"The centre must hold"
Partisan dealignment and the rise of the minor party at

Dissertation submitted to the Department of Media and Communications,

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to the continuing likelihood of hung parliaments (Curtice, 2015b, Clarke, 2016), and points towards a greater role for minor parties in future coalition governments.

The consequences of the fragmentation of political support for the major parties have already had a significant impact. In the aftermath of the general election, the Liberal Democrats began to reimagine its purpose as part of a progressive center-left alliance as the party was crushed after supporting the Conservatives in coalition (Cowburn, 2016). In September 2015, Labour party members turned their backs decisively on the New Labour era by rejecting a group of centrist leadership candidates in favour of Jeremy Corbyn, a back-bench rebel and veteran socialist, who secured a landslide victory despite having support of only a handful of his parliamentary colleagues. Since Corbyn's election, Labour has been riven by infighting, with

their original party (also see Harrop, 1987), or formed a lasting attachment to their new party. They found the most likely cause of a break in partisanship was a shift in the political climate, usually when voters entered the electorate, for example during a

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common amongst groups who feel economically insecure (McLaren and Johnson, 2007, Fox et al., 2012, Ford et al., 2012b). And rather than experiencing a weakening of national identity theorised by 'individualisation', studies show that between 1996 and 2011 there was an increase in the proportion of people who describe themselves as English and Scottish rather than British (Ormston, 2012, Curtice, 2013a).

Social identity theory can offer a theoretical framework to understand individuals desire to affirm their national and regional identities in this way. Defined as 'part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group' (Tajfel, 1974: 69), prejudice can stem from a desire to achieve or maintain a distinct or positive social identity (Sears, 1993). Beck's (2001) research on identity offers further insight, arguing that the speed of change in the globalised era could lead to some groups reconnecting with their national and ethnic identities, while Ignatieff (1993) concluded that globalisation has brought a resurgence of ethnic nationalism, leading citizens who feel they lack welfaTc 2r uun

Position issues are areas where the electorate may have differing opinions, such as levels of taxation, environmentalism or levels of immigration (Butler, 1974, Alt et al., 1976). On this reading, the defection of voters from the Conservative party to UKIP

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Having discussed the relevant literature to understand partisan dealignment and the rising support for the minor parties, this section defines the conceptual framework that guides this study.

Drawing from Evans and Tilley (2012), this research posits that ideological convergence of the major parties has marginalised a growing section of the electorate, as political choices are largely defined by post-

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democratic system (Habermas, 1992) and providing original perspectives as they reflect on their own lives, values, and changing social circumstances.

This dissertation therefore aims to answer the following research question:

Having outlined this work's theoretical underpinnings, the coming pages now progress to how this study plans to answer this question.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to provide rich insights into the political views of a defined group

rise in their popular vote share in 2015 (parliament.uk, 2016). Equally, the parties which dominate Northern Irish politics, Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party, were not included, as their stable

recorded to enable secondary analysis (Heritage, 1984); the average duration of focus group interviews was 47m:32s; the average duration for each individual interview was 27m:42s.

Conducting the analysis

I personally transcribed all the data immediately after each focus group and interview. Interviews were listened to multiple-times to ensure accuracy (Rubin, 2012), with the analysis guided by my conceptual framework and research question.

This is followed by a brief section of critical self-analysis, and the conclusions of this study.

appeal, using adjectives like 'strong', 'confident', 'impressive' to describe her. This contrasts with negative descriptions of Labour's leader at the 2015 general election, Ed Miliband, such as 'weak', 'useless' and 'pathetic'. As these

support. In allowing the political agenda to be defined by their political opponents in this way, and failing to make the case for investment in public services, many Green party voters felt

For many UKIP voters, immigration and the effect it has had on their community was the main political consideration, towering above all other positional issues and consuming much of the discussion within focus groups and interviews. As this study will show, UKIP voters framed most political issues through their hostility towards rising immigration levels and cultural diversity, supporting quantitative studies of the party's voters that have found these issues are often their primary political concern (Ford and Goodwin, 2014a).

Catch-all elite

Across all voter groups, the major parties were criticised by voters for perceived ideological convergence. As these voters from each minor party show, the policies of the major parties left them both dissatisfied with their agenda and unable to distinguish between the parties.

> UKIP R4: "Some of the big parties are just too scared to talk about things, because they're too down the middle... They try to please everyone, but ultimately, they just please no one apart from themselves."

s (Heath et al., 2001)

who are the originators and owners of this   model

(Prince, 2016),

d victory to become party leader, suggest that a majority

agenda

also

Green R1: "When I am on the tube I pick up the Evening Standard and put on my full propaganda filter to see what they're saying."

Green R6:

While they expressed deep unhappiness with the electoral system, these Green voters viewed their support as an important step to secure greater influence within national politics and apply pressure on the major parties to reform the democratic system, reflecting the blackmail role minor parties can have within the wider political system (Sartori, 1976).

> Green R2: "I think you have to show you are gaining support for other people to give you support, so for the Greens to keep increasing their vote share… But it's only when smaller parties are getting 10 or 20% of the vote that the p1 ( ) - (1) 0 ( )eas-53 (i) 432 (i) 3 (n) -3 (g

As these responses from UKIP and SNP voters show, there was often homogeneity in the language used to discuss regional and national identity, as voters spoke of how Scottish citizens or Romford's residents deserved to be prioritised by the government. SNP voters defined Scottish citizen's needs against England, while UKIP voters defined themselves against non-British immigrants— occasionally using mildly xenophobic terms to describe this group. While who exactly "Scottish" and "local" people are was often left undefined during the

political party, and viewed their political allegiance as a broader representation of their environmental values and civic objectives (Norris, 2002).

If the values of Green party voters can be understood as an extension of international solidarities, UKIP voters viewed their support of the party as a means to express their opposition to the forces of globalisation that have brought migration and multiculturalism. This

Sources: (Edinburgh.gov, 2013, Hackney.gov, 2013, Havering, 2014, London.gov, 2016).

UKIP R4: "The changes I have seen in last seven or eight years in Romford, it's just a mass of

SNP R3: "I feel like it's just a bit unfair, this divide is getting bigger and bigger and people are feeling hard done by. I kind of feel like I want, not a socialist government, but just a government that would come in and help everyone."

Multi-party identification

The vast majority of voters interviewed appeared to be happy with their decision to support a minor party in 2015, indicating partisan stability in the sense that they were likely to vote for the party again at the next general election. But in terms of the minor parties longer-term prospects, a number of Green party and SNP voters expressed residual loyalty to Labour or the Liberal Democrats, and could foresee circumstances when they would vote for these parties in future elections.

SNP R4: "I'm not a militant SNP supporter by any means. I could definitely be tempted back to Labour."

Green R8: "I think the Corbyn-effect has tempted a few people back. I'm waiting to see if it's a long-term shift in the party."

Green R2: "I still consider myself to be a supporter of the people who are trying to do good in the Liberal Democrats."

values; the failure of major parties' voter-maximisation strategies to include all voters; heightened feelings of global, local or national identity in the globalised era; and, a fundamental change in the voter's external environment.

SNP voters were mobilised by feelings of major party complacency, positive appraisals of the SNP on valence issues, alongside the heightened salience of Scottish identity following the independence referendum. For Green party voters, motivation came from a long-standing ideological commitment to global environmental challenges, and the perceived failure of Labour and the Liberal Democrats to defend public services, reinforcing the view that both parties were unsure about their values. And for UKIP's voters, a sense of collective failure by the major parties to address their concerns about immigration levels, and a perception of indifference about how this issue had affected their local community and quality of life, were central factors.

The majoritarian political system has proved resilient throughout much of the post-war period, but increased levels of immigration, the global financial crisis, and an independence referendum have been the catalyst for voters to turn their backs on the parties many had supported throughout their lives. Many of the voters that featured in this study were already reporting frustration with a democratic system that denies their party direct representation in government, and a media which they feel excludes their agenda.

The electoral instability in Britain is mirrored by the rise of extremists in many advanced

multi-party reality of 21st century Britain. To adapt a phrase and end this study with a reflection on how it began,

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

APPENDIX 2: CONSTITUENCY INFORMATION

Romford and Gidea Park

The Romford and Gidea Park constituency is situated approximately 14.1 miles east of central London. The population of the constituency is 70,953 (Commission, 2016), it

General election 2015 result: Hackney North and Stoke Newington		
Party	%	±
Labour	62.9	7.9
Conservative	14.7	0.2
Green	14.6	10
Liberal Democrat	5	-18.9
UKIP	2.2	2.2

Source: (parliament.uk, 2016)

Edinburgh North and Leith

Edinburgh North and Leith is situated approximately 2.0 miles north of central Edinburgh. The population in the constituency is 91,958 (NRS, 2014), and it is 91.7% white British (Edinburgh.gov, 2013) making it the third most diverse city in Scotland. The constituency was represented in parliament by Labour since its creation in 1997 to 2015, when the SNP won the seat (edinburgh.gov, 2016).

General Election 2015 result: Edinburgh North and Leith		
Party	%	±
SNP	40.9	31.3
Labour	31.3	-6.2
Conservative	16.2	1.3
Scottish Green	5.4	3.2
Liberal Democrat	4.5	-29.3

Source: (parliament.uk, 2016)

Respondent (R)	Former party	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation

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