

## **To what extent was the 2017 general Election a realigning election?**

This paper focuses on the subject of political realignments. This theory has been used to analyse the extent to which large scale change has occurred within the electorate and political system. There has been much debate amongst academics and political commentators regarding the 2017 general election, questioning if it was just a short blip back to a two-party system, or if some more extensive and fundamental change has occurred amongst the electorate. There is also disagreement surrounding the question if the possible change within the electorate will continue to shape the party system. As this debate is relatively new, little literature has been published on analysing the possibility that the last general election was a realigning election. Moreover, there has been much less of a statistical focus regarding researching the extent to which realignment occurred in the last election. On top of this, the theory of realignments within Britain has not been explored since the 1997 election, over two decades ago, creating the possibility a political realignment may have occurred since this date. This has produced a gap in this research area, which given the current political debate warrants further research. This paper aims to replicate past measurements, definitions and identified causal processes to see if historical theories of realignment can be applied to today's election data and give an indication the extent to which realignment has, or has not, occurred. Finally, it will allow for greater analysis of how the party system and the electorate may have changed in recent times, potentially giving greater understanding to how both political parties and the electorate may shape the political system in the near future. The concept of realignment will be measured based upon the three categories the book 'Critical Elections' provided. This covers tests on the rise of new issues, broader sociological changes and changes within the electorate. This paper uses data from MARPOR, Chapel Hill, the British Election Study (BES), 2005- 2017, and newly released data on party membership data from Professors P. Webb and T. Bale from the ESRC Party Members Project (PMP).

**Abbreviations & data used:** British election study (BES), Party Members Project (PMP), Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), Chapel Hill (CH) and Essex Continuous Monitoring dataset (ECM).

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction & Literature Review:**

### **Area of study:**

This paper's subject is the political science field of psephology. Within this field, this paper focuses on the concept of political realignment. The literature of political realignment broadly covers the concept that democracies can go through large scale change, which alters the basis of party competition (Denver, Carman and Johns 2012). This theory outlines a process of how politics permanently changes within a country, which in turn explains how countries change (Dalton *et al.* 1984). The process broadly envisages a situation where traditional voting patterns start to break down as loyalties decline, and political dealignment starts to grow. Once political dealignment is complete, democracies then go through a period of destabilisation where voters depart from their historic voting behaviour, which often produces surprise and close election results (Bartle and Allen 2011). This stage is known as a period of volatility. Traditionally in UK politics this has resulted in coalitions and hung parliaments, with governments struggling to survive and implement policy (Denver and Garnett 2014). Realignment then occurs when one party secures a majority with its new base, subsequently forcing other parties to change their strategy, thereby changing the political system.

### **Literature Review.**

Before this paper fully defines political realignment, it is helpful to understand how the current definition has formed.

Historically political realignment was thought of a sociological process that has been created separately from political party development, and electoral behaviour. One of the first theories published on this subject was Lipset's theory of political cleavages (Lipset 1967). This theory builds upon Downs' theory of a

left/right political spectrum and insists voters can re-position themselves within multiple dimensions, also known as political cleavages (Downs 1957). This, in theory, can only occur on important issues that cut across the political divide (Mair 1997). This is because later research discovered that consistent positions, needed to alter long term behaviour, only tend to occur on peoples most important issues (Zaller 1992). As these issues cut across the left/right political divide spatial models can be altered to add a line going down the middle, thus creating four quadrants, meaning multi-dimensional politics develops (Stokes 1963). These new issues usually arise outside the political arena and are developed by significant socio-economic shifts, which political parties then latch onto, which then impacts how voters should cast their ballots (Webb 2000). This theory fits in well with UK political history, which has been guided by sociological divides. Firstly, there was the divide of the protectionist landowning class and free trade liberal economics (Lipset 1967). This resulted in the collapse of the Tory party and the dominance of the Liberal parties. Secondly, with the emergence of trade unions, wider enfranchisement and the social consequences of industrialisation, socialism and the class divide emerged, which replaced the Liberal Party and the old religious divides (Cook 1975). Finally, this class divide existed until the emergence of Thatcherism, when politics was realigned around a consensus surrounding global economics. This was associated with economic competence, taxation, public spending and public service provision (Miller 1990). This theory, therefore, can summarise political change in British political history but was criticised for a lack of focus on how electorates change behaviour.

Later developments altered the theory to focus more on electoral behaviour as political science developed as a discipline. As political science developed, so did the methodologies available. Consequently, more statistical methods began to influence a greater number of universities research (Adcock and Bevir 2005). With the creation of the British Election Study (BES), along with the American NES survey (Campbell 1964), research became more focused around electoral changes that analysed individual-level data, rather than substantial sociological changes. Research using these datasets developed work revealing how values started to

change in individuals who became more socially mobile (Inglehart 1970). From this, supporting evidence emerged showing that in the USA and the UK a generation who benefited from rising prosperity began to have different values to their parents (Inglehart 1985; Nie and Verba 1976; Butler 1963). One differing value was the growing emphasis on quality of life factors, such as freedom, both in terms of civil rights and economic freedoms (Nie and Verba 1976 Särilvik and Crewe 1974). As the post-war consensus began to break down due to economic stagnation, parties found it harder to rely on electoral bases the previous generation had given them. For example, in the UK children who had benefitted from increased wealth and opportunities, which their parents did not have when growing up, grew more distant from their parents in support for the post-war consensus. For instance, levels for trade unions differed between generations (Särilvik and Crewe 1983; Butler and Stokes 1974).

Consequently, when significant economic troubles developed in the late 1970s, this new generation of former left-leaning voters was less aligned to Labour and the unions, and some drifted towards Thatcher and the Conservatives (Evans 1993). The consequence of such social change was a political change of dealignment, causing left parties to move to the centre to become electorally competitive (Clarke 2004). Finally, there is a great deal of supporting evidence of a generational shift in values across many different countries, suggesting that value shifts cause political change across democracies with different party systems and democratic institutions, broadly known as Post-Materialism theory (Inglehart 1997).

These theories were later supplanted by Valence theories, which historically have shown how the class divide had weakened and large scale electoral change was a result of voter's assessing parties' competence (Whiteley *et al.* 2013). This theory suggests that now voters are broadly agreed that Thatcher's economic reforms were needed to establish what everyone wants: a good economy, money for public services and a society that generates more opportunities. People were simply divided about how to deliver these services best (Clarke 2009). As a result, new

realignments would not develop as a consensus had been achieved because the party system had become fixed around these centre ground debates.

Each of these theories has its merits; yet all seem to suffer limitations in explaining how parties influence the electorate, and consequently, have an impact on making political realignments possible. For example, some academics understand large-scale political change as occurring through a change within the party system. This is because, even if the electorate has realigned, a realignment cannot take place without parties supplying choices that enable voters to register their division (Wolinetz 2009). Without this choice, votes are split across political parties in a way that does not register social divisions, and therefore realignment cannot ever occur as supply does not meet demand. Therefore, researchers subsequently attempted to create a theory that could encompass enough factors that could adequately measure the concept of political realignment to include party political change, as well as sociological and electoral change.

Consequently, all the theories above were combined in the book 'Critical Elections', which brought together academics spanning across different political science disciplines to analyse the extent the 1997 general election was a realigning election (Evans and Norris 1999). For instance, Professor Budge analysed parties manifesto content exploring the possibility that parties positions had dramatically changed, highlighting the potential of extensive party system change (Budge 1999). Professor Webb analysed party membership ideological changes, to gauge how intra-party democracy may be changing, and if this would likely cause a change in the party system (Webb 1999). Professor Curtice analysed changes in regional voting patterns, while Dr G. Evans researched class trends to investigate the potential of wider social realignments occurring (Curtice 1999; Evans and Norris 1999). Finally, other academics such as Dr P. Norris and Dr Mark Franklin focused on earlier theories emphasising the importance of new issues, which create the emergence of new cleavage divides that can create realignments (Franklin 1999; Evans and Norris 1999). This analysis focused on exploring how much new issues such as Europe and constitutional issues affected voting behaviour. Therefore, this book covered all three main theories: patterns of party competition, sociological

changes and new issue cleavage divides, thus creating a broader and more detailed analytical framework. This definition has been accepted within political science as a sound theoretical framework to test the extent to which an election has caused a realignment, and consequently the theory has not changed since. This theory found that there were too many tests that the 1997 election failed to meet within the three categories explored. As a result, it was concluded New Labour was a continuation of the consensus Thatcher created in the 80s, meaning realignment had not occurred.

### **This paper's definition:**

#### New Issues Alignments:

This paper will define new issues as outside that of economics and public service provision. This is because the last alignment that oversaw the breakdown of class-based politics places heavy emphasis as the most important issues being that of economic competence and public service provision (Clarke *et al.* 2011). Therefore, a new issue that can cause a realignment away from this consensus is most likely not to be thought of solely as an economic issue, even if it has economic origins. Moreover, this issue will need to cross left/right dividing lines to generate enough cross-party appeal to force a breakdown of traditional voting behaviour. It is suggested such an issue could be immigration (Goodwin 2018).

#### Sociological Alignments:

Sociological realignments are defined as clear and distinct social divisions displaying a divergence of opinions. Moreover, these social divides need to have been altered, or replaced with, new social divides for a realignment to be possible (Miller 1991). Previous sociological divisions have been religious divides, regional divides and economic class divides (Field 1997; Pattie and Johnston 2005; Robertson 1984). The last realignment occurred in the late 1970s where it has been

argued a consensus formed around centre-ground politics, open markets, economic competence and public service provision (Clarke 2004). Therefore, for a realignment to have emerged, it is likely that the old left/right economic competence and public service provision divides to have faded and new social divides to have emerged over new vital issues. New social divides might be one of Social Liberalism against Social Conservatism (Goodhart 2017). Consequently, it would be expected to see social groupings views change from one of division to greater uniformity on economic questions, while on the other hand witnessing wider gaps between different social groupings on questions surrounding topics of immigration and the EU.

#### Changed Party competition:

This paper takes the pre-2017 general election definition of the UK's party system as one of alternating patterns of pre-dominance (Quinn 2013). As a result, for a realignment to have materialised, there must be potential for the UK party system to have diverged from this party system type. Alternating predominance suggests two individual parties must have strong governing potential, in the form of a single party government. Typically one governing party is much stronger than the other for three elections in a row, with the other party dominating in the next cycle of government formation (Mair 1997). Crucially, there are not future patterns of government formation data available, meaning the paper must highlight if the current system strays from predominance characteristics and identify the potential these changes will continue. In order to do this, it must also assess if parties have grown in distance from each other, testing if party competition has become more polarised, which could indicate the emergence of Scandinavian bloc trends. This would also test if the party system may becoming more centrifugal than centripetal, all indicating a more comprehensive party system change (Sartori 1990).

In order to confirm a realignment has occurred, there must be evidence supporting wide-scale political change as defined by the above three definitions of political realignment.

## **Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework:**

This paper theorises that a realignment has occurred through sizeable social-economic change, which is a consequence of the last realignment, where both sides accepted global economics. This acceptance of neoliberal fiscal policies led to long term social changes (Goodwin and Denninson 2015). The most notable change is the decline in the proportion of the working class in western democracies (Tilley and Evans 2017). This has meant that this social grouping's political leverage has declined, and parties, consequently, have a reduced incentive to base the majority of their manifesto around these groupings demands. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that mainstream party manifestoes represent these groups preferences as a percentage of their manifesto content (Tilley and Evans 2017).

Moreover, globalisation may have created further social developments where some social groups have become economically more insecure (Oesch 2008). This level of insecurity might have led to increased concerns over immigration (Citrin *et al.* 1997). On top of this, there is evidence that increased economic openness, leading to higher migration numbers can suppress wage growth capabilities for the economically insecure groups most concerned with immigration (Dustmann, Frattini and Preston 2013). Meanwhile, while globalisation has potentially left these declining social groups more economically insecure, it has given more opportunities to others. One such group is younger graduates, who on average can expect to see higher wages, more secure work and better job opportunities than other groupings (Jarvis 2018). Therefore, there is a cohort change effect where some social groupings have declined in numbers, causing a loss of influence, while other groups have experienced quite the opposite trend. As a result, groups



disadvantaged by these changes witness a great deal of social and economic change, which they feel unable have a say over (Goodwin and Milazzo 2017).

With this, individuals who have socially more conservative views tend to feel politically powerless and consequently feel that their preferences are threatened. These groups are broadly known as the left behind groups and tend to have similar predispositions on issues like immigration because of the social changes described above (Zaller 1992; Goodwin 2018). On the other hand, groups that have benefitted from this position tend to be more supportive of the consequences of the global economic system which has dominated British society since the 1980s (Goodwin and Denninson 2015). Therefore, society has developed two distinct sets of social groupings that are more predisposed to have directly opposite positions, creating a divergence in values that cut across traditional left/right divides (Achterberg and Houtman 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2005). These values then became infused into British political discourse as new issues rose up the agenda, primarily immigration after new countries joined the EU and became eligible for access to freedom of movement, creating a widespread expectation that parties should tackle the immigration issue.

While this development occurred mainstream party positioning remained focused around centre-ground party competition structures, characteristically fighting battles around economic competence and policy, meaning new issues were left under-represented (H. D. Clarke *et al.* 2016; Laver 2001). The Effect was that voters became disillusioned with the mainstream parties and looked for third and blackmail parties to fill the vacated space (Meguid 2005). This is broadly known as Niche Party theory, where third parties and radical right parties gain traction due to a highly compact centre that mostly focuses only economic matters, leaving space for new parties to make inroads on non-economic issues (Ezrow 2008). As these parties continued to grow in influence this, in part, led to a referendum being called, and consequently Brexit. Brexit represents more than just an individual's views on Europe, but rather much more fundamental value

divides (Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley 2017), where voters were forced to change allegiances in the 2017 General election (Forsth 2017). Voters felt compelled to re-evaluate their positions as the Brexit event forced parties to address the issue as it quickly became the number one issue in British politics. The Conservatives backed a harder form of Brexit, with Labour offering a softer more middle ground option, in order to appeal to both, Remain and Leave voters. This development led to a change in historical voting patterns as voters were forced to choose between two competing visions of a Brexit deal that would shape Britain in one particular image over another. As some voters' traditional party took an opposite policy to their preferred Brexit outcome, this caused some individuals to vote for the other mainstream party. Consequently, creating voting patterns that went against past political behaviour.

Moreover, former UKIP voters felt the party was no longer relevant as their one flagship policy objective had been achieved (Cutts, Goodwin and Milazzo 2017). Along with this, the Lib-Dem's strategy as an anti-Conservative party was damaged by the coalition (Quinn, Bara and Bartle 2011), meaning people who had traditionally aligned with third parties now looked for one of the mainstream parties, again forcing a clear choice. This follows the logic of Duverger's law where people knew they were voting for a governing party and therefore had to choose which governing party's version of Brexit they wanted (Duverger 1959). Brexit represented different preferences involving multiple issues to economic openness, immigration to how to manage local industries. Brexit, therefore, created a new cleavage covering a range of policy issues that appeal to social grouping predispositions. This new cleavage can broadly be described as a Social Liberalism versus Social Conservatism divide. This divide then went into the election of 2017 and caused political stalemate, consequently altering the party system. It continues to shape party positioning and electoral behaviour, therefore representing the potential for long term change and a full realignment.

**So what: why do this study?**

This paper seeks to add to the current literature by combining theories into a multi-dimensional model, where parties and voters' positions are mapped on a four-quadrant multi-dimensional model. This paper will seek to test if party's movement, and voters movement, within this model bears any relation, both in terms of correlation and regression analysis. It will also seek to demonstrate if parties and the electorate have moved together in opposite directions, indicating the extent parties, and their support bases, are polarising, which might highlight full party system change and political realignment.

This dissertation seeks to add to the current literature by replicating the methodologies of the critical election book in the context of the 2017 election. This paper utilises this methodology to analyse the extent that political realignment occurred in the last election due to its main advantage. As discussed above, this is its ability to take into account all the three main realignment measurements: the role of socio-economic change, the electorate and the role political parties' play. This, therefore, also attempts to overcome previous theories weakness, a lack of focus on how changes outside the electorate shape the electorate's demands, notably the role parties can play. This approach also aims to add to the current literature by using this theory in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century setting. Currently, the theory of realignments has only been utilised in 20<sup>th</sup>-century politics and has not been implemented in research for twenty years. Therefore, by applying this theory to current political times, it will provide a case study to show how relevant this theory is to modern political times, helping indicate its relevance for future research. Moreover, it will plug a gap in current electoral behavioural literature that places heavy emphasis on short term valence theories and fails to utilise traditional theories that have helped explain broad and long-term shifts in electoral behaviour.

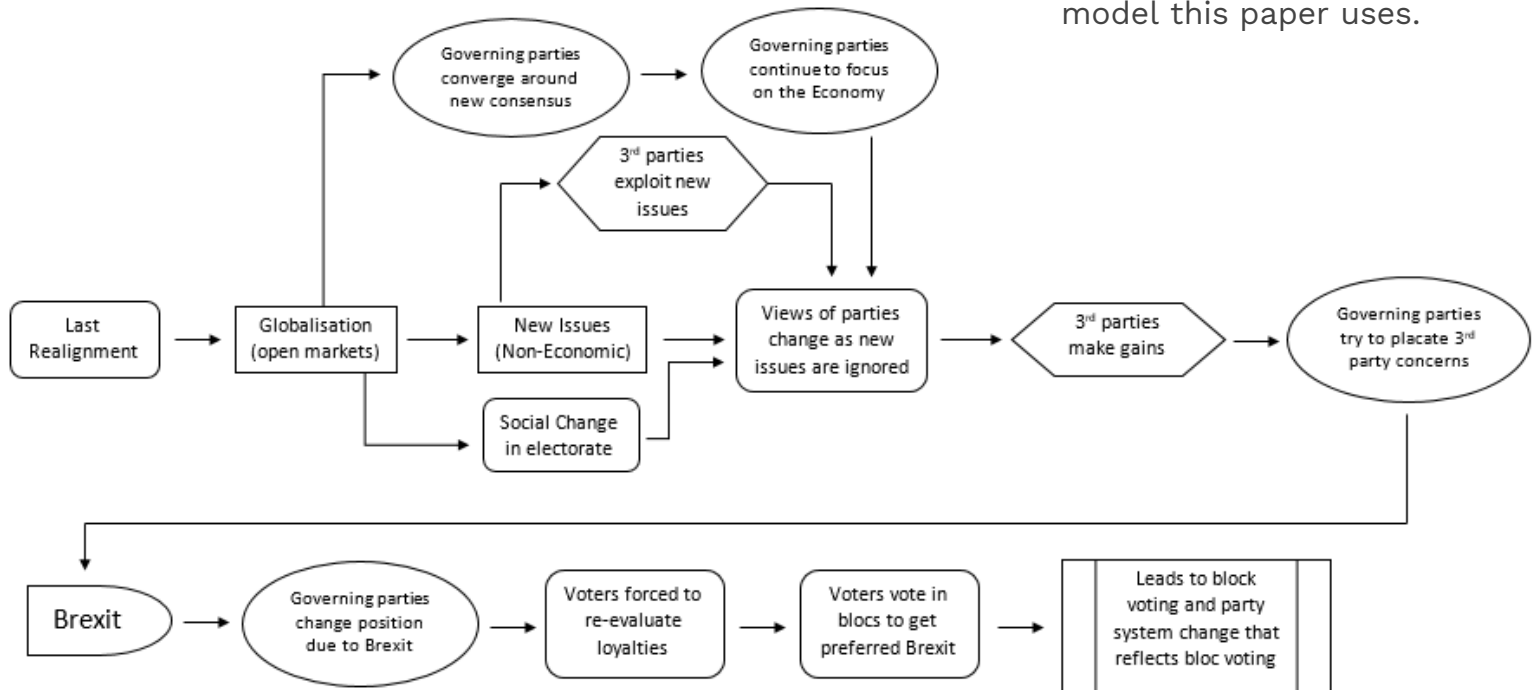
Finally, academics are divided on how such a substantial change was possible within a short period (Gamble 2019). Some have argued it could have been the influence of short term valence factors, such as Corbyn's improved performance,

relative to May's weakening performance, which helped create a hung parliament (Allen and Bartle 2018). Others by contrast have indicated that the election might have been a critical election where this election showed the electorate, and parties, have undergone substantial changes before the election that are significant enough to have caused realignment (Forsth 2017; Peck 2016). These mostly unexplored developments could be why the election produced a tighter than expected result and could indicate hung parliaments are likely to become the norm in UK politics. This creates debate around if whether the party system is going through a short-term period of instability, or if parties will have to change their behaviour for the longer term. Therefore, this dissertation is needed to address this academic debate and provide more evidence to indicate how British politics may be developing. Consequently, this will help address ambiguity and gaps within the current parties, public opinion and British electoral behaviour literature, helping gain greater understanding of political change within British politics.

Moreover, the 2017 General Election shock result prompted political commentators to make many different theories on why such a large political change had occurred within an election campaign (Peston 2017). This paper is needed to provide evidence that can help inform discussions amongst commentators, which may result in more accurate information being passed onto the public. It is needed to help the public understand the confusing and divided political times that currently exists.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology:

Summary of my theoretical model this paper uses.



### New Issues Alignments:

As stated earlier, new issues are defined as issues outside those of economics and public service provision. This is because the last realignment created a neo-liberal consensus around voters prioritising economic issues, managerialism and competence. As a result, surveys studies around electoral behaviour increasingly found that economic issues, competence and managerialism on public services were statistically significant in altering voting behaviour patterns (Whiteley, Clarke and Goodwin 2016). Therefore, this methodology must analyse what the trends on people's most pressing issues have been, along with testing if these trends have had an impact in causing voters to choose one party over another. This paper particularly devises its methodology to test if the issues of immigration and Europe have become more prominent within the electorates concerns.

To test the methodology of the paper, it will use the Essex Continuous Monitoring Survey (ECMS) as it contains a variable which has recorded people's most important issue since the year 2004. This is an open-ended question, so this paper

will group different responses into broad categories through converting similar spellings, mis-spellings and phrases into a series of categories. These categories will be labelled as the Economy, Public Services, Immigration, The EU, Terrorism, Crime, The Environment and other issues. The ECMS is a rolling survey which has recorded data for every month since 2004. Consequently, as this is a framing question it has been asked every month, allowing this paper to record these issue category trends for every quarter of every year since 2004. (Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski 2000). Moreover, this survey also asks important demographic details such as a respondents age, highest qualification, their left/right position and it also calculates their Liberal/Authoritarian position, reflecting how socially liberal or Conservative an individual is. This will enable the paper to break down trends of people's most important issue amongst different social groupings, such as young and old. This will also enable the paper to explore if trends on these issues were different amongst social groupings. This tests the idea that some groups may not be as concerned with rises in immigration and the EU debate than other groupings, thus raising the possibility of finding differences in priorities and therefore, a difference in individuals' core values.

If this paper were to discover trends that show Immigration and the EU rising above the economy then this would indicate a divergence from the last realignment and the possibility of a new one emerging. This will be displayed as a percentage of all respondents within a given quarter on what the most important issue was. If immigration and, or, the EU records a higher percentage than the Economy as being peoples most crucial issue by the end of the time-series analysis this could represent political change.

Finally, this paper will test if these issues cut across the left/right divide by analysing responses across the left/right divide against people's attitudes on immigration using ECMS data. This will also be done for the Liberal/ Authoritarian variable. If these new issues cut across the old divide, this paper would expect to see no precise distribution across the ten scaled left/right variable, while the

Liberal/Authoritarian trend would be bimodal, with liberal and Authoritarian ends of the scale showing radically different opinions on these new essential issues. For example, with Liberals showing views immigration is good for the economy, while Authoritarians being much less likely to hold such a view.

#### Sociological Alignments:

As stated in section one of this paper, social realignments are defined as clear and distinct social divisions displaying a divergence of opinions. This paper will test this divergence using new most important issues identified. This test will analyse if different social groups have different views and priorities on any new arising issues.

This paper will further test the extent to which social realignments have taken place by looking at results from UK constituencies. One form of sociological realignment tested in the 'Critical Election' book was the extent to which British politics has changed geographically (Pattie and Johnston 2005; Evans and Norris 1999) This paper will compare seats won and lost at the election in 2015, while also comparing majority levels using 2017 constituency data. If a sociological realignment had occurred, this paper would expect to see the two main parties' geographical bases changing. It would see the Conservatives winning more seats in the North, with Labour more in the South. This paper would also expect to see majority sizes changing, with the Conservatives having stronger bases in the North than before and Labour having more safe seats in the South than in 2015. If this trend was displayed, then parties may need to shift their parties to appeal to these parts of the country more in order to win new key marginal seats. If this is the case, this would be another indication that party system change could occur, and from this, a more extensive realignment may develop.

Finally, this paper will use multi-nominal regression to test to what extent sociological variables determine choosing one party over another, focusing on the choice over Conservative and Labour. This regression analysis will use merged data

from the BES 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2017 surveys. This is so this paper's analysis can determine the extent sociological variables caused an individual to change between and from the two main parties leading up to a period of high volatility, such as the 2010 hung parliament, Brexit and 2017 general election. This paper will also add in variables found to have diverging opinions amongst different social groups, which could, for example, ask opinions on immigration and the EU. Finally, this paper will add in control variables regarding the economy, how much parties are liked, and how competent they are perceived to be. This paper will then create the same models with the same variables for the BES 2017 Wave 12 dataset, which only records responses during the 2017 Election campaign. This will create another test that will display the extent each competing theory can explain the reasons why voters chose Labour over Conservative and therefore explain the extent to why the 2017 general election was a hung parliament.

#### Changed Party competition:

This paper will also focus on how party competition may have changed. As stated earlier, this paper defines change as one straying from alternating patterns of predominance. As stated above in the methodology, this paper can analyse the likelihood the mainstream party, and party system, change will occur through exploring geographical, sociological and electoral changes. This paper will also focus upon Multi-dimensional models that seek to map how parties have changed since the 2015 General Election, which will test how parties have reacted to Brexit. This paper will create two models to utilise different measurements of parties' spatial positions, MARPOR and Chapel Hill (Hooghe *et al.* 2010). Both datasets are used to avoid creating bias as these different measurements can produce different results at times (Hooghe *et al.* 2010). The models will place the parties on a Left/Right placement and a Liberal Authoritarian placement, aiming to capture the extent a party is socially Liberal or Conservative. The Left/Right self-placement is already calculated in both datasets, meaning that these variables can be put onto a -10 to +10 scale. The Liberal-Authoritarian measures for the MARPOR data can be calculated using Professor Budge's method in the 'Critical Election' book, where



several variables values are combined to create a scale of how much of a manifesto displays a Libertarian or Authoritarian tone (Budge 1999). The Chapel Hill data set has a Liberal and Authoritarian measure that comes with the latest version of the dataset (*1999-2014 Chapel Hill*). Once both the Left/Right and Liberal/Authoritarian points are calculated, they then can be mapped onto a four-quadrant spatial model where the Liberal and Authoritarian cleavage is placed down the middle of the left-right divide to create a spatial model with multiple dimensions. Once both parties' values for 2015 and 2017 have been plotted, these plots can then be compared and analysed to capture the extent of party change, indicating the extent of realignment.

This paper will use the PMP dataset to measure the change in party members since the 2015 election. This paper seeks to replicate and explore research on the changes in party membership publicised by the PMP (Bale, Webb and Poletti 2018). This dataset has questions that allow researchers to calculate how left/right wing an individual respondent is, alongside how Liberal/Authoritarian individual respondents are. This paper will replicate these calculations to test the extent Labour and Conservative party members have become more radical in terms of both Left/Right and Liberal/Authoritarian predispositions. If this paper was to find the stronger left/right and Liberal/Authoritarian tendencies, then this could indicate parties might be moving apart because of members polarising views. From this, the paper could then give indications of how likely polarising views are likely to continue, further polarising the party system and indicating more extensive political change and a potential party realignment.

Finally, to test if bloc patterns have emerged within the UK party system, this paper will analyse the flow of the vote. The flow of the vote will test where each of the two main party's vote came from in terms of how Individuals voted in the 2015 Election. If the Conservative increase came from right-wing parties, and Labour from left-wing parties, then this could indicate the emergence of a party system supported by bloc voting patterns. The flow of the vote measure is used

as it has been recommended, and used, by similar past research (Denver, Carman and Johns 2012).

### **Hypotheses:**

**H1:** This paper expects to find evidence that **non-economic** issues have **risen** in **importance**. This will be displayed through people's most important issues being non-economic orientated more often than being economically orientated.

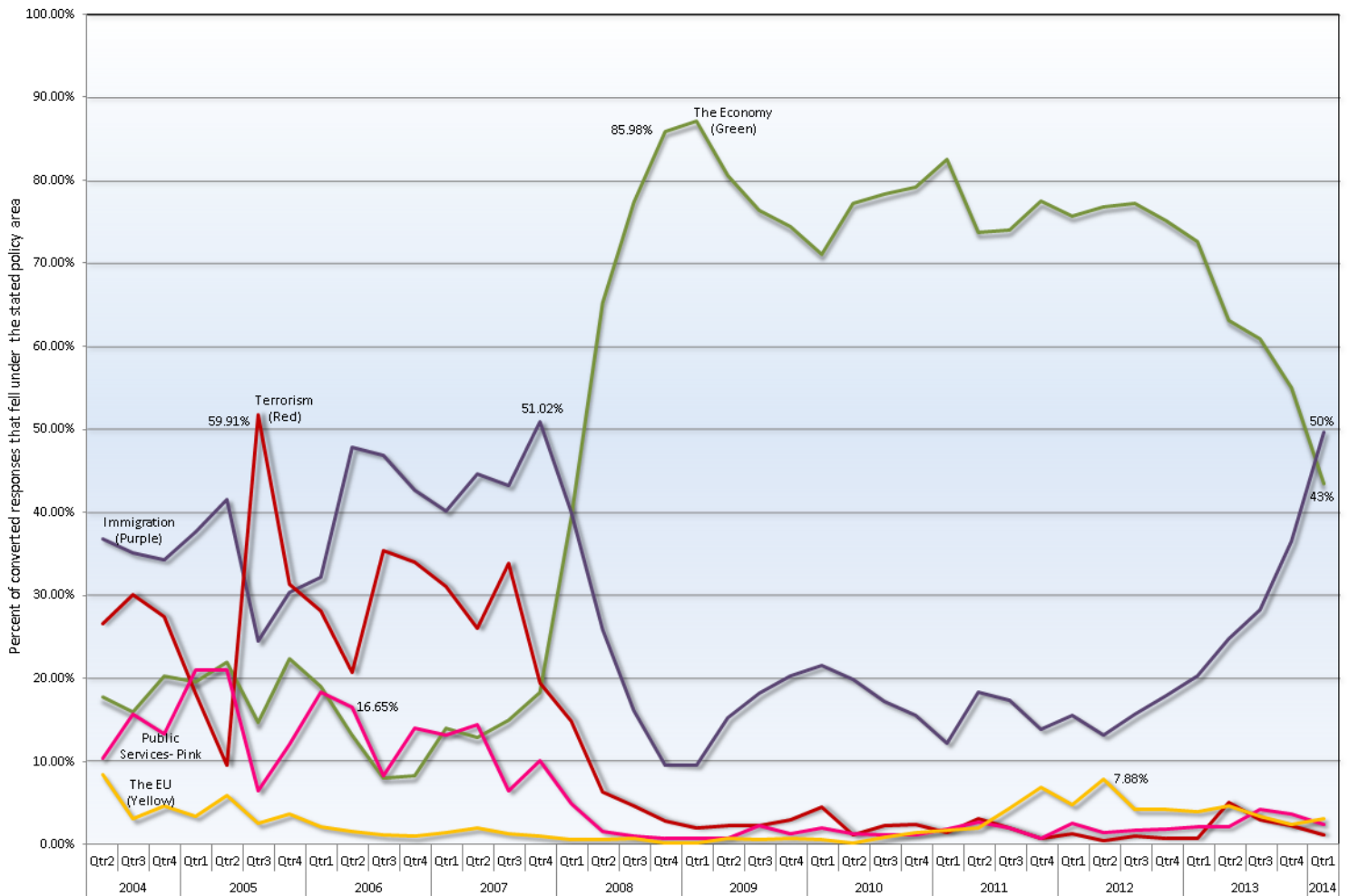
**H2:** This paper expects to find that **electoral change** has been **influenced by sociological divides**. This paper will test this by showing how different social groupings diverge on these new non-economic issues and how these issues affected voting behaviour leading up to, and within, the 2017 general election.

**H3:** This paper expects to discover information that **indicates strong potential for party system change**. This will find evidence parties are becoming more polarised and are becoming supported by block voting more than in previous elections.

## Chapter 4 – Findings:

### The Rise of New Issues?

Most Important Issue from 2004 - 2014 (As recorded by the Essex Continuous Monitoring Survey)

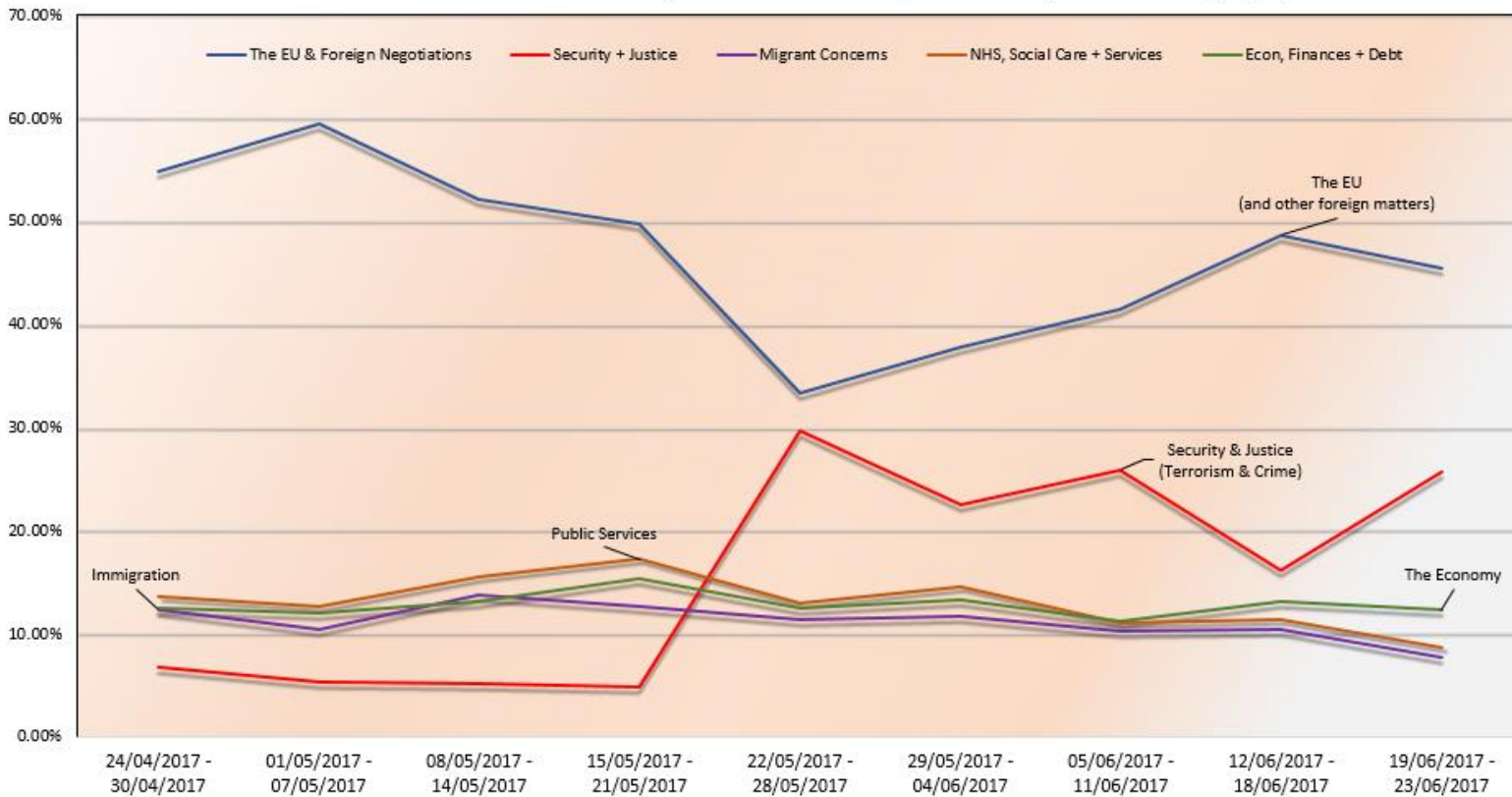


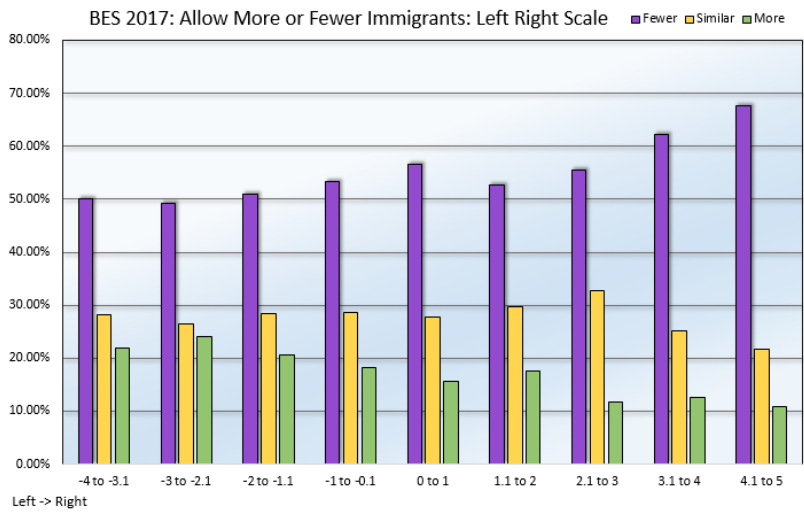
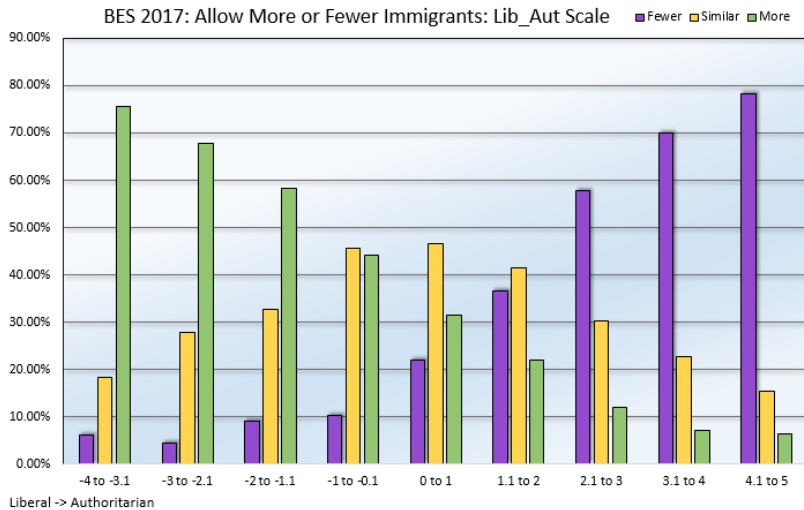
The first test that needs to be passed for a realignment to be possible is the emergence of new issues that can signal the emergence of new cleavage divides. For example, in Scotland, the emergence of the Independence issue has created a Nationalist and Unionist cleavage divide, which has helped alter the party system (Brandenburg and Johns 2014). Using the ECM surveys, this paper codes similar phrases and responses on people's most pressing issue into issue categories. When converting statements into categories, this study successfully converted around 50% of the responses from the open-ended question. After analysing the trends, it becomes apparent that immigration has been the number one issue, outside times of economic crisis, since the 2005 general

election. On top of this, approaching the 2017 general election, the three biggest issues for the respondents of the BES survey were firstly, the EU, secondly, terrorism and security and thirdly, immigration. All these are non-economic issues suggesting that there has been a change from the consensus around economic management being peoples' primary focus, as valence theory and the last realignment suggests should be the case.

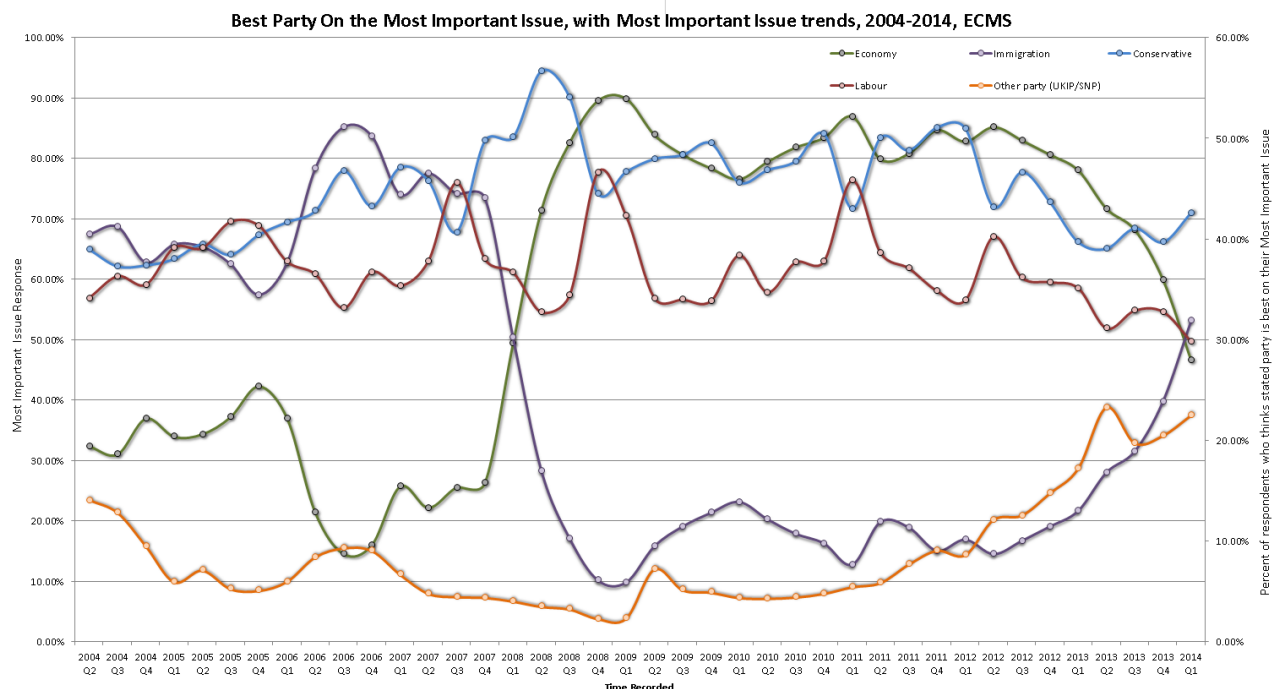
This graph demonstrates the EU issue being the Most Important Issue in the 2017 General Election.

2017 GE - BES Waves 11 - 13, Individuals Most Important Issue, Per Coded Category





For these new issues to be able to create a cleavage divide we must first establish how much they cut across the historic left/right divide. We can test this through using both ECM survey and BES data. If we take these new issues at the time of the 2017 General Election we can see that during the election these issues do appear to cut across the Left/Right divide. Using the Left/Right self-identification variable we can see it does not appear significant in determining if people want more or fewer immigrants. However, the Liberal/Authoritarian divide creates a bimodal distribution, suggesting this distinction does appear more significant in determining opinions on immigration.

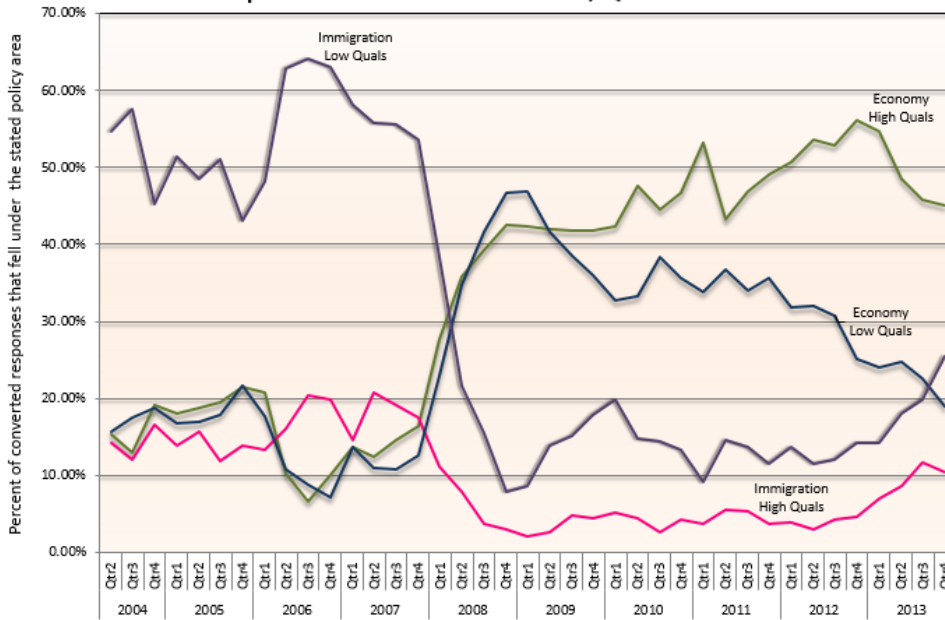


Furthermore, this paper has found evidence that these new issues had the potential to alter voting behaviour leading up to the general election. Taking the two most important issues, the paper then calculates the percentage of respondents that felt a given party was the best party to deal with their most pressing concerns. It can be seen that as the immigration issue rises up the agenda so does the number of people who think the Conservative Party is the best party to deal with the biggest issue of the day. Along with this, other parties, mainly UKIP, also have a boost in perceived performance on people's critical concerns. Alternatively, it can be seen that as the immigration issue increases, Labour's perceived competence decreases. This would indicate that as new issues have risen up the agenda, some parties have benefitted from this more than others. Other research highlights this trend exists because parties perceived best capable of handling an individual's most pressing concerns generally perform better in elections (H. Clarke *et al.* 2016).

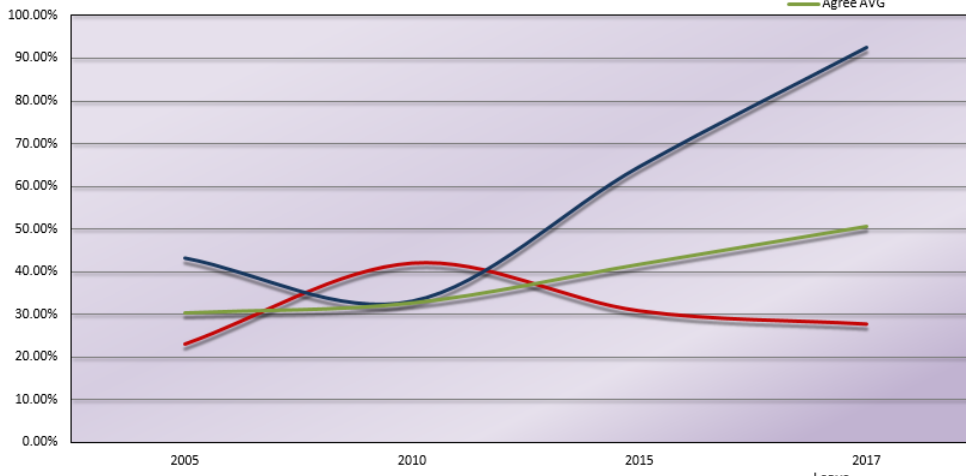
MII Category	All	Con	Lab	None	Other
1.The Economy (Debt, Jobs, Tax, Pensions)	64.08%	70.68%	78.70%	5.38%	42.85%
2.Immigration (Illegal + Asylum)	22.69%	20.78%	8.90%	89.51%	39.71%
3.Terrorism (Nat Security)	6.79%	3.74%	6.39%	2.88%	12.26%
5.Public Services (NHS, Education)	3.71%	2.71%	5.54%	1.91%	2.94%
9.The EU	2.73%	2.08%	0.47%	0.32%	2.24%
MII Category	AVG	Con_Diff	Lab_Diff	None_Diff	Other-Diff
1.The Economy (Debt, Jobs, Tax, Pensions)	64.08%	6.60%	14.62%	66.82%	-21.23%
2.Immigration (Illegal + Asylum)	22.69%	-1.91%	2.11%	-58.70%	17.02%
3.Terrorism (Nat Security)	6.79%	-3.05%	-16.30%	-3.91%	9.53%
5.Public Services (NHS, Education)	3.71%	-1.00%	1.83%	-3.39%	-0.77%
9.The EU	2.73%	-0.65%	-2.26%	-0.82%	-4.55%

Valence Theory therefore, can tell us that these issues have the capacity to change party vote share, and thus potentially alter party competition and cause a realignment. This paper also finds evidence that these issues were also seen to be ignored by the mainstream parties. The table opposite shows how other parties, like UKIP, were seen to prioritise these new issues significantly more. As a result, Party Niche

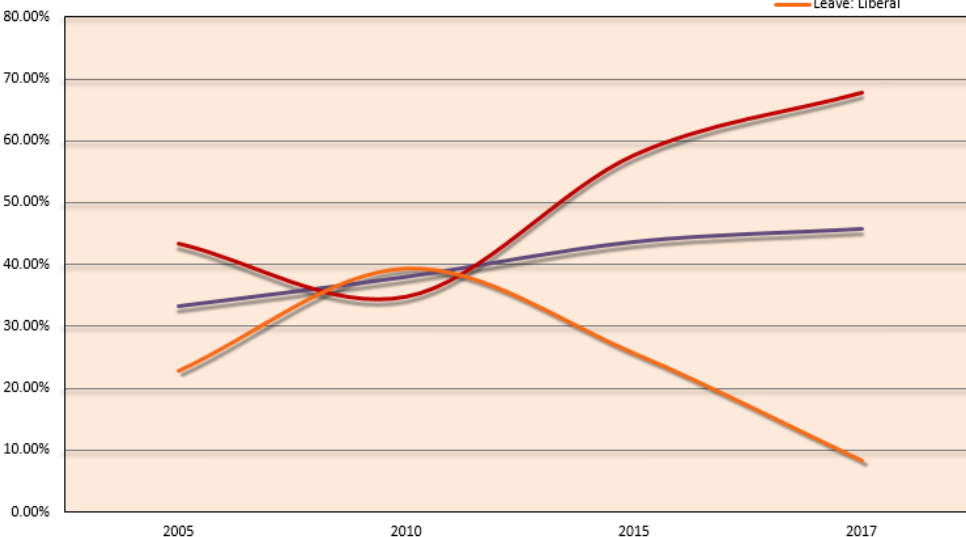
**Most Important Issue from 2004 - 2014, Qualification Difference**



Immigration Good for Economy: By Lib\_Aut Group, BES 05-17



Thoughts on EU Membership (Leave), By Lib\_Aut, BES: 05 -17

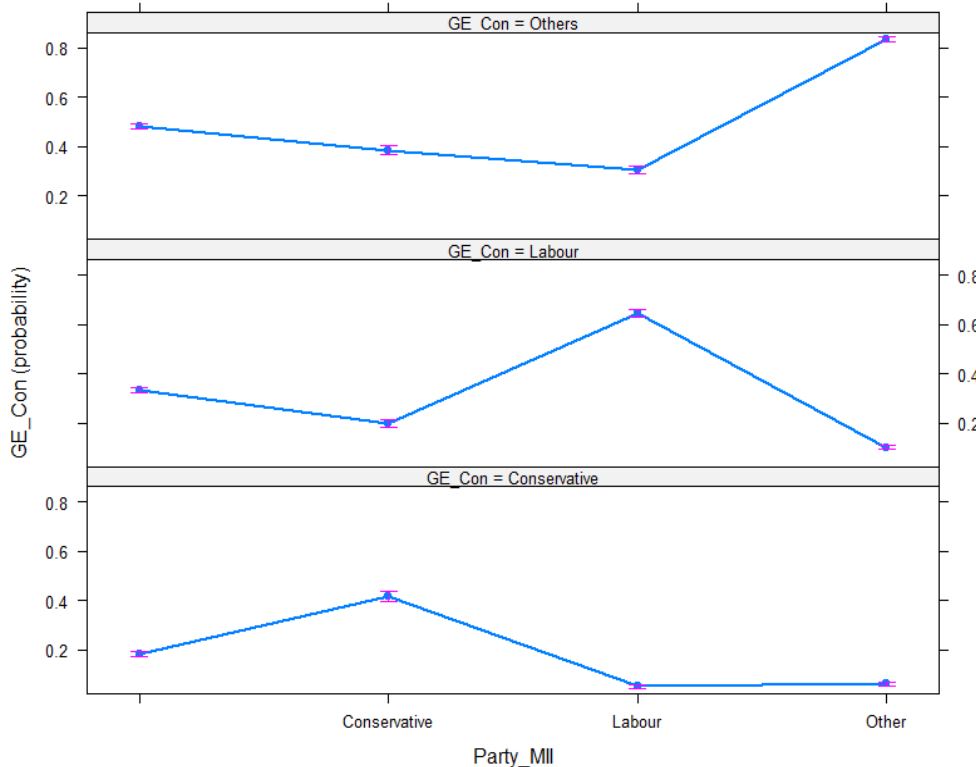


Theory indicates that these ignored issues created a vacated political space which made it possible for new parties to come along and force a change in mainstream party behaviour (Meyer and Wagner 2013). This is because once Niche parties occupy this vacated space they then need to decide if they ignore or adopt these party's rhetoric. There is some evidence to suggest that to tackle the threat from their flanks mainstream parties do at some point need to accommodate niche parties' view to tackle the threat and maintain enough support to keep office (Ezrow 2008). As these parties tend to be motivated through obtaining office they usually adopt these positions, which is what might have occurred with the Conservative party on Brexit and Immigration, helping create a more polarised party system, and potentially alter party competition. Finally, we can see that these issues do not only have different priorities by different party voters, but also by different social groups.

The younger and higher qualified an individual is the more likely they are to be comfortable with immigration and the EU, with the opposite for contrasting demographics. Also when dividing people into Liberal and Authoritarian groups there is a clear distinction where Liberals who record significantly more positive responses on the immigration and the EU issue than Authoritarians. Interestingly, this trend has diverged from 2005 where there was much agreement on the issue, with views clustering around the average. This suggests these important non-economic issues have the potential to cause bloc voting, that then could cause a realignment.

Changed Electorate? (Sociological analysis)

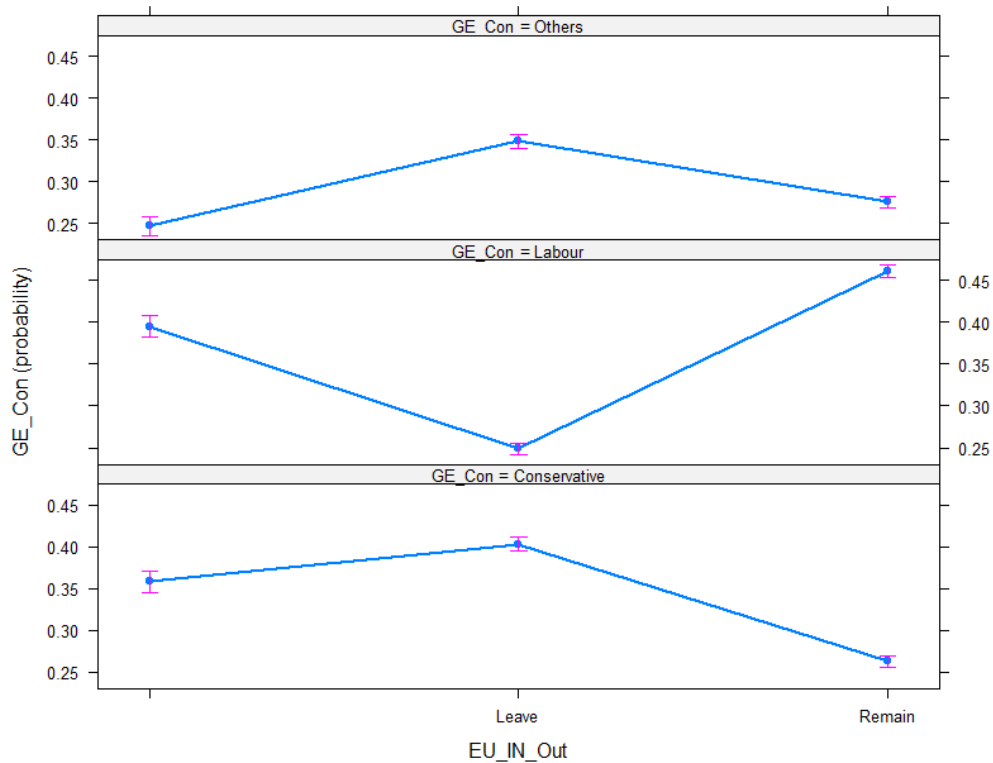
Substantial effects of The Party seen to be the best on an Individual's Most Important Issue and their



This paper has just identified how new issues might be affecting UK political development. To test if this theory has any more merit we take variables on the EU and Migration issue that have been consistently asked in the BES studies from 2005, 2010, 2015 & 2017. This will allow this paper to track the extent these variables have influenced UK political development across time, and importantly, at key moments in British politics. From this merged dataset the paper then performs multi-nominal regression analysis to help indicate when individuals might be choosing one party over another party across time.



### EU\_IN\_Out effect plot



When putting in these non-economic variables into a multi-nominal model, and plotting its substantive effects, we can see that leading up to the 2017 general election these new issues were significant. We can tell this through firstly, the party respondents gave as the best party on their most pressing concern being a strong predictor of which party they would vote for. Therefore, as we know issues like the EU and immigration have risen in prominence these issues have developed to have a strong impact on deciding which parties a perceived to perform best, and from this, which party they are likely to vote for. The above substantive effect shows that the EU issue has also been a good predictor of how people attach themselves to parties around election times. This was also the case for attitudes around the current level of migration. It is important to recall that this paper has found social divisions around these new non-economic issues.

Dependent Variables: Probability to vote Labour & Conservative		
	ProbVLab	ProbVCon
EURef2016Leave	0.162* (0.092)	0.385*** (0.082)
EURef2016Remain	0.333*** (0.089)	0.251*** (0.079)
negotiationSpecifics_ immigration controls	0.012 (0.043)	0.128*** (0.038)
expectAccess	-0.110** (0.048)	0.022 (0.043)
euLeaveVoice	-0.073** (0.029)	-0.012 (0.026)
effectsEUEcon	0.092*** (0.033)	-0.063** (0.029)
ReducemigrantCon	-0.015 (0.045)	0.140*** (0.041)
immigCultural	-0.025* (0.014)	-0.038*** (0.012)
changeEconomyLab	0.154*** (0.023)	-0.197*** (0.021)
bestOnMII Conservative	-0.382*** (0.059)	0.797*** (0.052)
bestOnMII Labour	0.430*** (0.063)	-0.205*** (0.056)
changeNHSLab	0.136*** (0.020)	0.043** (0.018)
LikeMay	0.048*** (0.013)	0.058*** (0.011)
LikeCorbo	0.031*** (0.009)	0.0001 (0.008)
BestPM	0.001 (0.032)	-0.583*** (0.029)
likeCon	-0.143*** (0.013)	0.634*** (0.012)
likeLab	0.765*** (0.010)	-0.089*** (0.009)

Therefore, as these issues appear to be influencing the electorates decisions leading up to the 2017 general election, at important political moments, it is possible to infer that these social divisions were playing a role in shaping the political system. Consequently, this makes it possible that the electorate are forming opposing blocks around these issues, which in turn creates block voting which can help alter the party system. The diagram at the end of this section also highlights how bloc voting may have occurred in the form of a new social Liberalism and Conservative divide. This all again displays that criteria of realignment have been met, increasing the potential that a political realignment was emerging in the run up to the 2017 general election.

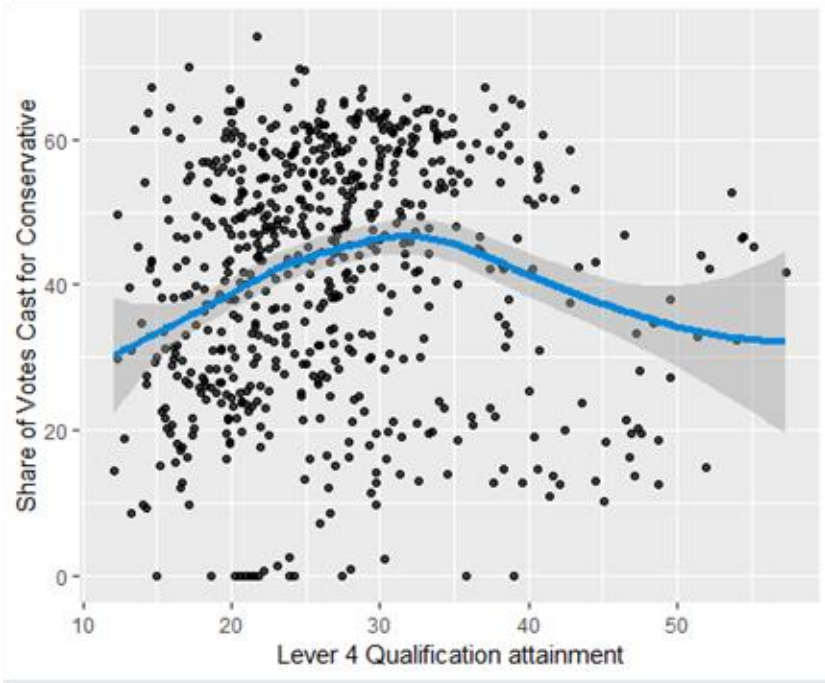
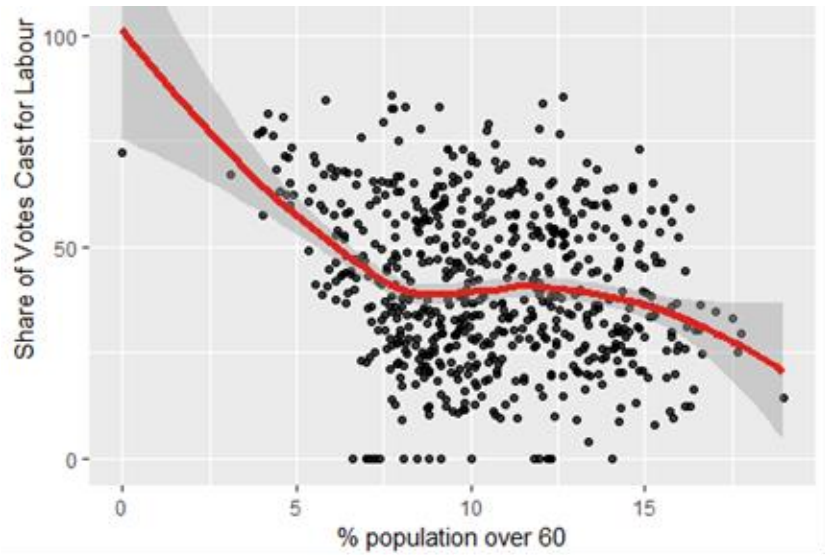
Not only were these issues important in shaping the electorate leading up to the 2017 election, they were also important in shaping the electorate during the 2017 general election. Using a scaled variable where respondents report how likely they are to vote for Labour or Conservative this paper creates a linear regression model, see the table to the left. This model highlights how the EU, immigration and how parties best performed on these issues helped shape the probability an individual would vote Labour, or alternatively, choose the Conservative party. For example, the model shows how people who preferred to oppose

AppGovt	-0.058** (0.028)	0.124*** (0.025)
leftRight	-0.089*** (0.012)	0.112*** (0.010)
Constant	0.805*** (0.212)	1.722*** (0.189)
Observations	12,730	12,730
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	<b>0.757</b>	<b>0.840</b>
Residual Std. Error	1.946	1.736
<i>Note</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

the EU and immigration tended to be more probable to vote for the Conservative party. Meanwhile, those that favoured the EU and were less against changes in immigration tended to back the Labour party. This is reinforced through variables that showed Labour voters prioritised open markets and trade in the EU negotiations, whilst the Conservative party favoured controls to migration. On top of this there were also economic priorities that shows the left/right divide still has some influence.

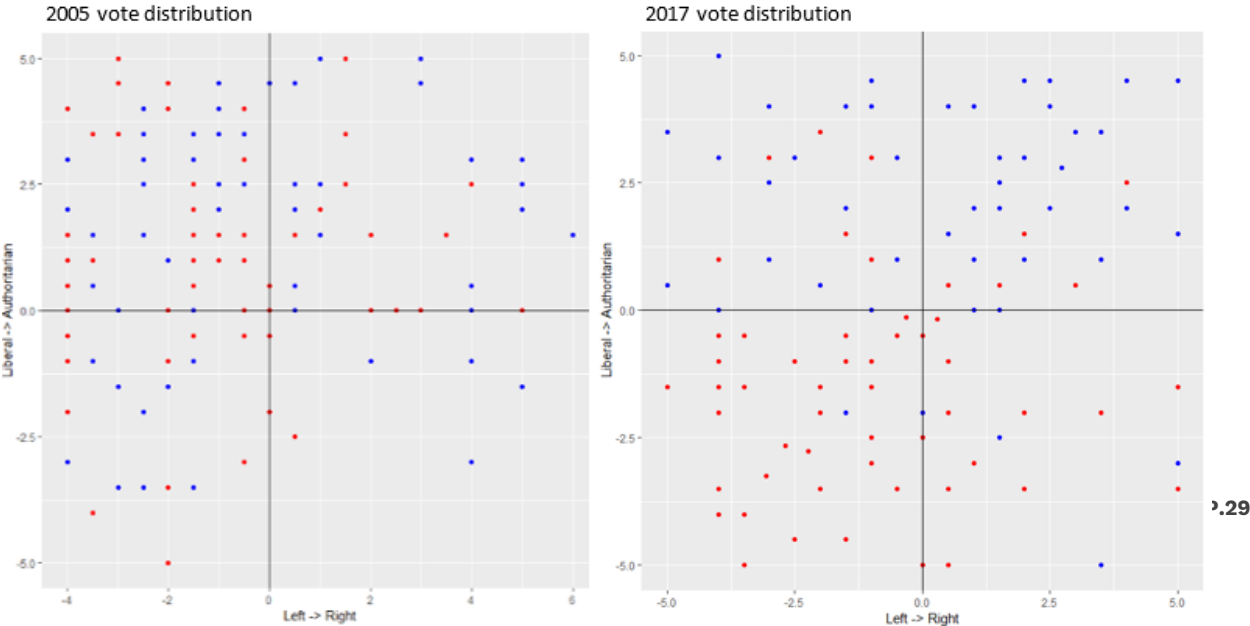
Overall, this model shows signs of clear indications that there are block voting patterns of non-economic issues that mirror a divide beyond just the traditional left/right divide, that are influencing voters' electoral choices at statistically significant levels. These divides appear to fit into blocks, which in the general election neatly fitted into a two-party divide surrounding the Brexit debate and opinions on EU negotiation outcomes, such as trade vs migration control. Therefore, the emergence of block voting indicates the potential for realignment where more parties could come along to split these very large diverse blocks that could fragment if the mainstream parties fail on Brexit.

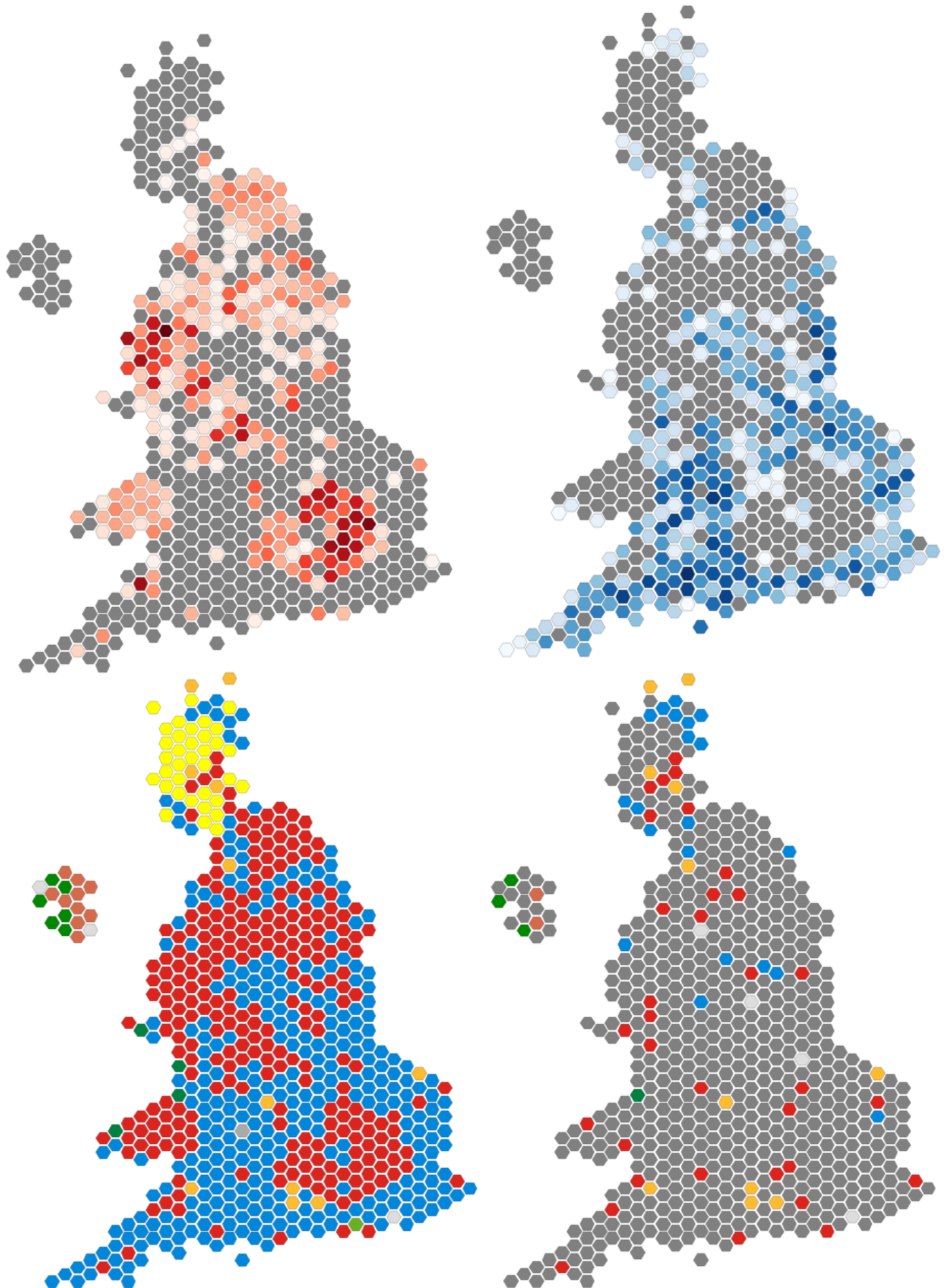
<i>Dependent variable: Constituency Winner</i>		
	Con_win	Lab_win
Turn_Diff	-0.115** (0.054)	0.320*** (0.053)
UKIP_Stand	0.012 (0.324)	0.049 (0.317)
Leave	1.795*** (0.410)	-0.353 (0.382)
Qual_cat3.L	-1.379*** (0.505)	0.778* (0.442)
Age_cat3.L	-0.860* (0.449)	1.909*** (0.407)
Youth.Unemploy	-0.590*** (0.161)	0.864*** (0.144)
Own House	-1.274*** (0.415)	
Social Rent	-1.413*** (0.421)	
Private rented	-1.309*** (0.418)	
Economically Inactive	-0.226*** (0.075)	
Lower managers	0.159* (0.092)	-0.204*** (0.051)
Net change	-0.003* (0.001)	0.003** (0.001)
Constant	129.487*** (39.091)	4.062* (2.104)
Log Likelihood	-142.830	-148.039
Akaike Inf. Crit.	317.661	320.077
<i>Note: *p&lt;0.1      **p&lt;0.05;      ***p&lt;0.01</i>		



Finally, when analysing constituency results, sociological patterns, similar to that of the sociological divide found in varying views around new important issues, are found. Here this paper finds the level of immigration within a constituency, and the extent a constituency voted to leave the EU, effects the chances of a constituency returning a Labour or Conservative MP at a statistically significant level. The percentage of young people, and the number of people with a degree within a constituency’s population appears to positively affect the likelihood of a constituency returning a Labour MP. This positive impact was also the case with more retired people, and people with no qualifications, within a constituency for the Conservative party. Along with there are also some economic issues like unemployment that affect how likely a party is to win a constituency, again highlighting the economic divides are still there, but now also along with sociological divides that cut across old Left/Right patterns. These trends are further mirrored in the changes of the distribution of the parliamentary party seats parties now have. This can be seen in the maps on the next page where Labour made most of their gains in the South, with the Conservative party making gains in the North. Now there are more Labour marginal seats in the North, and Conservative marginal seats in the South, again indicating regional change. This highlights that party competition may have altered from traditional regional patterns, highlighting the potential for electoral and party change, and from this, potential a realignment is developing and could fully develop later.

Note: The two below diagrams shows the distribution of the vote in 2005 and 2017. It shows that the Liberal/ Authoritarian divide in 2017 appears to direct party votes, indicating bloc voting has become more prevalent in recent elections.

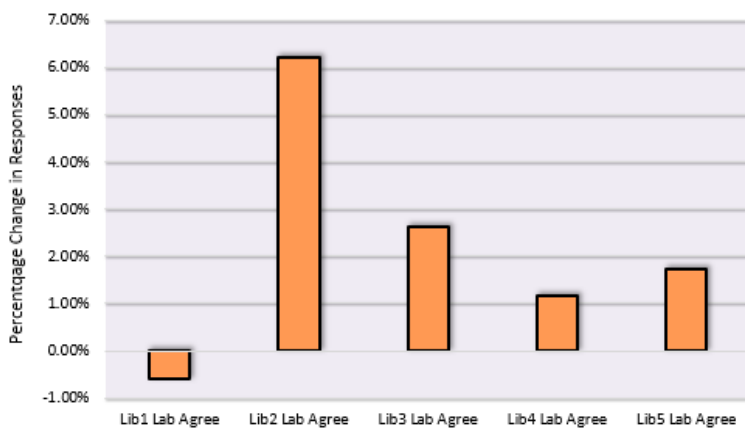




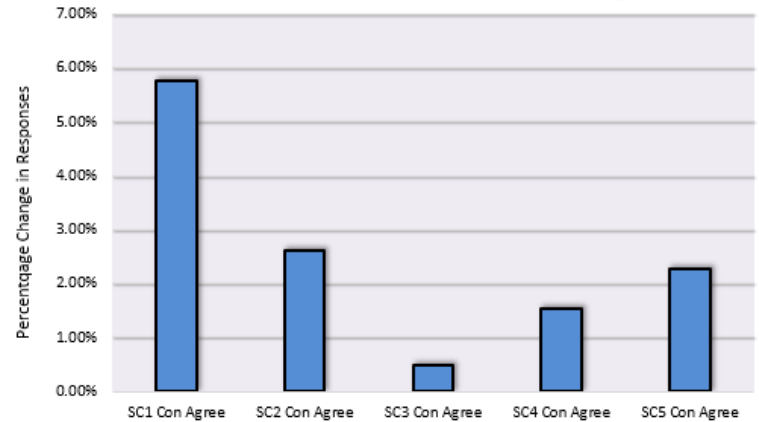
## Changed Parties and Party competition?

This paper also tests party change in terms of their members, who can change party positions and identities. This paper uses PMP data to replicate analysis done by Professor Webb and Bale, showing that both parties have changed since 2015 (Bale, Webb and Poletti 2017).

Labour Party Liberal Change Scores



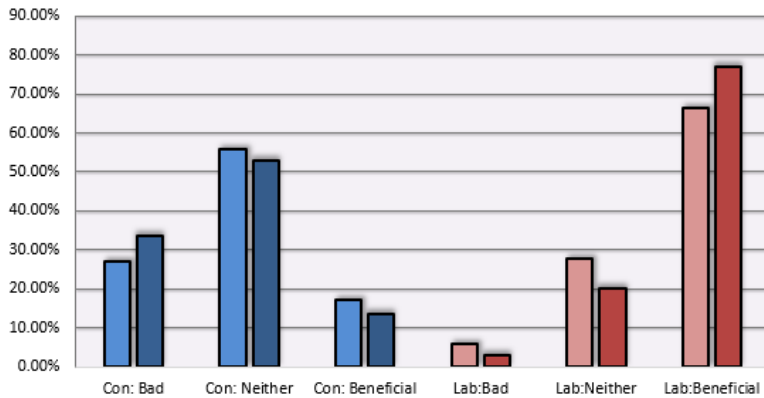
Conservative Party Socially Conservative Change Scores



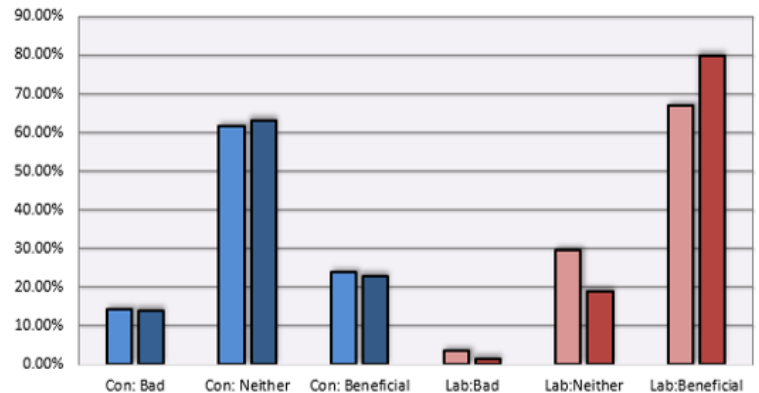
In short, analysis from this dataset shows that the parties' respective membership have changed in a way that can make the two main parties more polarised. Firstly, Labour Party membership appears to have moved further Left and Socially Liberal, and Right and Socially Conservative. On top of this, they have contrasting views on the most critical issues of the day, identified earlier as that of immigration and the EU. Labour members are increasingly more likely to feel pro-immigration and Europe, while Conservative members tend to be more opposed to positive statements on these matters. Along with this, the paper finds that these increases are mostly caused by new members joining, especially in regards to the Labour party. Moreover, these members are joining mostly not to become active, but to vote in leadership elections and aim to change policy. As these replicate the findings of the PMP, it can have increased confidence in these findings (Bale, Webb and Poletti 2018). Consequently, these changes could affect intra-party democracy and drag these parties closer to these polarising views, having the potential to create a more polarised party

system. This paper to test if these trends occurred, now looks at party positioning.

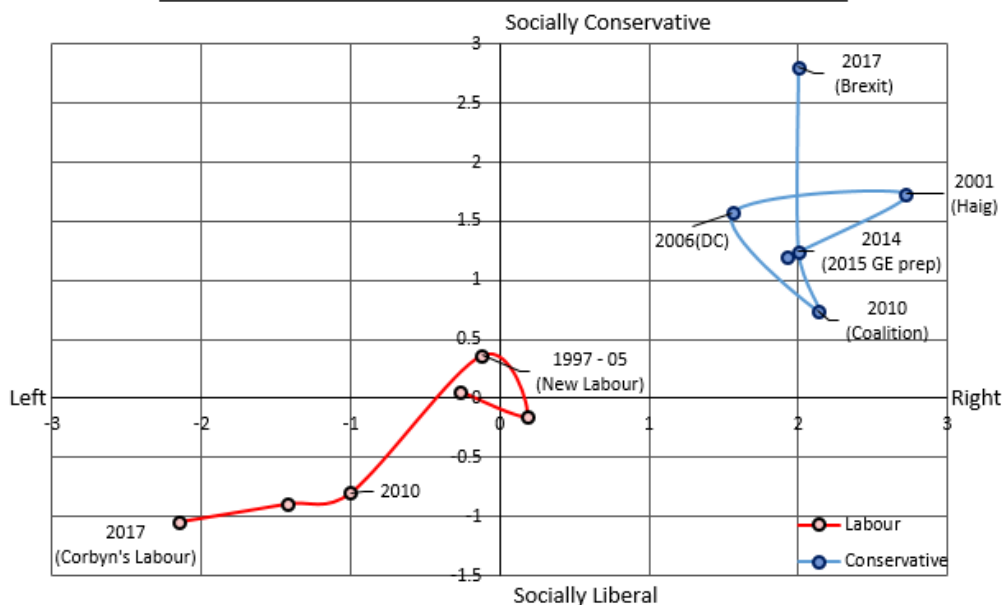
Immigration effect on Culture - Labour & Con members



Immigration of economic benefit, Lab & Con membership – 2015 - 2017

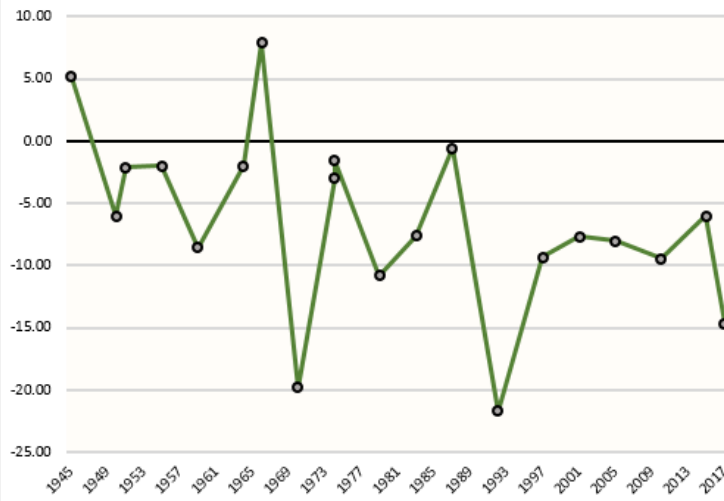


Con & Lab - Manifesto Content Multi - Dimensional Position

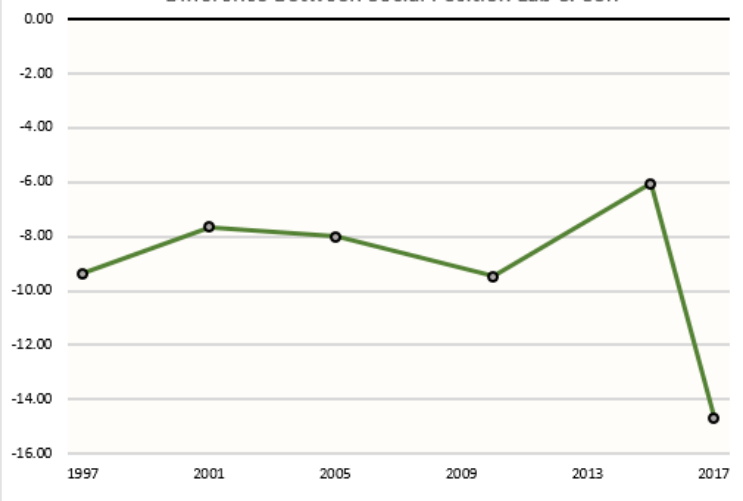


**Positioning:** In terms of party competition when analysing left/right and Liberal/Authoritarian measures shows the two parties' position splintering since the 2010 general election. Further, when replicating these measures, as defined in the methodology, the CMP data reinforces this finding, showing parties are how more polarised than in 1997, 2005, 2010 and 2015.

Difference Between Social Position Lab & Con



Difference Between Social Position Lab & Con





This paper therefore argues that when considering the new cleavage divide of Liberal/Authoritarian views alongside the traditional left/right divide the data suggests parties are becoming polarised across these differing dimensions. This indicates potential of partial party system change according to Sartori's definition, where party systems can change once they become more polarised (Sartori 1990). Polarisation within predominant party systems becomes important when this division creates bloc voting, which makes hung parliaments more likely. For example, in the 1980s, as the CMP data shows, it is possible to have higher levels of polarisation without creating hung parliaments due to the lack of bloc voting. The predominant system remained intact as party competition focused around centre ground swing voters that switched from Conservative and Labour, and occasionally a third centre ground party. However, if these governing parties now rely on bloc votes this could create more hung parliaments and force party system change.

This is because bloc voting causes voting that cuts across cleavage divides to occur less frequently, meaning that within a two-party system there becomes limited capacity for a governing party to gain a majority as it struggles to appeal to voters across the divide without losing its current base. As these bases are large, they become essential to keep on side to be able to win an election within a plurality voting system. If governing parties stray from their bases, other smaller parties on their side of the spectrum can suck up pieces of their block vote, causing other parties to win, which might have occurred in the EU 2019 elections (O'Grady 2019). As a result, parties have little incentive to move away from their "safe" positions and stalemate can occur (Halliday and Pidd 2019; Wintour and Mason 2017). This is the theory proposed by Sir John Curtice's statistical models that predict more hung parliaments (Clinton 2019; Swain 2017).

### **Block Voting:**

As discussed above to have potential of party system change polarisation is not enough; there needs to be evidence of block voting. This paper tests this by looking at the flow of the vote from the 2015 general election to the 2017 general election.

<b>Table 1: Con Flow of the vote – 2005-15</b>	<b>% Flow of Vote</b>
<b>Con, Con</b>	<b>75.83%</b>
<b>Con, UKIP</b>	<b>12.94%</b>
Con, Lab	5.36%
Con, Lib_Dem	3.17%
Con, Green	1.01%
Con, SNP	0.80%
Con, Other	0.73%
Con, PC	0.12%
Con, BNP	0.04%

<b>Table 2: 2015-17 Flow, Con vote share.</b>	<b>% Flow of Vote</b>
Con, Con	68.51%
UKIP, Con	17.19%
Lab, Con	6.74%
Lib_Dem, Con	3.73%
SNP, Con	1.03%
DK, Con	0.90%
Other, Con	0.78%
Green, Con	0.56%
NOA, Con	0.37%

Using the British Election surveys from 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2017 this paper analyses past voting patterns based on the party individuals voted for in the 2017 General election. Isolating the Conservative 2017 vote we can see that the theory of voters coming back to their natural home has some weight to it. Here we can go back to 2005 and see that the Conservative 2005 base mostly drifted to UKIP.

<b>2015-17 (UKIP change)</b>	<b>Count of id</b>
UKIP, Con	57.59%
KIP, UKIP	17.76%
UKIP, Lab	16.15%
UKIP, Lib_Dem	3.01%
UKIP, Other	2.51%
UKIP, Green	1.55%
UKIP, DK	0.71%
UKIP, PC	0.62%
UKIP, SNP	0.09%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

This reinforces other research that has produced evidence showing that as time progressed, and the UK had other elections, the Conservative vote appears to be fragmenting towards UKIP more than other parties (Evans and Mellon 2016). Moreover, this table shows that the Labour was behind UKIP in terms of where the party vote fragmented. This is important as it highlights party competition was not as much based in centre ground exchanges between the two main governing parties as the predominance party

systems state should occur.

Flow of vote 2005-15- Lab	% Flow of the Vote
Lab, Lab, Lab	50.11%
Lab, <b>Lib_Dem</b> , Lab	8.31%
Lab, Con, Con	5.27%
Lab, Lab, Con	3.79%
Lab, Lab, UKIP	3.65%
Lab, Lab, SNP	2.61%
Lab, Lib_Dem, Lib_Dem	2.13%
Lab, Didn't Vote, Lab	2.10%
Lab, Con, Lab	1.85%
Lab, Lib_Dem, Con	1.78%
Lab, Lib_Dem, UKIP	1.65%
Lab, Lab, Lib_Dem	1.65%
Lab, Con, UKIP	1.56%
Lab, Lab, Green	1.55%
Lab, Lib_Dem, Green	1.42%
Lab, UKIP, UKIP	1.27%
Lab, SNP, SNP	1.18%
Other	8.12%

Lab Flow of the Vote - 15 -17	% Flow of the Vote	Left Total	Right Total
Lab, Lab	66.50%	<b>20.78%</b>	12.67%
<b>Green</b> , Lab	8.35%		
Con, Lab	7.50%		
<b>Lib_Dem</b> , Lab	5.71%		
UKIP, Lab	5.17%		
SNP, Lab	1.82%		
NOA, Lab	1.56%		
Other, Lab	1.48%		
DK, Lab	1.13%		
PC, Lab	0.73%		
BNP, Lab	0.05%		
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>		

On analysing the Labour vote, it is more complicated as their vote has been fragmenting at a higher rate as they have gone from government to opposition. Firstly, it shows that their 2005 vote has mostly fragmented to the Liberal Democrats, then came back to Labour in

the 2015 General Election. This supports other research showing the Liberal vote fragmented as they joined the coalition to both Conservative and Labour, and has mostly stayed in these camps since (Allen and Bartle 2018). After taking this vote, the next largest share of the vote that came Labour's way was the Green party from the 2015 election. This is surprising considering the relative size of the parties. There were many more Conservative and UKIP voters than Green and Liberal Democratic voters in this period. Consequently, in pure numbers, these right parties have a higher capacity to fragment to the Labour party, but smaller left-wing parties are drifting towards Labour instead. This indicates that a left and socially Liberal block is forming in UK politics, with a more right wing and socially Conservative blocks forming towards the Conservative party.

Finally, this trend has occurred across many different elections since 2005, indicating that this block change has been gradual. This supports previous

research on realignments where the block vote that Thatcher received occurred from a process spanning across a decade where former disillusioned Labour voters first went to the Liberals, then later went to the Conservatives, termed the half-way safe house theory (Särilvik and Crewe 1983). As a result, it would appear that the flow of the vote has followed similar block patterns than that of the 1970s realignment did. For example, Labour did lose votes to UKIP, with voters then going to the Conservative party in 2017, supporting other findings (Ford and Goodwin 2016). There was a similar pattern in the Conservatives losing votes to the Liberal Democrats in the 2010 election, and then drifting towards Labour, and mostly staying there in the 2015 election. Alongside this there also is evidence that defectors from the Conservatives in 2005 have come back home, such as with UKIP, with defectors from Labour to the Greens and Liberal Democrats coming back home during the 2017 election. This therefore, follows patterns of the emergence of block voting and highlights higher potential of realignment in UK politics.

### **Overall party system change?**

This paper argues that it is too early to say party system change has occurred definitively; however, there is evidence to show there is a high potential that it could. Firstly, there is evidence that the party system is already straying from predominance as there is evidence that hung parliaments are more likely, due to increased polarisation and bloc voting. Moreover, the flow of the vote is not based around centre ground exchanges between Labour and Conservative voters, which characterised the Thatcher and New Labour dominance era. It is instead becoming more centred around right socially conservative and left-liberal groupings, indicating a more centrifugal party system (Sartori 1990). As a result, there is potential for the party system to become more based around block votes, as witnessed in the 2019 European elections. However, due to the electoral system, it may revert back to two-party politics characteristics if Brexit is delivered. As a result, it is too early to say the party system has completely changed from a

predominance model; possibly another General election may be needed for this to materialise. Instead, from the evidence it can be asserted that parties are being pushed in more polarising directions, and this creates the increased possibility for party system change, possibly based around bloc voting systems found in Scandinavia.

## **Chapter 5 – Conclusions:**

In summary, the findings show that the several factors needed to make political realignment possible have been found. Firstly, there is clear evidence that new issues have come to the forefront of British politics. Moreover, these new issues are departures from that of the debate of the economy, which has dominated UK politics since the last realignment. These issues, immigration and the EU, are non-economic issues and represent personal values, rather than economic concerns. These values have been found to diverge around different social groupings and consequently, created a new cleavage divide which has cut across historic left/right divides. These new cleavage divides can broadly be characterised as that of social liberalism and conservatism, which interact and cut across left/right issues.

From this, there is evidence that an increasing number of voters felt that none of the mainstream parties were the best party to handle these new issues; creating space for third parties to move in and address these non-economic issues rising up the agenda. This paper found further evidence that these issues did influence the probability that an individual would choose one party over another. For example, someone feeling more anti-EU and immigration was more likely to choose another party, like UKIP, and later the Conservative party. On top of this, the flow of the vote would suggest that the anti-EU and migration vote is flowing to right socially conservative parties, while the pro-EU vote is flowing to Socially Liberal left parties. This indicates that mainstream parties have been forced to change their policy positions because of these new issues and the emergence of bloc voting.

Moreover, this paper displays evidence that party positions have been shifting in a polarising way, with party membership strengthening this trend. This again gives further indications that electoral change is affecting the party system. Importantly, this all represents a change in all factors needed before a full realignment can be said to have materialised.

However, this paper must conclude that while the 2017 general election represents a high potential for a full realignment, this has not yet fully occurred. This is because there has only been a partial change in the party system. While there is growing evidence that the predominance model could be ending there is not yet the emergence of a clear and distinct alternative party system. While bloc voting may be present; there is not yet the party system yet to reflect this. The EU elections did reflect this type of party system, but with a different electoral system and secondary election. As a result, this paper concludes that there is a high potential for a realignment shortly, and academics will need to continue to focus on how the party system develops before a realignment can confidently be said to have fully materialised.

### **Afterwards.**

This paper would also argue that the wider impact upon political research is that, if accurate, it highlights academics should focus more on values-based politics, rather than just valence theory, when understanding political change. Moreover, it would also argue that academics need to put more focus on understanding how the party and electoral changes affect each other and are part of a longer process that can cause significant changes within the UK political system. Finally, the paper argues that academic focus should be placed on analysing developments in the UK party system. This is because once this has been understood the idea that the 2017 general election was a full realignment and a profound transformation in British politics can either be accepted or rejected.

The real-world Implications of these results are that parties possibly may need to alter their appeal in a way that can appeal to one bloc over another. If bloc voting becomes the norm, parties may need to form around this new electorate and work within a specific bloc, rather than sticking to the centre ground and trying to appeal to both sides, which historically has always benefitted parties seeking to govern. It may indicate that Labour needs to form a clearer position on Brexit as appealing to both sides holds no electoral advantage within this new type of electorate and party system.

A final implication of these results is that the emergence of block voting could limit the ability of the two main parties in gaining votes across the political divide. This may produce more hung parliaments where the UK has a large amount of parties on roughly the same amount of share of the vote. This first scenario would most likely occur if Brexit is not delivered by the next General Election where the Brexit and Conservative Party coalition would have roughly the same vote share as a Labour, Lib-Dem and Green coalition. In this scenario there would be a multi-party system within a plurality voting system, producing hung parliaments with very tribal politics, consequently increasing instability.

Alternatively, it may result in the traditional main parties being locked out of government. This scenario would most likely occur if Brexit is delivered in a way that can satisfy the Brexit Party. The Conservative Party could potentially claw back the majority of the current Brexit vote share. Consequently, there would be a sizeable conservative bloc, with an extremely divided socially liberal left bloc. This could force Labour out of power for a generation, as was the case with the last realignment. However, Labour would struggle to supplant the Conservative Party. This is because Labour would struggle to appeal across the divide, due to bloc voting, whilst at the same time finding it hard to take votes off other parties in the left/liberal bloc. This would mirror the situation in Sweden where one governing party dominated for decades with opposition parties unable to gain access to government.

As a result, this dissertation concludes by saying academics will need to see how the party system will continue to develop in order to understand the implications of political realignment on UK party politics, and from this, how it will affect policy and country developments.

**Final Note:** All graphs and data in the dissertation is original data analysis and research as of 24/06/2019.

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## Appendix

N/A.