parties tend to offer reasonably stable policy packages within a unidimensional issue space.

valence (or non-policy) dimension that pertains to a party's image for competence, integrity, or leadership (Adams 2019; Stokes 1992). The logic of valence can also be extended beyond "character-based valence" to "strategic valence" that considers the ability of a candidate or party to win elections, such as through fundraising and effective campaigning (Stone and Simas 2010). This is of special relevance in electoral contexts where voters are incentivized to vote for the party they assume is best positioned to win, rather than the most proximate party.

In considering additional issue dimensions, there are many debates that may not be directly aligned with a left-right economic issue dimension (Adams 2019, 189). There may be position variance on social, cultural, and moral issues between voters who otherwise share similar economic views (Dalton 2013; Inglehart and Norris 2017). In the context of this research, Brexit (the European Union) epitomize such a cross-cutting issue cleavage with potential to generate unlikely coalitions of support from voters who otherwise differ in other issue spaces. In multidimensional issue spaces, office-seeking parties are expected to 'cycle', with parties repositioning themselves to attain an advantage, thus motivating rivals to shift their positions (McKelvey 1979). Policy proposals are thus dynamic, and will shift according to voter preferences and strategic imperatives. Party activists also play an important role in constraining parties as they move in a multidimensional issue space; additional members change the overall party position, creating the impetus for new people to join and existing members to exit, with a stable equilibrium forming if no activists change their decision to participate and no new citizens become involved (Aldrich 1983). Conversely, situations where there is mass defection or abstention can propel parties to change course, in search of a new stable equilibrium.

Party competition can be understood as oligopolistic competition where short-term sacrifices are made to secure a longer-term position, such as eliminating challengers (Kitschelt

1994, 128). A party can move in an extreme direction to snuff out an opponent in the short-term if that is where voters are located by intensifying the salience of radical issues, even if this increases the polarization of voters across the political competitive space. However, these radicalized voters may abandon the oligopolist "mainstream" party once it returns to a more moderate or vote-maximizing strategy (Ibid.). This strategy is more viable where entry costs are high, target parties are less entrenched, and voters are more polarized and less concentrated around a median point.

Spatial models can be used to understand the emergence, life, and death of political parties. New parties can be born when citizens are sufficiently dissatisfied and political parties fall below "survival thresholds" (Laver and Schilperoord 2007). Voters shift to new parties as a result of political system evaluation, with vote-switching more likely to occur in permissive electoral environments. In addition, parties can exit the electoral arena in numerous ways such as merger death, dissolution death, and absorption death where a party in a position of weakness is subsumed by another (Bolleyer et al. 2019). These various deaths can be viewed both as strategic choices and consequences for the actors involved.

Understanding anti-establishment politics, and related concepts

With these party system and spatial modelling dynamics in mind, the emergence of anti-establishment parties and movements can be understood. Anti-establishment politics is broadly understood in this project to be a specific tool that various actors can use, with the success of anti-establishment appeals relying on politicians being able to convince voters that they are genuinely in opposition to the established power structure (Barr 2009). It is a "rhetorical appeal based on opposition to those who wield power within the state", where appeals are associated with correcting or fixing the flaws of representative democracy, such as by changing personnel

in charge, or promoting citizen participation (Ibid. 44). Specifically, anti-establishment politics targets the political elite as opposed to the economic elite and the 'power block' (Schedler 1996). In contrast with populism, less importance is placed on vertical connects between the leader and membership and on bellicose rhetorical stylings. Additionally, it avoids the contradictory issue of opportunistic or insincere political actors who merely employ populism as a rhetorical strategy. Since the target of anti-establishment politics is clarified as the political class; it makes conceptual sense that economic elites can engage in anti-establishment politics than populist politics, where the main historical thrust has traditionally been more anti-capitalist and anti-oligarchic (Ibid. 292).

Inglehart and Norris (2017) argue that support for populist authoritarian parties is motived by a backlash against cultural change, and declining 'existential security', caused by declining incomes and job insecurity, is also increasing support for these parties. They also argue that with the emergence of a 'post-materialist outlook', there has been a declining emphasis on economic issues vis-à-vis cultural issues, which has led traditional working-class constituencies to support right-wing parties. These two forces help explain why there is greater electorate availability for anti-establishment parties. Bronk and Jacoby (2020) argue that economic indeterminacy, rapid technological change, deregulation, and globalization, and consequent uncertainty and precarity faced by citizens, has resulted in the heightened appeal of populist politics. Unpredictability has created a context where the credibility of experts has been undermined and political actors seek to establish narratives as facts in an instrumental manner. In contrast, Lonergan and Blyth (2020) posit that anti-establishment sentiment and public anger is a consequence of increasing economic disparity and the disjunct between living conditions and ostensibly improving living conditions (according to elite-propagated models). As the gap

between the public and elite narratives widens, anger grows and mainstream parties tend to lose support, with anti-core populists serving as “the rogue code writers of politics” (Ibid. 11).

The notions of anti-core and anti-system parties in spatial modelling literature are also relevant as they outline how parties interact, namely in asymmetric competition. Schofield (1993) argues that party configurations, and how parties form the ‘core’ of a government-formation game, are important, with dominant core parties having true positions close to the electoral heart (or core of the political game through which elections are won) and weak core parties holding positions close to the electoral heart only in favourable conditions. Dominant core parties tend to product dominant party systems with one strong party almost always appearing in government, whereas weak core parties will tend to form minority governments unless party fragmentation allows smaller parties to form coalitions. In contrast, anti-core parties have true positions far from the electoral heart but may have a policy impact through coalition arrangements, and extreme parties can gain from proximity voting by maintaining their current positions as other parties locate themselves closer to the electoral heart. In terms of ‘contagion’, anti-core parties present a strategic threat to actors closer to the electoral heart as they threaten to “split the vote” even if they cannot outright win, hurting the chances of proximate mainstream parties. Larger parties are thus pressured both in terms of policy and messaging to counter this threat.

Importantly, coalition and government formation is influenced by the polarity of party systems (Ibid. 29-30). Unipolar systems will alternate between a strong party (usually forming a minority government) and a set of smaller parties that can form an alternate government, such as the bourgeoise centre-right parties in Sweden. Strong triadic multipolar systems will often have a centrally-located party that can bargain with either of the other two parties to form minimal

winning coalition governments, and in fragmented core systems a core party has a stable position from which it can negotiate with multiple other parties it faces. In the latter, the core party is always in government, and satisfying as many coalition partners as possible is an underlying logic, so surplus coalitions are common. While majoritarian electoral systems are more likely to produce single-party governments, this logic can extent to factions and social bases of support in big-tent parties.

For Capoccia (2002), parties can be taxonomized based on their relational anti-systemness and their ideological anti-systemness. Relational anti-systemness is based on a high spatial distance from other parties, the adoption of "isolationist" coalition strategies, and centrifugal (or extremist) propaganda that aims to delegitimise electoral opponents, whereas ideological anti-systemness "consists in the incompatibility of its ideological referents" and its political goals with democracy (Ibid. 23-24). Relational anti-systemness can be used to compare party strategies as they pertain to coalition and messaging. For example, 'polarising parties' (parties that are relationally but not ideologically anti-system) are likely to be excluded from coalition formation, whereas 'accommodating' anti-system parties, that are only ideologically anti-system but not outside of a political heart, may adopt centripetal tactics where such parties appeal to the centre. The taxonomy Capoccia establishes can be useful in classifying both challenger parties along with parties that have shifted rhetorically or programmatically to stifle this competition. Importantly, under this taxonomy and spatial logic, anti-system can refer to both party and constitutional systems. Thus, it is possible for "established" anti-system parties to exist. Anti-establishment discourse, political positioning, and logic can be differentiated according to these lines as well.

The intersection of party systems theory and spatial modelling is useful for situating anti-establishment movements. For instance, the notion of 'cartel parties' (Katz and Mair 1995, Blyth and Katz 2005) where effective political competition is reduced due to the professionalization of politics and consensus among elites creates an opportunity space for anti-establishment parties working against "mainstream" consensus. While this transition from traditional mass politics and catch-all politics can be understood as resulting in a less responsive political ecosystem exemplified through parties no longer aggregating citizen demands into coherent election manifestos, while instead focusing on specific issues to appeal to increasingly heterogenous electorates (Andeweg 1996), Kitschelt argues that parties have actually become more sensitive to voter preferences as they can no longer rely on "material and solidary selective incentives that maintained voter loyalty" during the era of mass party organization and patronage (2000, 175). In addition, organizational entrenchment, exemplified through mass membership, formal rules for interaction, and party bureaucracy, limit the influx of new demands into the party through new recruitment and can restrict party sensitivity to inputs from public opinion and civil society (Kitschelt 1994, 212). Parties are thus more sensitive to strategic vote-switching. Ultimately, mainstream parties have largely adapted to become more composite and heterogenous organizations, though this results in new vulnerabilities.

Anti-political establishment parties appear to benefit from collusion between establishment parties, especially in environments characterized by mutual distrust between the governing party (or coalition) and an excluded or ostracized opposition (Abedi 2004, 139). If there is either a collapse of centre parties or an "overcrowding" of the centre, anti-establishment parties can gain an electoral foothold. As such, a strategy against anti-establishment parties involves "increasing the ideological divergence between establishment parties" (Ibid. 140),

though this is difficult to achieve in an environment shaped by mainstream consensus on globalization, consequent policy convergence, and elite heuristics that suppose that remaining electorally competitive requires tacking to the political centre. Ultimately, Abedi argues that "deeper understanding of the reasons behind the success and failure of [anti-establishment] parties makes it necessary to examine more closely the modes of interaction between establishment parties and their challengers" (2004, 142). In addition, anti-system politics have been found to be more effective in countries with weak welfare states, structural trade deficits, and electoral rules that artificially supress the number of options voters can choose from (Hopkin 2020). Importantly, anti-establishment forces can exploit resentment towards establishment politics and present ostensible alternatives to neoliberalism and globalization. While salient anti-establishment policy positioning can result in contagion and cooptation can affect parties across the political spectrum and result in cooperation between far-right and mainstream conservative parties (van Spanje 2010), this does not necessarily entail a reconciliation of policy stances.

While there are many conditions anti-establishment parties can exploit to establish an electoral foothold, there are numerous possible interactions and outcomes. Party systems can fragment as smaller parties gain a greater share of the popular vote, and it is possible for dominant parties to be replaced with previously challenger or anti-establishment actors (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). Conversely, it is possible for dominant parties to reinvent themselves to increase their appeal. However, these outcomes vary by political context, including organizational variables such as electoral systems. In addition, anti-establishment parties can be included and integrated within a political consensus or coalition in an attempt to "sanitize" and reform these parties into being more mainstream (Abedi 2004); while party systems may appear to be fragmented due to the entry of new parties, the end result may be that effective governing

blocs or probably coalitions remain relatively stable. In other words, there can be stabilization towards a new equilibrium.

Research on the effects of electoral systems on anti-establishment parties

One compelling variable is the role of electoral systems as they influence bargaining processes and when compromises and coalitions are made (Shepsle 2010). Electoral systems have long been associated with a diverse array of political outcomes, and mechanics have a clear influence on effects such as the number of parties competing and the number of parties that end up winning seats in legislatures (Lijphart 1994) and the degree to which politics is consultative or competitive (Lijphart 1969). According to Duverger (1954), it is difficult for small parties to emerge and succeed within non-permissive electoral systems such as single-member plurality (SMP). Non-permissive systems tend to facilitate two-party systems, whereas proportional systems tend to favour multipartism. The underrepresentation of weaker parties has a psychological effect on the electorate, who "realise that their votes are wasted if they continue to give them [to third parties]" (1954, 226). Instead, prospective third party voters vote for the 'lesser of two evils; against the major party they least prefer. Ultimately, electoral systems contribute to environmental hostility that shapes the strategies that anti-establishment actors may adopt, such as entry in permissive electoral systems, gradual targeting and adaptation, and party capture within factionalized big-tent parties (such as the Republican Party in the United States or Conservative Party in the UK) (Self and Hicken 2016). This shapes the presence and success of populist parties. Party system institutionalisation and electoral system restrictiveness are both important, with low institutionalisation and high restrictiveness resulting in “populist capture” and high institutionalisation and low restrictiveness resulting in “populist targeting” and niche exploitation. This logic can plausibly be extended to anti-establishment parties as well.

According to rational choice institutionalism, there is a calculus of rewards that shapes party competition: "formal electoral rules generate important incentives that are capable of shaping and constraining political power" (Norris 2004, 7). Electoral formulae impact the strategic incentives presented to parties, candidates, and citizens though there can be a lag before actors start responding to these incentives. Specifically, electoral thresholds affect whether parties adopt bridging or bonding strategies, adopt programmatic or particularistic beliefs, and whether they appeal to heterogenous or homogenous segments of the population. Moreover, there also exists the threat of vote-splitting within the SMP system, which is when the distribution of votes among similar candidates reduces the chance of either candidate winning. As such, the type of electoral system poses a clear strategic setting to all political actors as it impacts how favourable entry and exit conditions are for smaller anti-establishment parties. Even if entry conditions are unfavourable for smaller parties in some circumstances, they may still present a threat for their mainstream counterparts as split votes can cost incumbent parties many seats.

Electoral systems thus condition mainstream and anti-establishment actors to behave in certain ways. In a majoritarian electoral system, small challenger parties are likely to be shut out unless their support is territorially concentrated. Mainstream parties will seek to retain otherwise third party voters, which could include the strategic adoption of policies or rhetoric. Conversely, challengers may seek to seize control of mainstream parties, as there may be no viable alternative if entry and survival thresholds are too high. Electoral systems influence internal party competition and candidate selection processes (Gallagher and Mitchell 2005): proportional systems tend to increase party centralisation, strengthening party discipline and leadership, while majoritarian single-member systems tend to be more decentralised, increasing the likelihood of

party factionalism. Anti-establishment actors can therefore find a home within, and potentially capture, ‘big tent’ parties in majoritarian systems, whereas forming a separate party is incentivised in proportional systems as entry conditions are more permissive.

The importance of electoral systems in explaining the emergence of radical right challenger parties is also corroborated by Norris (2005). Electoral systems shape the incentives for centripetal patterns and centrifugal patterns of party politics (Ibid. 199), with majoritarian systems incentivising the former and proportional systems the latter. Majoritarian systems require radical right parties to appeal to a larger number of voters, whereas proportional systems reward a niche appeal and ideological distinction from mainstream parties. While partisan dealignment is an integral spatial factor as it can create greater volatility and more opportunities for protest voting, electoral systems influence the electoral strategies the radical right uses to maximise their appeal. However, it is also noted that electoral systems do not guarantee that support is maintained or consolidated (Ibid. 248). Critical elections, where electoral progress gets sustained, requires sufficient continuous demand (i.e. mainstream parties not latching onto changes in public opinion as they relate to globalisation and migration) and weakened ties between established parties and their constituencies (Ibid. 147). Ultimately, in the case of radical right parties, it is demand-side and institutional factors that determine their entry and persistence.

In contrast, Abedi (2004) found that the relationship between the electoral fortunes of anti-establishment politics and electoral systems is not as crucial as it might initially appear: increasing electoral thresholds in proportional systems does not necessarily shut out anti-establishment parties, though it may make it more challenging for new parties to gain a foothold. In other circumstances, anti-establishment challengers were able to succeed despite significant thresholds and systemic barriers, such as the Reform Party in Canada.

Though there is an increased scholarly focus on populism and anti-establishment politics, including literature on the specific incentives facing dominant versus challenger parties (De Vries and Hobolt 2020), there is a dearth of literature that explicitly links spatial and institutional factors and establishes a common process to explain varying experiences of anti-establishment demand, emergence, and potential cooptation. An in-depth tracing of causal processes via a process tracing and analytic narrative approach that examines the strategic interaction between anti-establishment and mainstream actors, and how electoral systems influence strategic decision-making, can elucidate why anti-establishment politics vary across different settings. Additionally, a detailed case study can further the understanding of how anti-establishment and mainstream actors utilize different strategies, why these strategies were chosen, what expected pay-offs are, and how strategies can be successfully or unsuccessfully countered. This dynamic is well summarized by the following quote: "The process of organizational and strategic choice is not just constrained by systemic competitive conditions and internal rules of party politics, but also the less tangible influence of political language and ideas" (Kitschelt 1994, 36).

Before turning to methodological considerations, anti-establishment politics is the conceptual lens used rather than populism as there are intractable problems with the latter term. These include issues with conceptual slippage and demarcation: for instance, many parties of the contemporary radical right are considered populist, though the more pertinent features of these parties (i.e. xenophobia, anti-immigration, and nationalism) are more salient (Rydgren 2017). Nonetheless, these terms get conflated, when the anti-establishment valence is a salient feature of ostensibly populist parties. In addition, the focus of this research is understanding party systems and the dynamics between established and challenger parties, and their respective positionality. Anti-establishment does not preclude populism, but it better defends against the baggage

associated with populism. While literature on contemporary British and European populism and radical right parties is used as there is some conceptual overlap, it is applied through a lens that places more focus on the anti-establishment angle.

Chapter 2: Theorization of Anti-Establishment Entry and The Cooptation Game

This thesis argues that the permissiveness and proportionality of electoral systems, as a key independent variables, shape anti-establishment behaviour by incentivising certain strategies over others and changing the channels through which anti-establishment politics are likely to emerge and be sustained. Electoral systems also influence how mainstream actors strategically react to anti-establishment challengers. However, political dealignment and 'demand' for anti-establishment politics are also understood to be sufficient conditions for anti-establishment parties to emerge. This thesis hypothesizes a macro-level relationship between electoral systems and anti-establishment politics, with a micro-level mechanism (strategic choices) connecting the two. Put simply, electoral systems are an important conditional factor for how anti-establishment politics manifest in different contexts, with electoral system incentives having more salience in majoritarian democracies. The disjunct between seats won and votes received matters, and electoral disproportionality is theorised to alter which elite strategies are more useful and when. In the context of this thesis, testing this hypothesis elucidates the importance of electoral systems versus spatial incentives in the first-past-the-post electoral system in explaining where anti-establishment actors emerge and how mainstream parties respond to these challengers.

Understanding the strategic environment

Operating from a rational choice perspective, it is assumed that anti-establishment and mainstream actors within an electoral arena are seeking to maximise their utility (i.e. power and influence, either direct or indirect). Individual actors make choices based on their preferences and the constraints they face. The systems through which votes are translated into seats, including elements such as electoral formulae, district magnitude, and effective thresholds

influence actor decision-making and, under certain systems, can be core strategic considerations and have systemic impacts and can condition or nullify existing spatial incentives.

Important to the notion of anti-establishment politics is the concept of political outsiders. An outsider is "someone who gains political prominence not through or in association with an establishment, competitive party, but as a political independent or in association with new or newly competitive parties," in contrast with insiders who gain their prominence within established competitive party while seeking to preserve that system (Barr 2009, 33) This thesis posits that, while it is possible for anti-establishment outsiders to "capture" big-tent parties, it is equally possible for this title to be claimed as rhetorical cover (i.e. anti-establishment posturing used to guise an elite-driven agenda), and for personalities from mainstream parties to overshadow and shut out outsiders though agenda cooptation. Further, the degree to which political systems are challenged can vary among anti-establishment actors, as some may be content with carving out a niche or effecting minor changes rather than a total dismantling of the system.

Party competition may result in programmatic and discursive contagion, under which mainstream parties can co-opt policy and rhetorical positioning from challenger parties, and thus challenger parties can influence the entire party system. In the context of anti-establishment sentiment, voters choose challenger parties on their own programmatic merits rather than just the perceived failures of mainstream parties (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). For example, a demand-side explanation of populism is that harsh austerity in the wake of the euro crisis explains why many economically dislocated individuals have turned to challenger parties (Ibid.). Specific policies proposed by challenger parties may prove to be highly salient, altering mainstream party behaviour as these actors seek to secure their position (van Spanje 2010). This research seeks to

understand if a similar contagion effect applies to anti-establishment politics and discourse, wherein mainstream parties may adopt anti-establishment language to appease this sentiment depending on the incentives and constraints imposed by electoral systems. If mainstream parties or leaders can present themselves as anti-establishment, there may be less political space for anti-establishment challengers to exploit.

Normally, dominant mainstream parties have three key strategies to retain their electorate: distinctive convergence towards the centre to ostensibly maximise appeal, avoiding disadvantageous issues that conflict with the party's branding on a left-right dimension, and emphasising their competence (De Vries and Hobolt 2020, 88). However, these strategies all have intrinsic risk, such as a lack of choice leading to defection and less partisan identification, and "competence shocks" leading to short- and long-term damage to voter trust (Ibid. 89).

Moreover, dominant parties cannot necessarily keep issues off the agenda if there are significant mobilising efforts, either by civil society or challenger parties. While there are many tools that dominant parties have at their disposal to maintain their electoral advantage, challenger parties can engage in issue entrepreneurship and emphasize wedge issues (e.g. environment, immigration, European integration) that divide the constituencies of mainstream parties (Ibid. 139). Such issue entrepreneurship is a core strategy that enables challenger parties to undercut dominant mainstream parties. Moreover, anti-establishment rhetoric also enables challengers to attack the competence and credibility, as discrediting dominant competitors reduces the risk of cooptation of political programs (Ibid. 176). Given weakened party institutions where parties are increasingly elite-driven, state-aligned (i.e. publicly funded), and unable to mobilize on a permanent basis, there is an advantage for anti-establishment parties when voters who "[avoid]

being permanently mobilized in a collective organization" prefer "single-issue spurs of action" (Andeweg 1996, 157), which are best leveraged by challenger and anti-core parties.

Additionally, a strategy of engaging and integrating anti-establishment actors can possibly reform anti-establishment parties (Abedi 2004). Even if attempts at integration are unsuccessful in bringing anti-establishment parties into the political mainstream, they may reduce the level of electoral support they receive, in part through the appearance of collusion with mainstream actors.

Applying the mutually assured autonomy game

The logic of the mutually assured autonomy game, outlined by Holdo (2019a), is instructive in terms of understanding cooptation. Cooptation is understood as the process in which actors "gain procedural rights of participation in a decision-making process without exercising substantive impact on the content of the collective decision itself" (Gamson 1975). In this game, cooptation is aimed at undermining the opposition and stripping them of their credibility when it is desirable to co-opt a movement that opposes an elite's goals. Mutually assured autonomy, the opposite of cooptation, applies to situations where elites seek to legitimise challengers (who in turn mutually legitimise them) and maintain a 'sense of independence' (Ibid. 452). Elites have a choice whether to coopt or cooperate with movement organisations, who then have a choice of continued contention or conditional cooperation, the latter of which results in mutual legitimisation. Non-cooptation occurs when movement interests overlap with elite interests with regard to policy-making and when trust in the political system is low enough to warrant an external source of legitimisation (Ibid. 453-454). Importantly, which strategy is pursued depends on the transactional costs of concession and suppression; if a zero-sum game is being played, then cooptation may be more rational.

While this logic primarily applies to social movements, this logic can be modified to apply to political parties without loss to political environments in which the key actors are political parties. Electoral systems, as an independent variable, can influence intermediary and ultimate outcomes of this sequence. First, anti-establishment sentiment is presumed to have important spatial prerequisites: there needs to be sufficient demand and dealignment for such politics (Norris 2005). Then, related decisions regarding what type of group is to be formed (e.g. pressure group or faction) and whether the group decides to enter the intraparty or interparty arena, is in turn shaped by electoral system constraints such as high survival thresholds for entry and survival. Elites then decide to coopt or cooperate, depending on transactional costs imposed by electoral systems, such as cooptation if the threat posed by a new party is too high. The reaction of anti-establishment forces pertains to the decision to acquiesce to elite actors or continued contestation, which also determines the persistence or retreat of anti-establishment politics.

Cooptation is useful "when elites hope to prevent the emergence of mobilization of protests… when elites seek to free themselves from depending on the approval of allies… and when elites aim to eliminate overt resistance" (Holdo 2019b, 5). Preventative cooptation is used to undermine protest movements, and successful elite manipulation of issues (e.g. framing themselves as sufficiently grassroots to curtail anti-elite sentiment) can stifle group formation. Destructive cooptation, however, used to handle "overtly oppositional movements that seek to effect political changes that run counter to the elites' interests" incorporates these movements "to share responsibility for outcomes" and serves to delegitimise these movements by causing them to, in the eyes of their supporters, betray their own cause (Ibid. 6-7). While cooptation can be used in various ways, it ultimately seeks to remove constraints on the elites or eliminate

opposition without significant costs to themselves. However, cooperation is also a strategy that can be used to help elites "gain broader legitimacy by winning the approval of a movement's base" (Ibid. 12). For mainstream parties, one strategy may be forcing challenger parties to choose "between irrelevance in terms of office and irrelevance in terms of votes" (van Spanje 2011, 628).

The threat of entry remains a strategic consideration for parties regardless of whether it materializes. According to Kitschelt (2000), parties encounter electoral trade-offs where winning one new constituency can preclude holding onto an old one (similarly argued by Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Przeworski 1985); this trade-off for established parties creates an opportunity space for new entrants into the political arena, and internal structures and activists matter. An effective threat relies on the salience of a new appeal for electoral groups, the extent to which existing party alignments are disorganized by the trade-off, and electoral thresholds and barriers to entry (Kitschelt 2000, 170). There is an argument that established parties therefore seek to handicap challengers or incorporate them into a cartel (Katz and Mair 1996, 531). However, Kitschelt offers that party cartels are not necessarily effective against new entrants, and that the entry of new challengers cannot be understood purely through cooptation (2000, 173).

Accordingly, this thesis theorizes that the following causal sequence applies to political actors, with strategic options chosen depending on environmental constraints. First, anti-establishment actors, with a first-mover advantage (compared to institutionalized parties in new issue areas[3]), must choose whether to form a political party or faction and whether to enter the

[3] This is because organizational rules affect a party's strategic flexibility with respect to new competitive challenges, and organizational entrenchment can influence party responsiveness to new pressures (Kitschelt 1995).

intra or interparty arenas, with anti-establishment sentiment being a key condition for success or facilitating factor (Zulianello 2019). Second elites then react to this entry decision, and can choose to either coopt, cooperate, or reject anti-establishment actors or dispositioning, with anti-establishment actors then accepting or rejecting this positioning change. Payoffs vary according to electoral systems and whether a party is office-seeking or policy-driven (Laver and Schofield 1990). Policy-seeking parties strive to create public policy outputs close to their own preferred positions and deviation from this creates a cost for said politicians (Ibid. 49). The strategy adopted (i.e. coalition bargaining or ad hoc support in minority governments) may have different trade-offs for parties to consider. Ultimately, there are necessary spatial and electoral system preconditions for the crystallization of anti-establishment parties or the cooptation or institutionalization of such rhetoric by mainstream parties.

Agent conjectures, or what agents believe to be the objectives of others, are important as these can influence the entry of certain parties. For example, if party A, a vote maximiser, believes party B to be a policy-oriented party focused on influencing the policies of governing parties, then party A may shift its location in anticipation. Party B may also make the decision not to enter if party A shifts position, as doing so may siphon off votes and be counterproductive to its cause. Locational costs refer to the fact that, when established, a party cannot react to competition from new entrants by changing position without cost (Shepsle and Cohen 1990, 39). Anti-establishment parties are well poised to challenge dominant mainstream parties as they can mobilize new and salient policy issues or societal cleavages and employ anti-establishment rhetoric to undermine the appeal of established parties (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). They can more immediately respond to changing voter preferences in a way mainstream parties, which may have previously ‘cartelized’ and reached consensus in certain policy domains, cannot.

Effectively, the decision to join the electoral arena can serve as a threat to mainstream political parties as by leveraging salient policy issues, they can siphon votes away from establishment parties which cannot readily embrace anti-core or anti-system positions.

Accordingly, this thesis hypothesizes that majoritarian electoral systems, where disproportionality is high, are more likely to experience the capture or mainstreaming of anti-establishment rhetoric than countries with proportional systems because of the increased importance of electoral system incentives. Proportional electoral systems, with lower disproportionality, are more likely to experience the direct emergence, and general containment, of anti-establishment parties as spatial incentives become more important due to lower electoral system constraints. In other words, electoral system incentives are hypothesised to be more important for majoritarian democracies, whereas in proportional systems spatial incentives matter more. Without electoral system disproportionality as an exogenous constraint, parties can interact in a more naturally competitive way, and party systems can more dynamically react to changing conditions (e.g. small parties can exploit new opportunities such as new policy areas as they emerge, and support for parties is less entrenched and can more readily diminish). Fluctuations in public opinion are more readily reflected in such systems. However, in majoritarian electoral systems, costs of cooperation are higher as such systems turn electoral competition into a zero-sum game.

Why electoral systems matter for anti-establishment entry

In modern SMP electoral systems, voters select one candidate in a single constituency in which they are registered, and the candidate with the most votes wins irrespective of the percentage of the vote; even if a plurality win is narrow, it is “winner take all”. This electoral system means that votes for losing candidates and surplus votes for the winning candidate are

"wasted" as they cannot advance party results elsewhere, and as such there is not a predictable relationship between votes cast and seats won across a country (Mitchell 2005); it is possible for parties to win majority governments while losing the popular vote, depending on how well-distributed votes are across separate constituencies. Accordingly, SMP systems are characterized by single-party cabinets and disproportionality as the system is intended to reward larger parties and produce strong(er) majority governments (Curtice 2015). Nonetheless, it is possible for multi-party systems to thrive, even if seat totals are not proportional to the popular vote. In addition, SMP benefits polarization along regional and sectional lines and can exaggerate regional conflict (Cairns 1968). Notably, regional imbalances in development have driven Brexit (and subsequent British elections), the election of Donald Trump in the United States, and the electoral rise of the National Rally (formerly National Front) in France (Spicer 2018), which are three notable examples of *ostensibly* populist and anti-establishment politics.

It is expected that within majoritarian electoral systems such as SMP, the incentive structures tend to encourage the elite cooptation of anti-establishment policy and discourse. For the SMP system, this is because of the threat of vote-splitting between anti-establishment parties and their closest mainstream analogue, lowering the chances of either candidate winning. In single-member district systems, this can cost the mainstream party a significant number of seats compared to proportional systems where this impact would be more muted. Adopting anti-establishment discourse or parts of the challenger party's programmatic agenda is one way of mitigating the threat of vote-splitting; cooptation can be used as a tactic for mainstream parties to secure a foothold on a newly salient issue space or even as a means of downplaying or resisting new cleavages. Alternatively, anti-establishment actors may seek control of their mainstream counterparts as they might otherwise be marginalised, making the intraparty arena more

important for anti-establishment actors. Anti-core and relationally anti-system parties are theorised to be coopted in such systems as such tactics can help secure broader support for the mainstream party. However, it is also expected that second-order elections (e.g. local, or in the case of this thesis, supranational) can provide an electoral foothold for anti-establishment parties if there is less environmental hostility. Failing this, these elections can provide signals to actors prior to more salient electoral events.

In addition, majoritarian systems can inhibit political representation, and countries with stable, two-party dynamics, such as the United States and United Kingdom, can experience legitimation crises (Spicer 2018). As majoritarian systems can slow the development of new political forces into viable competitors and can create institutional inertia, majoritarian dynamics self-perpetuate until a crisis forces the adoption of new institutional rules. This thesis proposes that this is not necessarily the case, as the mainstream cooptation of anti-establishment programs and discourse can be used to guise the maintenance of the status quo.

In contrast with majoritarian electoral systems, proportional systems offer a different set of incentives. Proportional systems seek to minimise disparities between the popular vote and party representation in the legislature. Provided small parties receive enough votes to pass electoral thresholds, they are entitled to a proportional allocation of seats, though other proportional models use vote transferring to achieve greater proportionality than single-member systems. In proportional electoral systems, small parties can take greater advantage of electorate availability (van Kessel 2011) than in majoritarian systems. If there is mass dissatisfaction with establishment parties, it is easier for small parties to take advantage of the electorate's discontent, such as when there is a convergence between mainstream parties (Abedi 2002). Given the permissiveness of proportional systems, there is a lower barrier to entry for anti-core challengers

should they seek to form their own parties. An independent party, opposed to a faction within a larger party, may wield more influence and hold the balance of power. Acting outside mainstream parties, at least nominally, lends greater credibility to anti-establishment party claims that they are truly anti-establishment, which is undermined if they participate in coalition governments (van Spanje 2011). Likewise, a 'cordon sanitaire' may be applied as extensive cooperation with anti-establishment parties may be seen as a significant electoral liability for mainstream parties, especially if there are generally other potential coalition partners. Organizational rules directly affect strategic flexibility vis-à-vis new competitive challenges (Kitschelt 1994, 207). For instance, dominant coalition insider parties can be quickly displaced by new contenders, and strategic appeal is determined by the sentiment of party activists, in turn shaped by the political setting in which parties operate.

In addition, coalitions are less likely to form if they include anti-establishment parties than coalitions without such parties given less commitment to the maintenance of government (Martin and Stevenson 2001). Anti-establishment parties also tend to suffer greater "costs of governing", with establishment parties making gains after including such parties in coalitions (van Spanje 2011). There exists a "catch-22" where anti-establishment parties are unlikely to be included in government, and if they are, they are likely to be punished for participation.

Theorized relationship for anti-establishment entry

The proposed cooptation process, as illustrated in Figure 1, has two players, Party A (anti-establishment actor) and Party B (mainstream actor). A moves first, choosing to enter the electoral arena as a faction or a pressure group aiming to take over a mainstream party, be a distinct party, or choosing not to compete. This decision is motivated by factors such as environmental hostility and whether there is sufficient demand for a 'brand' of anti-

establishment politics (considered, at least in the initial stage, to be exogenous to the model). Party B then responds to this choice, though this response can be belated (i.e. elections or otherwise significant events can serve as important signals prior to strategies being selected). These responses boil down to legitimizing and cooperating with Party A (through incorporation or integration), cooptation of policies and or messaging, or not responding to Party A's challenge. The latter strategy is hypothesized to lead to gradual recession or replacement. Party A then decides whether to continue to compete, cooperate, or withdraw, with this decision being influenced by whether Party A is office-seeking or policy-driven. This process is expected to repeat until a new electoral equilibrium is met. Importantly, there are numerous signals exchanged by both parties, and the process of cooptation or cooperation can take place over several electoral cycles.

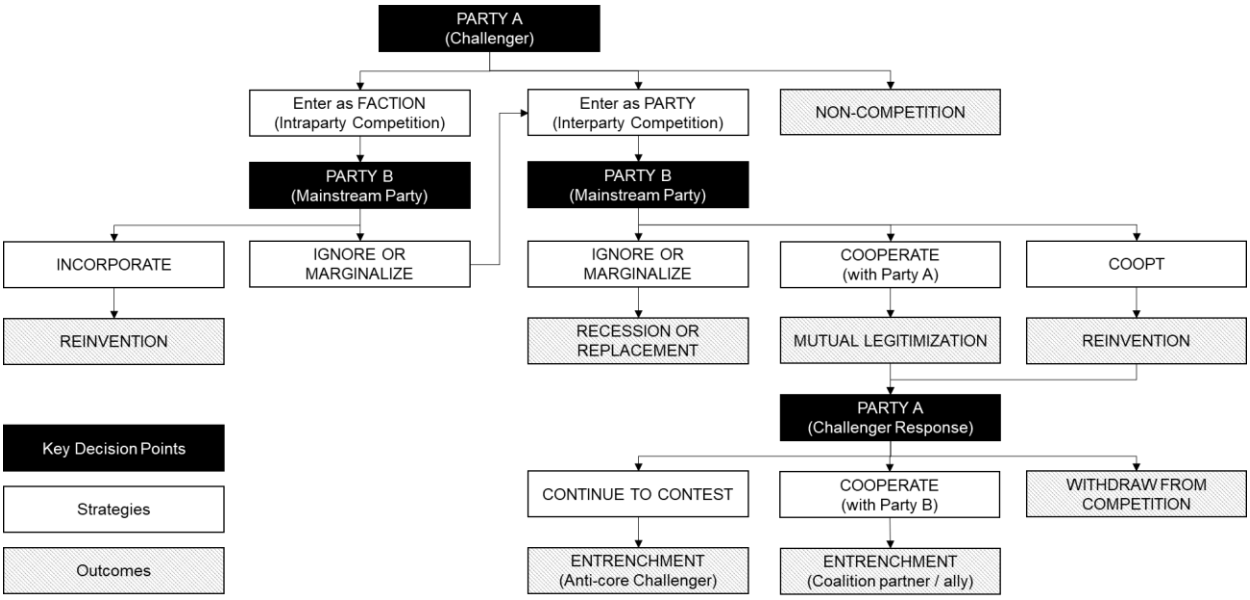
In this game, there are sources of certainty and uncertainty. Incomplete knowledge is assumed, as parties have no knowledge of the potential significance of elections in advance (i.e. the potential for an election to be dealigning, deviating, or critical [see Norris 2005]). In addition, Party A knows Party B's type (as an established mainstream party), but Party B does not necessarily know Party A's type, namely whether this challenger is a vote maximizing party or a policy-driven party seeking to satisfy party activists (Laver and Sergenti 2012). In addition, electoral payoffs remain uncertain. However, the players are expected to have an understanding of organizational and partisan incentives, such as how electoral systems influence the likelihood of certain strategies succeeding and their own strategic vulnerabilities, born out by public opinion research (e.g. the salience of policy issues). In other words, parties are expected to have a sense of what the demand is for certain policies and political styles, even if this understanding is incomplete. Ultimately, there are distinct spatial and electoral system incentives at play.

Importantly, the electoral system used, and its resulting disproportionality, is an influential variable at each of these decision points for both actors. Low entry thresholds encourage anti-establishment parties to enter the electoral arena as there is greater likelihood of gaining representation and less propensity for strategic voting to avoid "wasted" votes (Hopkin 2020). Low thresholds also encourage single-issue and policy-oriented parties, as there is less risk associated with adopting a more niche appeal. This also can encourage Party B to ignore or cooperate with challengers, as a sufficiently anti-core party may be safely ostracized (e.g. a neo-fascist party) or included if coalition formation is a socialized norm; this legitimization can also serve to undermine anti-establishment credentials and create a new stable equilibrium where previously anti-establishment actors become entrenched actors and reliable coalition partners.

In contrast, high disproportionality can lead Party A to first seek to influence Party B internally as electoral thresholds make entry a risky proposition. However, if policy demands are not met or if Party B's political style is antithetical to what Party A desires, then it can choose to enter the electoral arena instead, albeit more as a threat to Party B than as a serious challenge to gain seats. However, this is not absolute, as regionally concentrated parties can still be successful in this context (e.g. the Reform Party in Canada). If Party A "succeeds" and vote splitting costs (or is expected to cost) Party B seats, then they may be forced to coopt Party A, as cooperation is not expected to be successful in a disproportionate environment or may lead to de facto merger death or dissolution death (Bolleyer et al. 2019). Depending on whether Party A's goals are met or if they are undermined, they choose continued contention though the lack of parliamentary representation, which limits resources, puts pressure on Party A to withdraw as there is expected to be a cost of contention that is a disproportionate burden on smaller, anti-establishment parties.

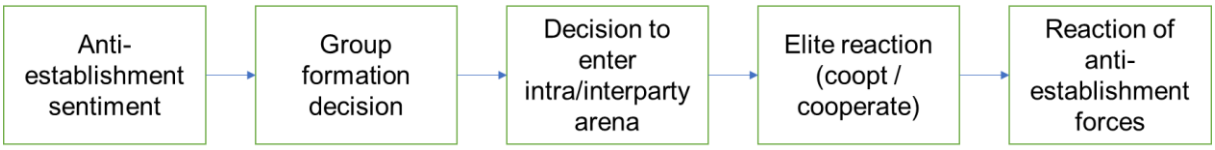
Ultimately, possible equilibria vary depending on the electoral demand and structural variables, with the structural variables being preeminent. If disproportionality is high, it is expected that A will generally choose to compete internally assuming sufficient “demand”. While less likely, if Party B is unresponsive to Party A and there is a credible threat of split votes, Party B coopting Party A is expected to result in a stable equilibrium by either satisfying Party A if it is a policy-oriented challenger or undermining them through destructive cooptation. As there is a greater propensity for strategic voting in disproportionate systems like SMP, the payoffs of cooptation are expected to be higher. In contrast, when disproportionality is low, A will either be successfully excluded (if demand is low) or become institutionalized within the party system. The latter can occur after mutual legitimization and inclusion, or if Party B maintains stable demand across multiple elections. Effectively, in proportional systems, the equilibria more naturally reflect electoral demand and whether this demand is appropriately met by existing parties, whereas in disproportionate systems the more important factor is whether there is a more credible electoral threat to the mainstream party; competition becomes more zero-sum in nature. The integration of electoral systems into the mutually assured autonomy game logic helps explain why cooptation does not occur more frequently despite its apparent rationality (Holdo 2019a, 458); when oligopolistic gains are possible for both Party A and Party B, mutual legitimization may be more beneficial, but this can only occur when payoffs (in terms of policy implementation or office attainment) are possible for both parties.

Figure 1: Theorized Anti-Establishment Entry and Consolidation Interactions



This theoretical framework is a simplification of many decision points that can occur over an extended period of time. It is intended to elucidate how electoral systems may influence the relationship between mainstream and anti-establishment parties. While it is a simple model that posits a fairly straightforward causal sequence (Figure 2), it aims to contribute a more nuanced understanding of entry dynamics in party systems.

Figure 2: Hypothesized macro-level causal sequence



Chapter 3: Analytical Approach

Methodology

This thesis uses a process-tracing and analytical narrative approach (Bennett and Checkel 2015, Bates et al. 1998; Beach and Pedersen 2013; Hall 2003) that captures the sequence of strategic interactions between establishment and anti-establishment actors to understand the influence the UK's single-member plurality electoral system had on anti-establishment capture and cooptation during the 2010s, which is considered an illustrative case for the purposes of this research. A theoretically-driven examination of histories behind outcomes allows for the testing of propositions derived from deductive theory formation (Hall 2003), and can support an elaboration and assessment of the validity of theories when the logic is extended to other events in the same category. Understanding critical junctures and decision points, and how structural (or macro-level or organizational) incentives underpin actor's decision-making (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010), allows for making causal inferences regarding the role electoral systems play in explaining why anti-establishment outcomes vary across different countries.

Analytic narratives typically are developed in three main steps: the use of narratives to elucidate the principal players, their preferences, the key decision points, possible choices, and the rules of the game; building a model of the sequence of interaction, including predicted outcomes; and the evaluation of the model through testable implications the model generates (Levi and Weingast 2016). It is a methodology that supports the identification of mechanisms and complements a process tracing approach. This thesis approaches this methodology differently, first by deriving a model based on existing theory and literature (see previous chapter) and then using a narrative to identify further refinements and considerations. While this research theorizes a relationship between two variables (electoral systems and anti-establishment

outcomes), the focus is on making descriptive inferences (King et al. 1994) and understanding mechanisms at play. This approach is taken to disaggregate abstract concepts (Gerring 2012), and to allow for a deeper description and theorization of interaction between distinct actors. As anti-establishment politics, and indeed populism, remain somewhat hazily defined, stronger descriptive inferences are an essential first step towards causal inferences (Barakso et al. 2013) and future analyses.

This thesis presents a theoretical framework based on the mutually assured autonomy game and associated strategies of cooperation or cooperation (Holdo 2019a; Holdo 2019b) along with relevant spatial modelling literature (e.g. Schofield 1993) and electoral systems literature explored and examined in the previous chapters. This theoretical framework presents an explanation of how anti-establishment and mainstream actors are theorized to respond to different incentive structures, with a greater emphasis placed on the SMP electoral system. Spatial models capture much of the political logic of party behaviour in strategic settings, and the Holdo model is informative in understanding the sequence of cooptation. The model theorized in the previous chapter presents key actors, their goals, different strategic options, and conditions that influence actor behaviour such as the expected utility and risk associated with different decisions. A graphic that summarizes high-level decisions and a sequential voting game was developed and theorized (Figure 1 and Figure 2), which will organize the case study to follow.

The second part of the analysis is a fine-grained case study narrative of the influence of anti-core, pro-Brexit parties (i.e. UKIP and the Brexit Party) on the mainstream British Conservative Party throughout the 2010s that tests this theoretical model and sequence. Through the review of secondary literature, a detailed narrative that elucidates the preferences of political actors, the constraints they face, and the interactions between mainstream and anti-establishment

actors including the strategies adopted will be articulated. Ultimately, process tracing and analytical narratives afford the possibility for multiple 'diagnostic' pieces of evidence within cases to be used to support or overturn hypotheses, though key attention needs to be paid to ensuring evidence is parsimonious to avoid a degree of freedom problem where it becomes impossible to establish a generalizable model (Bennett 2010). This framework contrasts between electoral system incentives and spatial incentives and highlights the interplay between the two.

While the process tracing and analytical narrative approach emphasises the key decisions of actors and key interaction points, each stage in the proposed causal process requires a somewhat different approach to evidence. With respect to the model holistically, recall that the electoral system, expressed through electoral disproportionality, would be the independent variable and the key dependent variable is anti-establishment politics (a set of process observations), which would be expressed through different outcomes (i.e. whether there is elite cooptation of anti-establishment policies and discourse, whether an anti-establishment party is entrenched in the political competition space).

Within the case, anti-establishment politics is represented through policies and discourse, identifying which actors are using anti-establishment positioning, and the key decisions and environmental context that led to that point. Each stage of the sequence requires different information and indicators for understanding anti-establishment politics. For example, measuring initial anti-establishment sentiment at the aggregate level (as a preceding condition for anti-establishment politics) requires the use of appropriate public opinion research to inform what the distribution of this sentiment is, along with an understanding of the historical and political context driving such public sentiment. However, assessing the strategic decisions taken by actors, and the political context surrounding such decisions, requires an assessment of historical

information. Given the exploratory scope of this thesis, secondary literature will predominantly be leveraged to this end.

While a relationship between electoral systems and the nature of anti-establishment politics (e.g. entry and cooptation) is hypothesized, the immediate features of electoral systems do not immediately lead to direct causal outcomes. Instead, there is a hypothesized process at work, and electoral systems are theorized to condition and influence the decision-making of political actors. As such, it is important to understand the underlying process and mechanisms that can support the theorized relationship. Because the research material and secondary literature is largely historical and qualitative, the process tracing and analytic narrative methodologies support both the data used and the model that has been theorized. As analytic narratives aim to draw applicable processes from specific historical examples, and often are based on models that centre on strategic choice (Bates et al. 1998), and because strategic interaction between mainstream and anti-establishment parties is assumed to be the key driver of ultimate outcomes, an analytic narrative approach is thus applicable to the research question.

Measuring what decision branch is taken requires various sources of evidence (for example, policies adopted from another party's manifesto / policy agenda and increasing similarity of discourse in manifestos to measure co-optation; the emergence of an explicitly distinct party rather than a pressure group indicating different forms of entry). This evidence is presented in a descriptive manner in support of descriptive inferences (King et al. 1994). Given that this is a single-case study, the focus is illustrating how the electoral system (IV) explains the specific choices of the Conservatives and UKIP/Brexit Party throughout the model. The end result of this research is a framework for further inquiry.

Case selection

To examine hypotheses on the influence of electoral systems on anti-establishment politics and the usefulness of the mutually assured autonomy game, this thesis examines the emergence and entrenchment of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), and later the Brexit Party, as an influential anti-core, anti-establishment political party and the cooptation of its anti-establishment positioning (nominally expressed through the Brexit issue) by the Conservative Party. UKIP has been characterised as populist and anti-establishment, and the Conservative Party, while evidently not an anti-establishment party, has programmatically and rhetorically converged to address defection to UKIP (Webb and Bale 2014). There is research that shows that, in some instances, UKIP presented a tangible threat to the Conservative Party and worked to shift the Conservatives' positioning on Brexit (Goodwin and Milazzo 2016; Clarke et al. 2017; Alexandre-Collier 2018). However, some studies downplay the real electoral threat posed by UKIP, and argue that changes in the Conservative Party's Brexit stance are instead a return to earlier Eurosceptic traditions enabled by changes in party leadership (Bale 2018). Given the United Kingdom's SMP electoral system, this is therefore a good case study for testing the hypothesis and there is a clear pattern of anti-establishment entry and interaction between mainstream forces and anti-establishment actors. *Prima facie*, this period of time demonstrates anti-establishment adaptation from an existing party, though arguably UKIP and the Brexit Party became entrenched at the supranational level in the European Parliament. This case is chosen because it is an illustrative case, suitable for hypothesis formation and theory development, where there is a clear interaction between a mainstream party seeking to contain an anti-establishment party, and while the goal of this research is to demonstrate the plausibility of a

causal sequence of these interactions, it can also be tested in further research to assess whether the model is generalizable.

While this thesis will focus on the 2015, 2017, and 2019 UK general elections and relevant contexts (e.g. the 2010 general election), European Parliament elections are also discussed. As second-order elections, there is greater propensity for protest voting at the expense of big parties than first-order elections. However, it is possible that protest voting in second-order elections socialises voting for smaller parties in national elections (Dinas and Riera 2018). As members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected through regional-list proportional representation, an interesting systemic contrast can be made between electoral system permissiveness in these elections which may provide a strong foothold for anti-establishment actors, which in turn becomes a strategic consideration for mainstream parties to take into account when competing in the 'primary' electoral arena. Given a relative paucity of campaign literature, secondary research is primarily used in this regard. The Brexit referendum is also addressed; as a pure voting event in which SMP has no direct consequence, there is no interaction between ideal points and territorial politics in which seats are won. Nonetheless, it is key to the historical narrative of how electoral systems and spatial factors intersect.

Ultimately, this detailed case study helps fill a gap in existing literature. A "deeper understanding of the reasons behind the success and failure of [anti-establishment] parties makes it necessary to examine more closely the modes of interaction between establishment parties and their challengers" (Abedi 2004, 142), and a detailed case study supports the theorization of this relationship and underlying dynamics. This thesis seeks to understand whether the hypothesised causal mechanism and sequence is valid, which can set the basis for further inquiry and generalisation in different contexts. Where there is a trade-off between internal validity and

external validity, process tracing affords a more detailed historical explanation of an individual case (Morgan 2016; Hall 2013). Reconstructing the chain of events, that led from initial causes (i.e. electoral systems) to outcomes can elucidate a deeper understanding of causal mechanisms, which is beneficial when developing broader hypotheses.

Chapter 4: The UK Conservative Party and Anti-Establishment Challengers in the 2010s

The United Kingdom between 2010 and 2019 presents a compelling case of anti-establishment cooptation, along with the societal, political, and economic conditions that created the 'demand' for anti-establishment politics. This section will explore strategic interactions between the Conversative Party, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), and the Brexit Party during this timeframe, using a case study informed by secondary literature. This chapter is organized as follows: first, it provides a general overview of the British electoral context. It then turns to a discussion of the context of British politics that led to anti-establishment entry, followed by mutual legitimization between the Conservative Party and its anti-establishment challengers. It concludes with the cooptation of anti-establishment positioning following the referendum, leading to the present day.

In the time period focused on to the time of writing (2010-2021), the UK House of Commons has 650 geographic constituencies, the vast majority being located in England (533 as of 2019). Seats are won by individuals who win the most votes in their given constituency, irrespective of whether a majority is won. A stated benefit of the SMP electoral system in the British context is that it enables voters to choose directly between alternative single-party governments; typically, the "winning" party wins has a distributed enough vote that it is able to secure more plurality wins, leading to an effective "governing bonus" (Curtice 2015). The exaggerated results under SMP primarily work if one of the two large parties is treated more favourably than the other, which in turn requires a relatively large number of marginal seats that are competitive between the two mainstream parties (Ibid. 26-27). Moreover, due to the mechanical and psychological effects of SMP previously discussed in this thesis, third parties tend to be disadvantaged. Nonetheless, the UK maintains a dynamic multiparty system and third

parties have still managed to secure stable parliamentary representation, such as the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party – the latter of which benefits from a geographically concentrated voter base. Smaller parties can also exert influence on the two main parties of government by targeting votes in key marginal seats, even if this does not result in material gains in terms of parliamentary representation.

The UK's electoral system is known for generating fairly disproportionate outcomes, and parties have been able to win majorities in Parliament with fairly slim pluralities. For example, Labour won 335 seats with 35.2% of the popular vote in 2005, and in 2015 the Conservatives won 330 with 36.9% of the popular vote. In 2010 and 2015, the Gallagher index score was 15.13 and 15.02 respectively, indicating very disproportional results,[4] and in 2019 the result was 11.8 (Gallagher 2021). The 2017 result was more proportional (6.47), in part explained by strong electoral performances from both the Conservative Party and Labour Party and a temporary return to a two-party dynamic, before a return to more disproportionate results in 2019 (Garland et al. 2020; Dunleavy 2019). Mechanically, smaller parties with more dispersed voting support, such as the Liberal Democrats or UKIP, have traditionally been severely underrepresented if not outright shut out from Parliament in the case of the latter. Nonetheless, as the case of the United Kingdom shows, because a solid proportion of the British electorate do not actively support Labour or the Conservatives, this bloc of voters, and its fluctuating size, represents both a serious risk and opportunity for the two main parties.

[4] The least squares index measures disproportionality between vote distribution and seat distribution. The lower the score, the more proportional an election result is.

The context of British politics before 2010: creating anti-establishment demand

By the late 1990s, it was clear that British politics had cartelized, and that both the Conservative Party and Labour Party had shifted more to the political right in response to broad macroeconomic changes and changes in party organization (Blyth and Katz 2005). In particular, the Labour Party had adopted an overtly pro-European stance and shifted away from traditional working-class constituencies; rather than orienting political competition along a class cleavage, managerial competence and downsizing policy expectations came to be the political norm. Ultimately, there has been a shift from parties in the UK acting as "[vote] maximizing competitors" to "risk averse colluders" in an environment characterized by the acceptance of the tenets of globalization and implied reduced policy efficacy of parties (Ibid. 40). At least for a period of time, no party had an incentive to leave this equilibrium, as parties were shielded from severe electoral losses (or minimized costs of defeat) if policy expectations are played down in the electorate, especially in the context of class dealignment.

While Labour pursued a catch-all strategy in an attempt to tap swing voters, this had significant longer-term effects such as changing the composition of the party's support base and driving out voters further away from the political centre (Karreth et al. 2013). This positioning contributed to an environment of partisan dealignment, where new voters were less loyal to the party, and previously aligned individuals are more likely to abstain or voter for another party. Consistent with social democratic policies across Europe, there was enduring damage to the party in the long run. Practically, this dealignment opened up a section of the electorate more willing to vote for alternatives than in the past. For the UKIP, the former Labour heartland was seen as a prospective target; between Eurosceptic attitudes, and concerns about immigration and

identity (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015, 9), UKIP was seen as a viable challenger party attuned to the political conditions of the North as well.

Ultimately, the growth of UKIP across working class England is multifaceted. While Ford and Goodwin (2016) argued that UKIP's growth was driven by disillusioned working-class voters, Mellon and Evans (2016) countered that class dealignment took place long before UKIP emerged as a relevant political player; this is also corroborated by Widfeldt and Brandenburg (2017). In tandem with less partisan identification, the Labour Party became increasingly dependent on two irreconcilable constituencies: the pro-European, cosmopolitan, and upwardly mobile middle class and the traditional working class, which is less favourable to the EU and to immigration (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, 239).

In particular, British immigration policy in the 2000s, in particular opening the UK's borders to EU accession countries, played a large role in priming anti-establishment sentiment (Evans and Mellon 2019). While Labour was initially more ambivalent towards the European Economic Community (EEC), it became more pro-European as it adopted its "New Labour" posture. As the free movement of people is a fundamental principle of the EU, a "thermostatic" response (where policy can change in response to public opinion 'signals') to restricting immigration levels in line with public opinion was no longer possible (Ibid. 77). An incorrect assessment of immigration flows, combined with many immigrants intending to work in Germany (which implemented more transitional controls) choosing the United Kingdom instead (Dustmann et al., 2003) primed both Euroscepticism and anti-immigrant sentiment. While the Conservative Party initially benefited from defecting Labour voters in 2010 (Evans and Chzhen, 2013), this initial boon would not persist through the early 2010s.

At the same time, the Conversative Party under David Cameron's leadership was also undergoing immense change and modernization in a context of stagnant electoral support among its traditional middle class base (Ashcroft 2005). After the 2010 general election, the Conservative Party formed a coalition government with the liberal, pro-European Liberal Democrats, while also presenting a more modern and socially liberal form of conservatism (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015, 21). In particular, there was greater rhetorical emphasis on "tackling climate change, alleviating poverty, delivering overseas aid, legalizing same-sex marriage, celebrating Britain's rising ethnic diversity, and bringing more women and ethnic minorities into politics (Ibid. 22), much to the chagrin of the traditional social conservative base and Cameron's radical right flank. David Cameron's attempt to modernize the Conservative Party arguably alienated a sizable chunk of grassroots support, albeit temporarily (Webb et al. 2017, 440). Willingness to consider voting for alternative parties can reflect indecision, temporary dissatisfaction, and a desire for a change in party leadership. In particular, while the Conservative-led coalition government promised controls on immigration, the UKIP was able to capitalize on this issue as the coalition proved unable to control EU immigration (Evans and Mellon 2019, 81).

Ultimately, anti-establishment and populist politics can be understood as a reaction to the growth of a neoliberalised "cartel" system (Hopkin and Blyth 2019). As mainstream parties became less distinct from another and parties became more disentangled from their constituents and civil society (Katz and Mair 1995), voters became dealigned from traditional partisan affiliations. It is understandable why there was greater electorate availability for anti-establishment politics in the UK, especially as dissatisfaction with established parties or

"politics-as-usual" grew.[5] Ultimately, broader changes in the British political environment, including changes in the political and the rhetorical positioning of both the Labour and Conservative parties, help explain the increasing relevance of the UKIP in the early 2010s, even if the threat was felt unevenly between the two mainstream parties.

Similar to the dynamic proposed by Norris (2004) as discussed earlier, it is clear how Cameron's heterogenous positioning was shaped by the SMP electoral system used in the UK, which then became a strategic vulnerability for the party. While a broad centripetal appeal helped secure a plurality of seats and 36% of the popular vote in the 2010 general election, it did not secure an outright majority government. Even if entry conditions were still largely unfavourable for smaller right-wing parties, the failure to secure a majority meant that there would be an increased dependence on other parties and need to broaden the party's appeal (though the direction of this appeal was not yet evident).

Founded in 1993, UKIP has largely maintained a consistent narrative that the interests of ordinary people have been "progressively subverted by a cartel of unresponsive cultural, economic and political elites" (Clarke et al. 2017, 112). As part of this narrative, self-serving elites across the mainstream political parties willingly ceded national sovereignty to the EU, creating a democratic deficit and perceived "loss of control" over policymaking in an increasingly globalized world. Pareschi and Albertini (2016) argue that various types of populism, namely political, ethnic, and regionalist, are present within UKIP's discourse, expressed through appeals against the political class and for popular sovereignty, in addition to

[5] For example, major party decline (in percentage of vote share) and less citizen participation in party activity (Katz and Mair 1995; Katz and Mair 2018).

presenting the EU as a dangerous other combined with anti-immigration rhetoric and policy positions. In terms of parliamentary representation, UKIP was a largely peripheral force, never securing more than 2.2% of the popular vote prior to the 2010 general election. However, in European Parliament elections, due to their regional list proportional representation electoral system and the second-order nature of European Parliament elections (see Dinas and Riera 2018), UKIP was able to secure steady representation in the UK's delegation, ranging from 7% of the popular vote (and three seats) in 1999 to 17% (and 13 seats) in 2009. Similar to the role of regional assemblies serving as a safety valve that can make it more likely for smaller parties to win some political representation (Farrell 2011), the European Parliament elections (and to a lesser extent local elections) served this function.

Clarke et al. (2017) emphasize the role of relative deprivation (Runciman 1966), a situation where there is a large gap between citizen expectations and what they actually experience. A large gap, exacerbated by perceived government inaction or unresponsiveness on salient issues, can create and facilitate political beliefs and perceptions that "government does not work for ordinary people", that "minorities receive special treatment" from the government, or that politicians are increasingly distant from the demands of their constituents (Ibid. 116). In articulating this sense of relative deprivation, UKIP, as an insurgent party, was able to leverage both electoral successes in second order elections and the resulting increasing publicity (Murphy and Devine 2018), leading to expanding public support. In addition, the use of identity politics and ability to ostensibly voice the fears of an anxious electorate (Crines and Heppell 2017) helped solidify UKIP's position as a credible anti-establishment challenger. Importantly, UKIP is more than just a single-issue Eurosceptic party (Ford and Goodwin 2014a; Ford and Goodwin 2014b); while it was able to leverage Euroscepticism and immigration as wedge issues in

securing its “niche”, it was also able to leverage dissatisfaction with Westminster to gradually secure support from voters who felt “left behind”, namely older, working-class white voters and social conservatives increasingly at odds with mainstream public opinion.

Ultimately, in the opening stages of the theorized anti-establishment entry and consolidation game, the decisions of UKIP are difficult to assess; while a largely peripheral party until 2010, it secured an electoral foothold in the European parliament and was able to take advantage of anti-immigrant sentiment and latent Euroscepticism in some constituencies of both the Conservative Party and Labour Party. There was a clear electorate demand for an anti-establishment party such as UKIP caused by the cartelization of the mainstream parties along a neoliberal and pro-EU consensus. However, there were significant institutional and psychological factors impeding UKIP’s entry into the political scene (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015). The electoral dynamics of SMP require strong, geographically concentrated support to win seats (i.e. plurality wins in multiple constituencies), and a broad geographic distribution can prove counterproductive unlike in proportional electoral systems. Second, the psychological effects of ‘non-permissive’ electoral systems (see Duverger 1954) mean that electors, who may be sympathetic, are less likely to vote for a party that is unlikely to win.

Moreover, there was an inherent tension in UKIP at this critical threshold between 2004 and 2009, as there was a difference in vision between the party membership who wanted to maintain the party’s anti-establishment character, and policy-seeking goals, and office-seeking goals (Abedi and Lundberg 2009). In the early stages of an anti-establishment party’s lifecycle, developing and communicating a distinct identity message, alongside emphasising intraparty democracy, are at the forefront, before vote-seeking goals become prioritized as the party membership (and machinery) grows (Ibid. 78-79). At this critical juncture, UKIP had a choice

between fully competing with the Conservative Party and serving as direct electoral threat versus functioning like more of a pressure group influencing Conservative policy (Ibid. 85). Following 2009, UKIP was in a strong position to influence the political mainstream; Conservative gains from adopting a more centrist approach could hypothetically be cancelled out by voters shifting towards UKIP, and voters who tactically voted Conservative to keep Labour out of office would need to be appeased (Hayton 2010).

2010-2016: From major anti-establishment entry to mutual legitimization

After the 2009 European Parliament election and the 2010 general election, UKIP emerged as a more relevant and credible player on the British political scene. According to Clarke et al. (2017), UKIP voting intentions trended upwards leading into the 2014 European Parliament elections and 2015 general election, reaching 15% support in public opinion research prior to 2014, three times the vote intention prior to 2010. Importantly, this support was volatile in nature, indicating uncertainty when many voters looked at, and considered, UKIP's message and platform (Ibid. 119). This also coincides with greater media coverage of the party and more publicity, driving increasing, albeit soft, support for the party (Murphy and Devine 2018).

From Cremonesi and Salvati's (2019) textual analysis of 'populist' leader speeches in the 2014 European Parliament election, a clear pro/anti-integration cleavage was emphasized by Farage at this time, along with a clear emphasis on British identity and an anti-elite stance specifically leveraged against the EU and domestic politicians perceived as being under its control. UKIP's core political message was "fundamentally Eurosceptic" and contained populist and anti-establishment rhetoric primarily with respect to the "valorization of the national community" (Ibid. 33). This is consistent with the valorization of "the people" and protest populism characterized by conflict between a common citizenry and ruling elites under a

representative system that limits the former's power, and an identitarian populism that emphasises the threat of a foreign "other". It is evident that at this point in time, UKIP presented itself as a strong anti-establishment challenge in contrast with the mainstream British parties.

There is evidence to suggest that this presentation was successful. In the May 2014 European Parliament election, UKIP finished as the strongest party for the British delegation for the first time, receiving 27.5% of the vote and the most seats (in part due to the proportional nature of European elections). In 2013, survey results indicated that 30% of Conservative Party members would "seriously consider" voting for UKIP, though ultimately the proportion of Conservative members who voted for UKIP in the 2015 general election ended up being 5% (Webb et al. 2017). While, unsurprisingly, party members overwhelmingly voted for the party to which they belong in a first-order election, the consideration and soft support presented a serious strategic challenge for the Conservative Party leading into the 2015 general election given the risk UKIP's growth could pose to Conservative electoral chances.

At this stage in the cooptation game, it is clear that UKIP had entered the electoral arena with clear policy-seeking goals and the intent to challenge the political establishment, namely with respect to the exit of the UK from the European Union and with intent to act more strongly on issues such as immigration. While there remained a strong Eurosceptic contingent in the Conservative Party, until now, this faction was unable on its own terms to influence the overall position of the government, which remained soft Eurosceptic (especially given the influence of the pro-European Liberal Democrats in the coalition government). Following the 2014 European election and leading into the 2015 general election, the Conservatives had to choose between three main strategies: ignore the threat, cooperate with UKIP, or coopt their discourse and policies. However, this process is not as clean as the theorized game would imply. While initially

there was a degree of cooperation (or rather, appeasement), this strategy would eventually give way to a more substantial reinvention of the party along hard Euroscepticism lines over the course of multiple electoral cycles.

An important consideration is not necessarily the precise percentage that UKIP won or took away from the Conservative Party, but rather the uncertainty and the perceived threat of vote splitting for more tenuous supporters, leaners, or unaffiliated voters. While members still by-and-large vote for the party they belong to, it is still a strategic imperative for parties to maintain membership levels (Webb et al. 2017) as even minor swings, caused by both losses in support and increasing support for other parties, could result in substantial seat losses. In addition, Clarke et al. found evidence that party competition between the Conservative Party and UKIP was more acute than for other parties, with sizable negative correlations between trends in support in monthly surveys conducted between 2010 and 2015 (2017, 142-3). Polls showing a steady base of support for UKIP, a slight lead for Labour, in tandem with some party defections, made it appear less likely that the Conservative government would be able to maintain power (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015, 152). Leading into the 2015 general election, the Conservative Party would need to choose how to respond to this threat.

The 2015 election in many ways represented a more serious foray into the first-order election, with UKIP attempting to play with typical SMP strategies by targeting seats in the right constituencies and allocating resources accordingly (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015, 271-2). Although the target-seat strategy spread the party too thin and failed to deliver seats, it helped drive the overall vote and in target seats the party achieved 24% of the popular vote on average (Ibid. 275). Importantly, the results helped drive the narrative that UKIP was becoming a more serious contender, capable of increasing support, owning issues such as immigration and Europe,

and setting a baseline for future elections. David Cameron was able to secure a narrow majority victory in the 2015 election, winning 330 seats and 37% of the popular vote. While Nigel Farage did not win a seat, UKIP managed to win 12.6% of the popular vote and one seat (Clacton), representing a 9.5% increase from 2010, and came in second in 120 constituencies. The 2015 election was characterized by a fall in the amount of marginal Labour-Conservative seats (from a high of 27.3% in 1964 to a low of 13.1% in 2015), indicating that there was less of a uniform judgement on the main two parties (Curtice 2015, 28-29). While support for Labour and the Conservative parties narrowly increased, swings were primarily explained by the collapse of the Liberal Democrats (-15.1%, with Conservatives winning 27 seats previously held by them) and the rise of the SNP in Scotland. While UKIP made historic inroads, their vote was fairly evenly spread and not sufficiently concentrated to win many seats (Ibid. 34). However, UKIP also made gains where Labour had a strong majority, indicating a "reshuffling" of the opposition, whereas in marginal seats, Conservative losses were more modest (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015, 279-280). For seats held by the Conservative Party, Labour tended to experience vote share losses in favour of UKIP, with this being more pronounced in safer Conservative seats.

The lead-up, and aftermath, of the 2015 general election is characterized by a degree of mutual legitimization between the Conservative Party and UKIP. While UKIP did not breakthrough in terms of the amount of seats won, their evenly spread vote share in England represented a strategic threat for the Conservative Party; the Conservatives only won a small majority of 12 seats, and a UKIP that could take away Conservative votes in marginal seats could result in the Labour Party winning more seats. Of the 120 seats where UKIP had a second-place finish, 76 were won by the Conservative Party and 44 were held by Labour (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015, 277). Importantly, 34 of these were Northern constituencies that were part of

Labour's "Red Wall", highlighting Labour's potential vulnerability as well as the Conservatives'. Importantly, this indicates that, in understanding (more meaningful) anti-establishment entry into a political system, the sum of interactions with other parties needs to be considered, rather than interactions between a challenger and the most proximate mainstream party.

As theorized in an earlier paper, UKIP served as a "safety valve" where disaffected members of the Conservative Party could go to, in a sense allowing both parties to exist symbiotically (Abedi and Lundberg 2009, 85). For Widfeldt and Brandenburg (2017), UKIP established itself as a "bridging position" between the extreme right (e.g. the British National Party) and the more mainstream, Eurosceptic Conservative voters. In particular, it attracted typical Conservative voters who were more culturally conservative, concerned about immigration and the European Union, and dissatisfied with David Cameron at this point in time (Webb and Bale 2014). Increasingly, Brexit identities were found to be prevalent, personally salient, and cut across traditional party lines, with many voters explicitly identifying as either leavers or remainers, which was more widespread than partisan identities (Hobolt et al. 2020).

In an effort to move past party infighting, to mitigate against the threat of UKIP, and to address public concerns regarding the relationship between the UK and EU, the Conservative Party increasingly embraced soft Eurosceptic messaging which emphasized the need for reforming the EU, and that Britain's continued membership would be contingent on this. David Cameron attempted to win over voters by first negotiating the terms of EU membership, in the interest of carving out a more favourable deal. In fact, polling indicated that a plurality would vote for remain only if major concessions were won by the Conservative government (Clarke et al. 2017, 230-231). These proposed reforms touched on disparate policy domains, including

economic liberalization and deregulation, national sovereignty, and immigration. Ultimately, concessions were won in all areas (e.g. exemptions from further integration, veto powers for national governments) though Cameron's requests for an exemption from freedom of movement provisions and restricting benefits and social housing for EU migrants were not met (Clarke et al. 2017, 23-24). Importantly though, these moves did not represent a full cooptation of UKIP's position, but rather a legitimization of it that also legitimized and increased the salience of Brexit, while empowering UKIP as an agent for change. Notably, such cooperation can create opportunities for elites to strengthen their standing and political legitimacy among people with some shared goals (e.g. economic liberalization in this case), making it possible to advance a political agenda that may not have otherwise been tenable (Holdo 2019a, 454).

On February 20, 2016, a referendum on the UK's continued membership in the EU was called for June 23. The failure to obtain key reforms and sharply reduce the level of immigration had given more legitimacy to (and ammunition for) UKIP and pro-Brexit advocacy groups, such as Vote Leave and Leave.EU, that presented a narrative that leaving the EU was the only way to control immigration (Clarke et al. 2017, 28-29). Notably, the Conservative party was divided on this issue, with David Cameron campaigning to remain and future prime minister Boris Johnston aligning himself with the Vote Leave apparatus. Though the Labour Party officially supported the Remain campaign, it was clear that there was a disjunct between parliamentarians and the party's support base; this underlying conflict would continue to hound this party in addition to the Conservatives. However, leading into the referendum, Evans and Mellon (2016) found that 45% of Conservative supporters, in 2016, had UKIP as a second preference, in contrast with only 19% of Labour supporters, with far fewer UKIP supporters being likely to have voted Labour

than Conservative. As such, it is clear that UKIP continued to pose more of an electoral threat to the Conservatives than to Labour, at least at that point in time.

Ultimately, 51.9% of those casting ballots voted to leave the EU, with 53.4% voting to leave in England and 52.5% in Wales (compared to only 44.2% in Northern Ireland and 38% in Scotland). Three quarters of constituencies held by the Conservative Party had over 50% support for leave, though 66% of Labour-held constituencies similarly voted for leave (Clarke et al. 2017, 150). Constituency-level findings also indicated that 63.4% of constituencies would have voted leave, with this being more significantly more pronounced in England (Ibid. 152). Survey research indicated that both immigration and economic dimensions played a significant role in explaining the leave vote, with those optimistic about the economy (and Britain's role in the world) if the country were to leave the EU, and those who believed the UK would be better able to control immigration and counter terrorist threats, more likely to vote for leave (Ibid. 161-163). While explaining the outcome of Brexit is outside the scope of this research, it is notable that the result contravened normal expectations regarding a "status quo" bias (LeDuc 2003), in part explained by the inability of the mainstream parties to stake out clear positions on Brexit in contrast with smaller parties (Clarke et al. 2017) resulting in an asymmetric information environment where risks and threats from the EU were "priced-in" to the national debate on EU membership whereas pro-EU frames were less emphasized (Goodwin et al. 2020). Notably, challenger parties seize on opportunities provided by mainstream party decisions (Kitschelt 1995), and in this case the governing party played a significant role in "providing the catalyst for a dramatic surge in immigration concern" (Evans and Mellon 2019, 84).

Through the introduction of a non-geographically based voting event, UKIP and factions of the Conservative Party became key cooperators. Over the course of the 2010s, immigration

and Brexit became more cross-cutting policy dimensions, and the salience of these issues increased short term support for the UKIP and favourable conditions for a radical right party to flourish (Evans and Mellon 2019). If anything, the Brexit referendum and higher-than-expected leave vote, with higher turnout than normal general elections, indicates that while support for UKIP was still fairly low (12.6% in 2015), their potential ceiling could be much higher should issue ownership not be contested by other parties. Notably, this provided a clear strategic imperative and policy signal to the Conservative Party going into a more uncertain future.

2016 and beyond: cooptation, consolidation, and entrenchment

Initially invigorated by dissatisfaction with the coalition government, expressed through its anti-EU, anti-immigration message, UKIP was able to portray itself as "the real opposition", and Brexit presented the party a core opportunity to champion Brexiteers (Clarke et al. 2016). However, both potential outcomes ultimately presented significant strategic issues. If a 'remain' verdict was decisive, Europe could be taken off the agenda, and the party could find itself in a position of irrelevance (Ibid. 151), though a leave vote would also incentivize mainstream parties to place greater emphasis and policy attention on the issue. While the party enjoyed a degree of legitimation during the referendum period, the Eurosceptic faction of the Conservative Party was also able to benefit. Legitimacy and recognition function as structural constraints that are interpreted and mediated through elite-movement interaction, and can assist both parties in achieving their expected results and represent their interests (Holdo 2019a). Tacit recognition and cooperation enabled UKIP to achieve its core policy goal and helped secure the Conservative Party's Eurosceptic flank as the salience of this issue dimension increased.

Parties have an incentive to take up extreme positions to achieve policy differentiation and issue ownership, and parties are more likely to emphasize extreme positions if they are

comparatively small, the position is distinct from other parties, and other parties fail to emphasize the issue (Wagner 2011). In contrast to Downsian expectations, it is not uncommon for parties to emphasize extreme positions, and the variance in the extent to which this is done can be explained by strategic vote-maximizing incentives in the context of policy differentiation and issue ownership (Ibid. 82). After the Brexit vote, David Cameron quickly resigned, resulting in a leadership contest and an opportunity for the party to reinvent itself. Conversely, while there was an attempt to oust Jeremy Corbyn for perceived weakness in the Brexit campaign, this leadership challenge was ultimately unsuccessful.

Ultimately, the Conservative Party reinvented itself on increasingly more Eurosceptic lines. With the 2017 election, UKIP faltered. Between a sharp decline in popular support, and the new prime minister Theresa May pursuing a harder Brexit, UKIP's platform and key policy goal was successfully coopted by the mainstream Conservative Party, with politics being ostensibly reoriented to a cultural, versus a redistributive axis (Evans and Mellon 2019). The 2017 election signaled a return, however ephemeral, to two-party politics, with the Conservatives securing 42.4% of the vote and Labour securing 40.0%, with the latter's increase depriving Theresa May of a majority government. UKIP's vote share collapsed from 12.6% to a meagre 1.8%, and this decline was strongly associated with the increase in the Conservative's vote share (Whiteley et al. 2018). The party suffered because, notwithstanding internal and leadership issues, the party had effectively achieved its core policy goal, and many former supporters moved back to other parties (Ibid. 95). In 2017, Theresa May outlined her government's priorities for the Brexit negotiations, such as an end to membership in the single market and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, leaving the customs union, regaining independence in international trade negotiations, and reasserting control over borders and immigration policy. This move,

towards an unambiguously hard Brexit, likely legitimized the new government. Moreover, on the cultural dimension, the Conservative Party also shifted away from a more socially liberal outlook under David Cameron (Ibid. 95-96).

Despite this increased issue ownership over Brexit, the 2017 election was a middling result for the Conservatives. While they increased their share of the popular vote quite considerably, they lost 13 seats and their majority. With Brexit a certainty, if not the specific form it would take, austerity and the economy increased in salience, with a clear shift leftwards in the overall "policy mood" on issues such as welfare, public services, and inequality, benefiting the Labour Party (Bartle 2018). While the election was called to increase the government's majority to reduce uncertainty regarding Brexit negotiations and legislation, the result ultimately frustrated matters further, as Labour's more ambivalent approach to Brexit in favour of other domestic issues maintained the more traditional base while also attracting socially liberal remain voters now shunned from the Conservative Party (Kavanagh 2018).

Alexandre-Collier (2018) argues that the evolution of the Conservative Party towards overt Euroscepticism happened gradually. Between the 2015 general election and 2016, UKIP presented a looming threat given shared voters and issues. Party leadership initially aimed to ignore the threat and comparatively few MPs changed their positions on Brexit. However, as UKIP's influence dwindled after 2016, more MPs "radicalized their positions in line with their leadership's instructions, including remainers who chose to endorse the government's move towards a hard Brexit" (Ibid. 215). This new positioning, and cooptation of UKIP's agenda, was generalized and largely elite-driven. This change took place after the 2015 election, where the threat from UKIP was most acute.

Importantly, this does raise important questions regarding whether this was a true cooptation of UKIP, or instead a return to deeply ingrained Euroscepticism and traditionalism before Cameron's leadership embodied by the new prime minister (Ibid. 216). In a sense, UKIP's indirect influence enabled Conservative Eurosceptics to push their agenda, first creating the conditions for a referendum to take place, and later gaining control of the party's broader agenda (Sobelewska and Ford 2020). At this stage in the game, UKIP withdrew as an effective anti-establishment force. While the party would continue to exist in a rump state, it lost its footing even in local elections.

Despite the new cooptation of UKIP's agenda, the consolidation of support took more time to manifest. Throughout Brexit negotiations, there were numerous setbacks and failures of the May government to pass core pieces of Brexit legislation. There were even periods in the summer of 2019 where both the Liberal Democrats and newly-formed Brexit Party led polls with narrow pluralities (Sobelewska and Ford 2020, 325). Despite the deadlock in negotiations (i.e. the Chequers Plan) with the EU and failing to secure a Commons majority for her deal three times, the Labour opposition was unable to maintain their support in leave voting areas; Brexit ambiguity ended up slashing support for the party in their traditional Northern heartland, which had largely voted leave in the referendum (Ibid. 285). Eventually, May resigned and the leadership of the Conservative Party was won by Boris Johnston, promising a more combative and uncompromising approach. Another early election was called when his accelerated schedule for debating the Bill was rejected by MPs (Ibid. 293), this time with the Conservatives winning 43.6% of the popular vote and 365 seats – a convincing majority. Support among leave voters rose from 45% in 2015 to 72% in 2019, and support among remain voters plummeted to 18% (Ibid. 295). While the new Brexit Party, formed in late 2019 and headed by Farage, was able to

win a plurality of seats in the preceding European Parliament election, it only secured 2% of the vote in the general election. As the Conservative Party was able to consolidate the leave vote, the remain vote splintered across Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and SNP.

The decision to serve as a pressure group or political safety valve ultimately cannot work well in a SMP electoral system; political competition becomes a zero-sum game where gains for UKIP came at (largely) the expense of the Conservative Party, with a possibility of limited payoffs for both parties, meaning that mutual legitimization, while beneficial in the short-run, becomes harmful in the long-run. Unlike what was theorized in the model, proportional representation does not just enable political competition to electorally interact in a more naturally competitive way in a manner more responsive to public opinion, but also in a way that enables a broader selection of political strategies. The Conservative Party ultimately had limited options; support for both the UKIP and Brexit Party was strongest where support for the Conservative Party was also strong, increasing risk to the Conservatives (Ibid. 320). Speaking speculatively, should UKIP or the Brexit Party have had more time to establish themselves as viable alternatives, it is possible that a crisis of confidence in the traditional party could have led to a longer-standing collapse in support, if not outright replacement given the psychological mechanisms of the SMP electoral system. This cooptation and adaption reflect the political reality of a factionalized, big-tent party. In contrast with the expectation of hitherto external anti-establishment or populist forces taking the reins of the larger party machine in a hostile environment (Self and Hicken 2016), a faction, emboldened by external pressures, was instead able to exert more influence, enabled by party leadership interested in the interest of pursuing a competitive advantage. As Brexit becomes the new normal, it will be key to examine the extent

to which the cultural / internationalist-nationalist cleavage persists, and how agile the party will be in adapting to new threats or challengers.

Conclusion

Assessing the British case against the theorized model

The case of UKIP and the Conservative Party clearly demonstrates the impact electoral systems have on anti-establishment entry and partisan competition. Social movements can affect elite legitimacy both negatively, by calling attention to decisions and actions that the public may respond negatively to, and positively by cooperating and engaging with elites (Holdo 2019b). Through this cooperation, both elites and movements are able to advance their strategic interests, allowing the pursuit of new goals. While not a social movement in the traditional sense, UKIP, and later the Brexit Party, acted as an external pressure group and was able to influence the political agenda through much of the 2010s. For a point, namely during the referendum period, there was a degree of conditional cooperation, where both parties gained strategic advantages (office-seeking for the Conservatives, and policy-seeking for UKIP). However, this mutual legitimization and autonomy eventually gave way to cooptation as the dynamics of SMP meant that, continued, long-term entrenchment of the anti-establishment force could result in failure for both parties, both in achieving office and enacting policy. A potential example to explore would be interaction between the Reform Party and Progressive Conservative Party, as the continued persistence of both led to continued electoral (and presumably policy) disappointments in the 1990s and early 2000s.

It is also clear that, rather than there being a critical election where progress is sustained, 2015 represented a deviating election where the anti-establishment party made progress before regression to more "normal" outcomes (see Norris 2005). Gradual dealignment throughout the 2000s and 2010s created the opportunity space for UKIP, though it is also clear that the demand for anti-establishment politics (or, perhaps more likely radical right politics) was both

longstanding in British politics (Ford et al. 2011) and also present within factions of the Conservative Party. The process of "reinvention" along more ardently Eurosceptic lines did take place over several electoral cycles, which can be explained both by evolving public support for Brexit and the threat posed by UKIP.

As expected, parties interacted in a dynamic and sequential manner. The "game" did not end with UKIP responding to the Conservative Party's strategy, but rather there were continuous interactions over the course of several election cycles, and both parties adapted strategies in light of situational circumstances. For instance, UKIP and its predecessor existed for several years, gaining relevance towards the end of the 2000s. For much of this time, the threat of entry was largely ignored, perhaps due to a Downsian belief that Brexit hard-liners would support the most proximate mainstream option on that issue dimension. As the topics of Europe and immigration increased in salience, primed by both parties, it became clear that the anti-establishment alternative "owned" these issues at the expense of the mainstream option. A large surge in support for UKIP in the 2015 election necessitated a strategic rethink, initially an attempt at mutual legitimization and appeasement through a referendum that was expected to fail. However, when it succeeded, the Conservatives more full-heartedly coopted the UKIP policy agenda. There was less room for UKIP, or its de facto successor, to exploit, and the Conservative Party effectively reinvented itself as the party of Brexit. Through the institutional incentives presented by the SMP electoral system, it is unlikely that mutual legitimization could persist indefinitely, or that the mainstream party would be outright replaced by the insurgent, barring a major crisis in confidence. Interestingly, despite destructive cooptation primarily being understood as a method by which elites convince movement leaders to change their positions without anything in return (Gamson 1975, Holdo 2019b), the opposite appears to have taken place, whereby the elite

party changed its positions to hinder the insurgent party. This is consistent with an argument from van Spanje and de Graaf (2018), where parties can successfully reduce support for other parties by "parroting" the core policy issue if other parties are sufficiently ostracized from mainstream politics and government formation.

Discussion and future avenues for research

The proposed sequence of interaction between anti-establishment actors and mainstream parties is ultimately a simplification of the nuanced and gradual ways that parties interact. Party competition is dynamic and sequential, and there are numerous organizational, partisan, historical, and demographic elements that can influence overall party systems and relationships. Moreover, it is possible that such a model can apply to any challenger party, regardless of how anti-establishment they are perceived to be, and that there can also be effects between parties that are non-proximate (see van Spanje 2010). Nonetheless, it is evident that electoral systems influenced the strategic options that would have the best situational payoffs and risks stemming from the more meaningful political entry of an anti-establishment party. It explains why a mainstream political party adopted the policy agenda and rhetorical positioning of an anti-establishment challenger to serve its own ends, rather than "ignoring" the threat (insofar that any political or electoral system can allow this) and maintaining its own distinct agenda. From the mechanism identified, future research can further examine specific steps in greater detail to support stronger causal inferences. It may be possible to break down causal process observations into more granular intervening variables.

Textual analysis is another avenue that could supplement descriptive inference and can indicate the cooptation of political discourse over time. Methodologies, such as the use of topic-based agreement to demonstrate levels of agreement and disagreement with respect to different

policy areas (Menini et al. 2017) could serve as useful approaches. Manifestoes, party leader speeches, and other campaign artefacts could be informative units of analysis for such a study.[6] A sophisticated textual analysis can potentially allow for a strong causal assessment, albeit with a narrower focus (e.g. specifically on language or discourse adoption/cooptation).

Focusing on a single case helped illustrate the usefulness of the mutually assured autonomy game and explain how SMP factored into the strategies available to different parties. However, only examining one case does not allow for a systematic assessment on how *different* types of electoral system used influence anti-establishment emergence. In this regard, expanding the analysis to additional cases with various electoral systems would determine the generalizability of the theorized cooptation sequence. There are numerous other elements that can be explored and refined, with a view to keeping the model parsimonious. These include:

- The heterogeneity of mainstream parties. Mainstream parties were assumed to be discrete entities in terms of overall decision-making, though the case of the UK indicates that a large factionalized party will have constituent parts that respond to new challengers differently.
- The influence of multi-level elections as "signals" for parties preceding first-order elections, as it is possible for sub-national, local, or supranational elections to provide bulwark for less-established parties, especially if such elections are prone to protest voting.

[6] Textual analysis was initially considered for this project, but the analysis of granular discourse adoption ultimately was beyond the scope of this research. In addition, developing a strong methodology for reliably coding and classifying manifestoes (Mikhaylov et al. 2012) would require a separate research agenda. Convergence, and policy cooptation were ultimately considered to be well covered by the secondary literature.

- Differentiating different levels of entry into a political system. As the case of UKIP demonstrates, minor parties can exist for a long time before becoming relevant challengers to mainstream parties. At what point do such parties become threats to their mainstream counterparts?
- Considering variation depending on ideological orientation and institutional context. Is the willingness to incorporate and adopt challenger party positions conditioned by ideology, and do constraints, such as the role of money and investment within a political system (Ferguson 1995), influence the risk involved with co-opting certain challengers?
- Considering other dominant strategies and understanding strategies in a more dynamic manner. As illustrated by the case, party strategies are fluid and evolve over time, and in response to numerous inputs beyond elections and voting events.

One limitation is that the case examined does not directly link electoral system incentives to strategic choices made by both parties; actions are instead linked to incentives in a post hoc manner. To accomplish this, elite-level interviews could be leveraged to understand the degree to which electoral systems versus partisan incentives motivated party leadership, and the evolution of party strategy over time. Establishing electoral systems as the primary motivator of actor decision-making would lend additional credence to the hypothesis that such systems condition the emergence and manifestation of anti-establishment politics, and would provide a strong basis for causal inference in a model that emphasizes strategic decision-making as a key, micro-level mechanism.

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