Brexit: A Fluke, or the Future of British Conservatism? Analyzing the Post-Brexit Conservative Party's Populist Status Quo

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ABSTRACT

The British people's vote to leave the European Union in 2016 — known as the Brexit vote — represents the outcome of a successful populist movement. More recently, the Conservative Party's staggering 2019 electoral success shows that the populist "Get Brexit Done" message remains popular amongst both traditional Conservatives as well as broad swaths of the working class in former Labour strongholds. This study asks why the Conservative Party has changed so markedly in response to the ongoing Brexit negotiations and explores explanations for the Party's new rhetoric, policy changes, and factional shifts within the halls of Westminster. While some scholars look at the supply-side causes of populism and others look at the demand-side causes, this study applies a third school of thought that examines the relationship between supply and demand by analyzing a series of interviews with Conservative Party staff as well as public opinion polling. In doing so, the study concludes that there has been a deep, reciprocal, and simultaneous onset of populist Euroscepticism within both the Conservative Party and the working class that has structurally re-aligned the Conservative Party from more 'libertarian' to more 'authoritarian' in nature. A feedback loop has locked the new Conservative base into a new mentality that the Conservative Party then reciprocates and feeds back to the voters. This research provides the broader scholarly literature on populism with an example of the aftermath of populist movements when both elites and voters are able to forge relationships and work together to achieve their goals.

INTRODUCTION[1]

Since the onset of the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the subsequent Great Recession, the countries and people of Europe persevered by undertaking the difficult process of economic recovery together. The European Union and the national governments, through unprecedented unity and communication, were able to create stimulus packages and financial reforms that have since brought down unemployment, raised GDP per capita, and reinvigorated European businesses and the financial sector ("Eurostat Economic Indicators", 2019). However, despite the recent gains that led President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker (2017) to say that "the sun is shining" in Europe, this top-line analysis does not account for the loss of faith in the European unity project that the economic downturn fueled. The strict austerity measures that were thrust upon the governments of Europe were perceived as demeaning and counterproductive to those out of work, while rising tides of immigration from the Middle East and North Africa provoked a wave of nativism (Juncker, 2017). Rising economic anxiety, increasing nationalist sentiments, and Euroscepticism granted savvy populist movements across the continent newfound electoral success in the 2014 European Parliament elections (Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2014). In the same year, far-right parties that had not seen significant success since their modern debuts in the 1980s began entering national parliaments and governments at significantly higher rates than before (Golder, 2016).

European governments have embraced robust liberal democracies since the end of World War II. They erected the European Union and increasingly outward-facing foreign policies to foster an environment of an increased European identity, economic interdependence on the continent, and a common policy outlook through growing supranationalism. Modern European populist movements represent the most pressing critique of the prevailing system of liberal democracy to date,

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1 To distinguish quotations from outside sources from interviewees' direct quote, interviewees will be quoted in single quotation marks throughout this paper.

and it is a phenomenon that will determine the direction of Europe, its countries, and its people for decades. The movement's success or failure will define Europe's future policy positions in countless areas which include immigration, treatment of minorities, and the continued growth of the European Union project. As such, the issue at hand is deserving of significant scholarly study (Mounk, 2014). Populist politics can be characterized as a rallying of people against 'elites', contemporary populism appeals to a narrative of people against 'European elites', and a need for a 'national renaissance' in which domestic policies and national traditions reassert themselves over those of Brussels. As such, the brand of European populism that is successful today is often nationalist and quite Eurosceptic. As a response to the current populist wave that has emerged on the political right today, mainstream conservative parties have shifted their policies and rhetoric further towards the far-right on the traditional left-right political spectrum to share in this electoral success (Sierakowski, 2018; Colantone & Stanig, 2019).[2]

As in other European countries, a swath of the British public became so dismayed by their circumstances that they lost confidence in established institutions; they instead increasingly chose unknown (but alluring) extremist parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which are often far-right in nature today. The success of the Brexit movement and the 2019 UK Parliamentary elections make the British case of contemporary populism a particularly timely one for research. As such, traditionally mainstream policymakers in Europe and around the world have an incentive to develop a greater understanding of where populism emerges from and how it operates and interacts with citizens. Because of the recent nature of these events, it is important to look at them as case studies of a broader phenomenon by which populism grows, in-part, from within a political party. To address this topic, I analyzed the British case of withdrawal from the United Kingdom — Brexit — and its impact on the political party that embraced it — the Conservative Party.

This modern far-right populism found its footing quite recently and has grown at an explosive rate that scholarship has not been able to keep up with. The phenomenon is woefully understudied, and the analysis of European populist political parties has not been fully modernized to account for Europe's present-day supranationalism and interconnectedness. The contemporary literature on modern European populism and nationalism has begun to discuss the supply-side[3] and demand-side[4] factors underlying the promotion and adoption of populism in detail since its resurgence, and there is an emerging scholarly consensus that demand-side phenomena are primarily to blame (Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2019). However, this consensus has been questioned. One critical gap in the literature remains that prevents us from making strong predictions about European far-right populism: a focus on just the supply- or the demand-side does not account for the "inherent interaction between supply and demand" that determines the electoral and political success levels of various far-right parties (Golder, 2016). Scholars have begun to develop a new school of thought, which this paper calls a 'Third Way'. These scholars examine the relationship between supply and demand so that they can investigate not just populism's antecedents, but better understand how those antecedents play out in the dynamics of populism. This paper delves into the Third Way within the Brexit case specifically, exploring the way that the British Conservative Party has been impacted by the populism that it has simultaneously supplied to the public and conversely absorbed from public demands.

The purpose of the present case study is to better understand the changes within the Conservative Party as a result of populism. This research contributes to the literature and real-world gaps related to the supply- and demand-side factors of far-right parties by looking at the interaction between supply and demand in the British case. I ask the following research question: Why has the Conservative Party changed so markedly in the years following the Brexit referendum, and what explains the Party's rhetorical and general policy changes as well as its factional shifts? Through interviews with affiliates of the Conservative Party, I find evidence of a set of conditions that came together in a perfect storm for a political realignment of their Party: emergent populism

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2 The current re-ordering of industrial societies towards post-industrial/service economic systems has come at significant costs to the traditional industrial base of working-class laborers in countries across Europe. This is especially true in the North of England, a formerly vibrant industrial and manufacturing hub that has since seen fleeing jobs and stagnant incomes. This is a visible phenomenon in both economic and political scholarship, as the centers of wealth have empirically become more centered in cities at the cost of rural/'traditional' ways of life. While left-wing political parties such as the British Labour Party had traditionally received high electoral support from working class demographics through advocacy for their interests, these communities today have seen few changes and have begun to look elsewhere. The result in the 21st century has been a wave of populism, nationalism, and anti-institutionalism that has manifested as Euroscepticism.

3 According to Halikiopoulou et al., supply-side factors are "the ways in which parties use nationalism strategically in an attempt to broaden their appeal by presenting themselves as legitimate to large sections of the population."

4 According to Halikiopoulou et al., demand-side factors are the grievances and social cleavages that create demand for far-right parties.

within the Conservative Party apparatus, and a newfound expanded voter base that has come to include more of the English working class in the conflict-ridden post-Brexit years. From the onset of the Brexit referendum campaigns to the present day, a political and electoral realignment has been propelled onward by a feedback loop of ideas between the Party, which perpetually co-opted populist rhetoric from the UK Independence Party, and its new expanded base, which perpetually responded to populism and demanded small-c conservative, non-elite candidates that could both 'Get Brexit Done' and shake up London-centric politics. In the wake of this realignment, the British center-right has fundamentally shifted: With the support of an expanded majority that demands that the Party reject 'elite' politics, the new Members of Parliament and the Party's current leadership are upending the Conservative Party's long-standing libertarian tradition by embracing stricter immigration and 'tough-on-crime' law enforcement policies, while governing with a mandate from voters who demand paternalistic and 'Britain-first' economic reforms.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FROM EARLY EUROSCEPTICISM TO BORIS JOHNSON

Populism is especially visible in the United Kingdom, where the victory of the Leave campaign in the Brexit referendum (known officially as the "United Kingdom European Union membership referendum") has thrown British politics into turmoil. The Brexit movement was a populist one, with many nationalist elements that appealed to British voters who are 'naturally small-c conservative' but may not have historically voted for the Conservative Party, according to one of this study's interviewees.[5] It easily appeals to people who would prefer a strong military, no perceived overreach of external forces, and controlled immigration. This is not unique to the UK, nor the British Conservative Party — the ability of a movement to affect a state's politics on this scale using similar rhetoric, politics, and policy is absolutely possible and demonstrably occurring across the world.[6] However, the Brexit movement is an especially salient example of far-right populism because of its success: the Brexit referendum occurred and triggered the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

As this paper will discuss, the Conservative Party's response to far-right populism has been to embrace Euroscepticism in Parliamentary affairs. Under Prime Minister Boris Johnson's leadership, the Party has signaled to the public that it plans to put national interests first and return the United Kingdom to a period of lost glory that occurred before the country's 'mistaken experiment'

with supranationalism. As such, this case represents a broad shift in the supply- and demand-side factors of nationalism. As such, the way in which populism has affected British politics is of substantial interest and makes the United Kingdom a highly compelling case; the ramifications on the future of the country and its political parties have manifested themselves more consequentially than in any other country in Europe today. The underlying Eurosceptic sentiments, anti-immigrant attitudes, and economic woes that propelled the Leave campaign have not subsided; they have, in fact, become a dominant wing of the mainstream Conservative Party. David Cameron's promise to reform Britain's relationship with the EU regardless of the outcome of the referendum began his party's shift towards a mainstream pro-Brexit position (Oliver, 2016). That said, Britain's Euroscepticism had emerged long before Cameron's premiership.

British Euroscepticism has had a place in both the Conservative and Labour Parties since the 1970s, when the United Kingdom joined the European Community (EC). The Labour Party was initially the more Eurosceptic of the two; its leadership and membership alike saw the European Communities as increasingly neoliberal and unable to confront working class challenges (Startin, 2015). In 1975, future Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had voted with the majority of the Labour Party in its bid to challenge the processes of European integration; his own Euroscepticism would persist as party leader throughout the 2016 Brexit referendum campaign (The Economist, 2019). For its part, the Conservative Party had its own Eurosceptic elements. Though she had spent much of her career being supportive of the European project, Margaret Thatcher had eventually become wary of European integration: In 1988, Thatcher (1988) warned against forming a "European super-state" during her Bruges speech; in 1990, she proclaimed "No, no, no" in the House of Commons to the creation of the European Union (BBC News, 2013). In the wake of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty — the founding treaty of the European Union — organizations such as the European Research Group, which sought to provide an intellectual and ideological critique of the European Project, appeared within the Conservative Party. At the same time, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) emerged as a leading advocate for Britain's exit from the European Union. It gained minimal traction at first, though it eventually began to find electoral success at the European Parliament level due to the use of proportional representation and the far-right populist rhetoric of its leader, Nigel Farage. After the onset of the Great Recession and the signing of the Lisbon Treaty by the Labour Party, UKIP had amassed some right-wing support under Nigel Farage in the 2009

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5 A 'small-c conservative' refers to someone who adheres to a conservative political ideology. This is distinct from a 'Conservative', someone who is a member, politician, or dedicated voter of the British Conservative Party.

6 See the cases of the Republican Party in the United States, the Canadian Conservative Party, Italian Five Star Movement.

European Parliamentary elections, spelling fear for the Conservative Party that it might siphon off its voters at the national level in future elections (Flamini, 2013).

Since these first bouts of Euroscepticism, the U.K. has followed the same theme as other 21st century powers by converting into a largely service-based economy centered around urban areas, especially London (The Economist, 2012). On the other hand, the North of England, Wales, and the English Midlands were left particularly far behind the rest of the country (The Economist, 2012). It is no coincidence that populists were able to build a coalition consisting of far-right nationalist voices, right-wing Conservative voices, and populist/far-left Labour voices that spoke with one voice against globalization and the perceived 'other' in the form of the European Union.

The populist movement quickly lost the overt support of the Labour Party, even before the Brexit referendum, and so it turned its attention entirely towards the right (Flamini, 2013). This message was incredibly powerful, and many savvy politicians that represented the Conservative Party both locally and nationally noticed how it resonated with rural voters from across the political spectrum. Concepts such as providing for one's own poor (rather than relying on the European Development Fund), 'writing one's own laws', and 'controlling one's own borders' have entered the Conservative Party's voter base and Party Parliamentary Group in greater numbers, and in a louder volume, than before.

The situation in the United Kingdom has evolved significantly since the referendum; the underlying trends of populism have continued to sweep through the Conservative Party and its voters. On December 12th, 2019, the Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative Party won its largest government majority in decades on the back of major swaths of Labour voters in the English Midlands who abandoned the Labour Party in its traditional stronghold districts. On February 1st, 2020, the United Kingdom formally withdrew from the European Union, entering a transition period for the UK and EU to arrange departure agreements before the withdrawal took effect on January 1st, 2021.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The resurgence of the modern European far-right populist movement over the last decade has provoked a new round of scholarship focused on studying the phenomenon, but many questions remain regarding how these political movements interact with their respective voter bases and how these movements affect mainstream political parties and politics at-large. To analyze this issue, scholars tend to divide and conquer to address populism and nationalism on two fronts. On one front — the 'Demand Influences Supply' school of thought — scholars study how voters overtly demand populism from their elected officials in response to real or perceived economic or social grievances; these are the 'demand-side factors' of far-right nationalism (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019). On the other front — the 'Supply Influences Demand' school of thought — scholars have chosen to focus on the 'supply-side factors', which are "the ways in which parties use [populism and/or nationalism] strategically in an attempt to broaden their appeal by presenting themselves as legitimate to large sections of the population" (Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2014). Scholars within each of these schools of thought tend to consider their respective side to be the driver of the other; they also typically study supply- and demand-side factors in isolation of each other. As a result, the interaction between supply- and demand-side factors has been understudied (Golder, 2016). In recent years, some have proposed a 'Third Way' approach. Scholars from this school of thought contend that there is a two-way interaction between supply- and demand-side factors (Mudde, 2010). Crucially, they also assert that supply- and demand-side factors must both be maximized to facilitate populist party success; neither is more seen as inherently more important than the other. As such, this literature review first examines the 'Demand Influences Supply' and 'Supply Influences Demand' schools of thought. It then proceeds to discuss the 'Third Way' school of thought.

The 'Demand Influences Supply' Approach

The demand-side factors of nationalism amongst the voting public are particularly salient in understanding the rise of the modern European far-right. Scholars in the 'Demand Influences Supply' school of thought consider demand-side characteristics to be the drivers of the present rise in far-right nationalist parties and consider supplied nationalism to be a secondary response. This school of thought has been highly dominant historically, and dates back to Scheuch and Klingemann's (1967) treatise which outlines the "normal pathology thesis" of the far-right. The theory asserts that far-right values are foreign to liberal democracy, and there is always a risk of a far-right party rising in all democracies. They argue that far-right parties spread as a pathogen through situational demands by the public. Typically, scholars study one of three key demand-side grievances that lend themselves to populist party success, especially amongst the far-right: economic insecurity, cultural change, and reduced trust in elites.

Globalization and the Great Recession have left many in Western democracies in a state of economic insecurity as jobs have moved abroad, low-skill labor has become automated, and wages have decreased. This financial damage manifests in a psychopolitical narcissistic injury — "a deep personal conflict at the interface of sociopolitical context and individual identity" (Umbrasas, 2017). As Post and George (2004) assert in their extreme leader-follower behavior framework, these

psychologically injured individuals are the first to demand a strong leader. In post-Great Recession Europe, looking to the nation can provide "an answer to a pervasive, and at the extreme, pathological feeling of ineffectiveness in [one's] life" (Umbrasas, 2017). Austerity measures imposed by the European Union were unpopular, and many voters thought that their nation's economic status was under threat (Rodrik, 2018). Simply put, many voters have chosen to look nostalgically towards their nation's 'better past', and regaining a lost national economy is a hallmark of modern European nationalism (Bekhuis et al., 2013). As de Búrca (2018) states, these factors were visible in five ways in both the British and American contexts: "(i) a reaction against immigration, (ii) concern about economic insecurity, (iii) a rejection of internationalism and transnationalism, (iv) a return to inward- looking (economic) nationalism and (v) a rise in authoritarian and illiberal sentiment."

Ongoing cultural change has wracked European countries since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 in two main waves: inter-European cultural integration driven by the free movement of labor between European Union member states and the 2015 influx of predominantly Muslim refugees (Polyakova & Shekhovtsov, 2016). Some who have seen their country's culture or language 'change' wish to avoid this culture shock. Moreover, Mounk (2014) observes that short-term fluctuations in the economy do not fully explain the rise of the far-right. Mounk (2014) suggests in his "identity crisis theory" that some type of cultural change must be occurring on a longer time scale. Mounk (2014) identifies these cultural changes as the perceived 'threat' to national identity by immigrants and supranational organizations and the perceived decline in intergenerational living standards. Because establishment European political parties typically possess a pro-European Union orientation, discontented voters have seen nationalism as the only viable alternative to express their Euroscepticism (Ünver, 2016). Vasilopoulos et al. (2019) find that emotions resulting from cultural grievances play a role in demand for the far-right and that angrier voters are more likely to vote for far-right parties and more fearful voters are more likely to vote for mainstream parties.

In recent years, trust in elites has been significantly diminished due to both economic and cultural upheaval (Mudde, 2010). Mukand and Rodrik (2015) theorize that elites, the majority group, and the minority group(s) are three separate societal groups that can experience social cleavage. Though cleavages between majority and minority groups can be based along any line of identity, including ethnicity and religion, cleavages between either of these groups and elites will be most often visible on the basis of class (Mukand and Rodrik, 2015). Moreover, voters will come to perceive the upper class as a protector of the status quo, and will come to perceive extremist candidates as outsiders who can upset the status quo (Karakas & Mitra, 2020).

The 'Supply Influences Demand' Approach

Another rapidly growing set of scholars reject the classic consensus that voter demand is the primary driver of far-right populist success today. Instead, they argue that a demand-side focus neglects the realities of inter- and intra-country variation in support for populist movements. Why, they ask, does nationalism only take root in some locations where demand-side factors are present? Mudde (2010) argues that although demand-side factors do help explain the success of far-right nationalist parties in Europe today, it is supply-side factors such as party strength, party ideology, and party rhetoric that truly predict whether or not these parties will be successful. Mudde (2010) asserts that far-right populist parties are not abnormal and actually function in the same ways as other parties, and says that Scheuch and Klingemann's "normal pathology thesis" ought to be known as the "pathological normalcy thesis." By this, Mudde means that far-right parties are the result of normal democratic operations that have 'gone too far' and have created a political pathology. As a result, scholars in this school of thought treat far-right parties as typical entities within a democracy. They view far-right parties as 'make or break' agenda-setters that influence voter demands, just like any other party.

Scholars in the 'Supply Influences Demand' school of thought focus on supplies such as party strength and ideology. Party strength is typically measured by analyzing media presence, legislative participation, and grassroots support. Mair (2006) notes that populist parties find the most success when the conception of 'the people' as the core component of democracy is degraded. Mair (2006) asserts that far-right parties leverage conceptions of 'the lost nation' as a replacement bedrock in society to gain strength. Furthermore, van Spanje (2010) finds that mainstream parties will ostracize a far-right party less frequently if it appears strong in the electoral dynamics of just one or a few regional elections within a country.

As I will study in my case, scholars also focus heavily on party rhetoric as a crucial supply-side factor in determining the success of today's far-right. As such, they conduct content analyses, discourse analyses, and find historical or symbolic references within far-right politicians' speeches. As an extension of classic social exclusion theories, far-right nationalist parties today organize social exclusion based on nativist and xenophobic rhetoric that focuses on cultural differences rather than overt arguments of biological superiority. Mondon (2015) refers to this rhetoric as "neo-racism, cultural racism, or cultural differentialism" because it subtly implies to voters that European liberal democracy can only flourish in countries consisting of 'traditionally' European races. Polyakova and Shekhovtsov (2016) argue that today's

far-right political parties significantly tone down the rhetoric of overt biological racism and authoritarianism to avoid association with fascism. They demonstrate that today's most electorally successful far-right parties are ones that have been able to moderate their rhetoric to gain "respectability" during election seasons (Polyakova & Shekhovtsov, 2016).

A 'Third Way' Forward to Bridge the Gap?

This literature review has found the divide between the 'Demand Influences Supply' and 'Supply Influences Demand' schools of thought to be quite deep. The driving direction of the supply-demand interaction remains a highly contested gap in the literature on modern populism. However, limited research has begun to pursue a third path forward, which exists as a separate school of thought. As Golder (2016) argues in his study, this school of thought theorizes that supplied and demanded contemporary nationalism can only grow together, and will only produce far-right successes when both are maximized. Lubbers and Scheepers (2002) have pioneered this practical model by quantitatively measuring the growth of demand-side factors together with ideological markers within France's National Rally party. Instead of focusing on the contentious direction of the party-voter interaction, Lubbers and Scheepers (2002) provide correlative analysis of the French electorate and National Rally ideological rhetoric in comparison to data from other Western European countries. Though promising, their comparative study and others like it have been seen as incomplete because they overly condense different qualitative demand- and supply-side factors across many countries' scenarios into a framework of quantitative variables in a manner that does not wholly represent the social interactions within far-right nationalism (Golder, 2016).

Vines and Marsh (2018) also grapple with the need to move past supply- and demand- in a vacuum, instead arguing that we need to "move beyond explanations of the problem that [place] 'blame'" on either the suppliers or demanders of populism. Vines and Marsh (2018) build on the concept of "anti-politics," which is political action and rhetoric that is perceived to be 'outside' of a country's politics and that leads to developments such as "the decline in voting participation, party membership, and other forms of traditional political participation." While Mete (2010) argues that anti-politics can be either passive (or from below), with "activists questioning the existing political order," or active (or from above), with "citizens being particularly attracted to populist leaders/parties," Vines and Marsh go a step further. Rather than acknowledge the possibility that both supply and demand can influence populist rhetoric in different cases, Vines and March (2018) assert that "anti-politics is a relational concept... [revolving] around the relationship between

political authorities and citizens, which is interactive and iterative." This means that more study is needed to understand the relationship between the voters and politicians — a relationship that Vines and Marsh (2018) argue has become frayed and "decoupl[ed]," which they say is the real cause of anti-political populism.

Given the deadlock in this body of academic literature, a unifying approach is needed to add to the scholarly understanding of how populism functions in Europe today. This research contributes to a more dynamic approach to the scholarly conversation by shedding some light on how demand- and supply-side factors of populism interact in the British case to apply the 'Third Way' school of thought.

METHODS

Approach

My data collection and analysis employed an interpretivist epistemological approach. The nature of populism and the changes that it has produced in the British political system must be understood in a social context. The goal of my research methodology has been to qualitatively explore sociopolitical interaction. Finally, because of the social nature of my research subject, an interpretivist approach permitted me to act as an instrument in this project to communicate with British voters and political actors to understand their thoughts, opinions, and experiences. I allowed my interviewees to guide me to what they saw as the most important aspects of the new Conservative Party and of the new British political landscape.

Data Collection Process

To answer my research question within the British case, I observed the ways in which the Conservative Party has changed in terms of party ideology, rhetoric, and composition since both the Brexit referendum and onset of widespread British Euroscepticism. To do so, I organized and conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen 'party actors' within the Conservative Party, all from either England or Wales. These party actors included parliamentary assistants and office staffers, senior parliamentary staffers and communications officers, local Councilors, Young Conservative members, parliamentary office managers, and one Member of Parliament (See Appendix A).

These interviewees both carried out change in the Conservative Party and are influenced by those changes; the views of party actors have not been deeply explored since the 2016 Brexit referendum nor the 2019 general election, in which the Conservative Party won a landslide victory. I first asked questions related to their understanding of the history of populism, nationalism, and Euroscepticism in the UK before turning to the history of

the Brexit movement and post-referendum withdrawal. Next, I explored their perceptions on change within the Conservative Party, such as by asking how or if they perceive the Party to have shifted across the Cameron, May, and Johnson premierships, and by exploring whether or not they perceive ideology or policy objectives to have changed in recent years. I also asked them to comment on any trends of continuity and change with respect to elite maneuvering, party rhetoric, and policy from a supply perspective. Additionally, I sought to observe changes in voter demand by asking them about their perceptions as private citizens as well. Where relevant, I utilized my semi-structured format to follow up on common themes that I was learning about, such as the internal Conservative Party divide between 'libertarianism' and 'authoritarianism', the role of immigration in the Brexit referendum, or their perceptions of the Conservative Party's direction.

I asked questions related to their perceptions, such as how they perceive their party to have changed, if at all, and what they consider to be the most important policy objectives of their party today. I also asked them to comment on any trends of continuity and change with respect to elite maneuvering, party rhetoric, and policy from a supply perspective. Additionally, I sought to observe changes in voter demand by asking them about their perceptions as private citizens as well. The semi-structured interview format was ideal because it allowed me to ensure that I could follow up on specific topics that became common throughout the interviews (e.g., the decline of libertarianism or the new make-up of the Conservative Party in Parliament).

In addition to these interviews, I also analyzed a variety of public opinion data from the British Polling Council which identifies how British politics have changed at historical points of transition throughout the twentieth century as it did during the Thatcher years. Lastly, I consulted other studies, news media, and all UK and EU parliamentary election results chronicling these years.

Data Analysis Process

I analyzed my data in accordance with the 'Third Way' school of thought, which required careful attention to the interaction between supply- and demand-side factors of nationalism. The purpose of my interviews with party actors was to better understand changes in the supply-side factors of nationalism, and to tease out the demand-side factors of nationalism in the wake of the December 12th, 2019 parliamentary elections and the January 31st, 2020 exit from the European Union.

I conducted a thematic analysis of my fifteen interviews. First, each interview was recorded and listened to in order to record direct quotes as well as copious notes on everything that each interviewee said. Then, all pertinent statements that an interviewee made

that had reoccurred in the data, as well as all statements that provided a novel viewpoint, were sorted by theme. A view was considered pertinent and assigned a theme if it: (a) related to interactions between the Conservative Party and voters, (b) related to changes within either the Conservative Party or the public, (c) discussed a personal view that was not a broad reflection of public opinion, (d) discussed or referenced populism and/or nationalism (or referenced a sub-category of these ideas such as economic anxiety, globalization, or Euroscepticism). For a full list of coded themes and their frequency amongst all interviews, see Appendix B.

My analysis examined how voters recall the Brexit campaign, what it meant to them, and how their views of British politics and British political parties have shifted over time. Moreover, by asking party actors about changes in legislative affairs and strategy (as it relates to rhetoric and electoral politics), my analysis identified where party actors and voters think the same and where they differ to ascertain what role populism plays in each group's thinking and interactions with the other.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

There were important ethical considerations at play while conducting interviews. With respect to conducting interviews with Conservative Party actors, risk to participants may come in the form of job security considerations. For this reason, all data was anonymized and responses were obfuscated to ensure that responses would not indicate an interviewee's identity, specific career, or affiliation. A participant consent form discussed the inherent risks to confidentiality posed by participating in interviews and provided a full overview of this study's purpose and scope. All interview recordings were stored offline using encryption software, pending deletion, pursuant to the consent form.

This study also had two limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the virus made in-person interviewing impossible. Conducting interviews virtually increased risks to confidentiality and could have theoretically precluded full honesty from participants despite precautions. Second, the pandemic drastically increased the workload of all Conservative Party actors, from Councilors to parliamentary staffers to Members of Parliament. As such, some sampled individuals declined to be interviewed due to other pressing priorities and lack of availability, which limited this study's interview pool.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: KEY ANTI-POLITICAL ISSUES AND A FEEDBACK LOOP

The Core Issues of British Populism

Euroscepticism and Sovereignty

The issue of sovereignty has been deeply rooted within the "vox pop" — which describes the "snippets of public opinion from people 'on the street' — of the British public for decades; common concerns are often limiting out of control immigration and "tak[ing] back control of laws" (Hearn, 2017). Both of these concerns were heavily reflected by interviewees, who saw the Brexit movement as primarily stemming from the United Kingdom's 'unique' position off the coast of the mainland continent. Both Remainers and Leavers cited the British people's long-standing reluctance towards the European Union and skepticism of bureaucracy.[7] Euroscepticism, they said, had been seeded in the Conservative Party during the Thatcher era. Those who wanted the European Union to remain far less unified, such as Bill Cash, persisted throughout the process of the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht. Though they were able to negotiate down Britain's contributions to the EU, many in the party infrastructure 'privately wanted the European Union to remain a useful club and nothing more' and were not supportive of the European project. Most interviewees said that the large-scale shift in public sentiment came after Tony Blair signed the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, which prompted UKIP's meteoric rise to third place in national polling. I was told that UKIP's ability to push David Cameron to support a referendum in 2015 was critical in beginning the Conservative Party's embrace of populism. Though Euroscepticism had begun to grow within the European Research Group since 1993 in response to the Maastricht Treaty ratification, it was the Lisbon Treaty that increased the scale of its work and increased concerns within the Conservative Party in Parliament. Interviewees identified the signing of the Lisbon Treaty as the period when British government appeared to be 'superseded'; outcry against the Labour Party by Conservatives solidified a certain Eurosceptic sentiment within the Conservative Party.

Another issue that was crucial to changes in the Conservative Party was David Cameron's recession-era austerity policies, which signaled to those who had lost their jobs that Cameron was adhering to European Union policy rather than looking out for the British public. Nationalism stemming from economic tensions had already been on the rise, but "the degree to which individuals were adversely affected by the crisis and their discontent with the EU's handling of the crisis are major factors in explaining defection from mainstream pro-European to Eurosceptic parties in these elections"

(Colantone & Stanig, 2019; Hobolt and de Vries, 2016). Some interviewees said that 'Little Englanders' in the North were fed up with the 'London-centric and Brussels-centric narrative' that had pushed austerity, and the lack of democracy at the supranational level had left some feeling particularly left behind and particularly disdainful towards bureaucrats. Conservatives were shocked that UKIP had come in third place in the polling before the 2015 election. There seemed to be an opportunity for populism to sweep up these Eurosceptic narratives, both within and outside of the Conservative Party. Soon populism would bubble up to the surface in the wake of the Brexit referendum and totally reshape the landscape of the Conservative Party.

At its core, several interviewees said the Brexit movement 'relied on the idea of Britain as a global superpower.' There was a sentiment amongst many interviewees that a large number of the Conservative Party's membership 'yearned for past glory' and saw it as 'shameful' that a country with such 'economic and global clout' would not be able to determine the wellbeing of its people and its businesses 'on its own.' Indeed, as Hobolt and de Vries (2016) show, "the degree to which individuals were adversely affected by the crisis and their discontent with the EU's handling of the crisis are major factors in explaining defection from mainstream pro-European to Eurosceptic parties in these elections." To a large extent, this sentiment of exceptionalism was considered to have driven turnout all the way through the 2019 elections, where interviewees identified the "Get Brexit Done" slogan as a sign of an ascendant Britain. Indeed, Boris Johnson's Conservative Party appeared to have 'shown the differences between Conservatives and Labour'. His electoral campaign highlighted the strength of a fully independent Britain, while traditional Northern working class voters saw Labour's mixed Brexit message as evidence that 'Labour Party did not view Britain as a superpower' and that it 'still wanted to rely on the European Union.' Many also identified the Johnson government's coronavirus-era spending increases not just as efforts to head off a recession, but as an attempt to show the country that Britain can handle such a crisis with its own strength. The government seems 'acutely aware' of how Cameron's unpopular austerity policies had helped the Leave campaign succeed, as Fetzer (2019) noticed, and now seems ideologically determined to grow the role of government in the domestic economy to prove that 'Britain can go it alone'.

Immigration

The importance of immigration in the minds of the British people depends on with whom one chooses to speak. While it would be difficult to ascertain how much

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[7] "Remainer" interviewees were those who had disclosed that they had voted to 'Remain' in the European Union in the 2016 Brexit referendum; "Leaver" interviewees had voted to 'Leave'.

immigration policy has informed the British electorate or the nature of the Conservative Party, interviewees said that there is 'no doubt' that anti-immigration rhetoric from UKIP and Nigel Farage during the Brexit referendum campaign 'made it acceptable to talk about people "flooding in" to the United Kingdom.' Every interviewee that I spoke to, possibly due a common socioeconomic background that has exposed them to metropolitan multiculturalism, regarded this type of rhetoric with disdain. Most were quick to note that, in their eyes, neither the Remain or Leave campaign sought to make immigration the core issue of the campaign; only Nigel Farage's UKIP and other far-right groups 'made it an issue' (BBC News, 2016). I was also told that the Leave campaign was able to make its economic arguments while 'outsourcing harsh, simple, and emotional rhetoric' to Nigel Farage; the Remain campaign had to fight on two fronts.

Those who discussed immigration always identified Northern England as an area from which negative attitudes towards immigration are more common. After the Treaty of Maastricht established free movement of people, there was a movement of nationals from Eastern European countries into the United Kingdom. Despite the fact that these immigrants typically lived closer to London, interviewees described a broad English sentiment that these immigrants were taking jobs or were being favored by 'Etonian elites' over building up the 'forgotten North.' It is notable that voters with anti-immigration attitudes tend to call for, and latch onto, political voices such as UKIP's Nigel Farage who advocated heavily against the free movement of people (BBC News, 2016). Amongst interviewees, views on immigration tended to correlate heavily with their preference for either Remaining or Leaving in the European Union. All described Priti Patel, current Secretary of State for the Home Department, as a pivotal Johnson government appointee who has signaled to those who supported Brexit that hardline immigration was on the agenda. One pro-Brexit interviewee described Priti Patel as 'the heartthrob of all small-c conservative young men who want to see restricted immigration.' Indeed, Boris Johnson's post-2019 government has moved towards the ideological right on immigration by moving to implement a points-based immigration system, hiring more police officers and border enforcers, and publicly denouncing illegal migration (Elgot, 2019).

A Feedback Loop: The Working Class and the Conservative Mainstream Merge

In combination with concerns over immigration throughout the country, the issue of Brexit has fundamentally reshaped the views of the English working class. As the 2019 election shows, the Labour Party's traditional working class strongholds in the North of England — known aptly as the "Red Wall" —

overwhelmingly turned, constituency by constituency, in favor of the Conservative Party (Wainwright, 2019). The Conservative landslide, and large resulting majority, demonstrates that a political realignment has occurred in the United Kingdom: The Labour Party is now much more urban, and the Conservative Party has grown its majority by forging deep local ties in working class constituencies. These ties, forged through rhetoric pertaining to 'sovereignty' and 'immigration', created a right-wing wave of populism that pulled the working class into the Conservative Party. One dejected staffer told me that the Conservatives have 'expanded their base remarkably by cutting out people' like him — that is to say, he felt that Cameronites like himself no longer saw their beliefs represented in the Party's rhetoric, or at times, its policies. While some of this shift surely came from a desire to see Brexit through, interviews revealed a populism that changed both the electorate and the Conservative Party. Between the Brexit referendum campaign and the present day, both the voters and politicians have created a feedback loop that has supported and powered this political realignment.

Oesch (2008) provides a robust framework through which to understand this political realignment: the working class "has become the core clientele of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe" not just as a result of economic and welfare woes, but more importantly by political discontent and the ideology of "cultural protectionism". When the working class simultaneously becomes disaffected with a country's democratic elites and fearful of the loss of an "exclusive form of community" to outsiders, they will turn towards right-wing populist parties (Oesch, 2008).

This theory seems to hold especially true in the British case. Conservative interviewees used words such as 'Etonian', 'Oxbridge', and 'London-centric' to describe not just the make-up of British politics, but also the make-up of Members of their own Party in Parliament. Whether originally Remainers or Leavers, all expressed dissatisfaction with the degree to which the Conservative Party had, for a long time, appeared not to speak to the country's working class. In this way, a politician like David Cameron failed to carry much popularity with the working class, who were most exposed to 2010 fiscal cuts and therefore correlatively more likely to support the Leave campaign after becoming disaffected with elites (Colantone & Stanig, 2019). Instead, the Conservative Party lost votes to UKIP, the third largest party in the 2015 general election. According to interviewees, UKIP possessed a broadly right-wing populist agenda that was attractive to voters on both metrics that Oesch describes: it positioned itself as an 'alternative to elites' and as a 'protector of the Englishman.' As we know, the Conservative Party responded by co-opting these demand-side calls for populism and called for the Brexit referendum (Hobolt, 2016).

My interviewees attributed this populism to Theresa May's 2017 general election shortfall. They said that, to voters, Theresa May represented 'more of the same': Traditional Etonian power in Parliament that would 'embrace immigration and Europe' in spite of the referendum. However, Boris Johnson had a 'clever' understanding of voter demand and was then able to use his power as an influential agenda-setter to supply his own brand of nationalism while leading the party into the 2019 general elections: the "Get Brexit Done" slogan.

The New Conservative Party and the 'Libertarian-Authoritarian Dichotomy'

The 2019 Election Sparked a Political Realignment

Interviewees were careful to note that, under Theresa May, many Conservative MPs saw the process of leaving the EU as a 'damage limitation exercise'; the goal of these individuals was to ensure as 'soft' a Brexit as possible. After the thrice-repeated failure of Parliament to pass Theresa May's EU Withdrawal Agreements, increasing frustration on the Conservative right, the tabloids, and among the electorate, led these political figures to be called 'Remoaners' — a term that referred to all MPs, but especially Conservatives who voted remain and were 'obstructing Brexit' in the House of Commons. Conservative Remoaners were described as 'working with Labour' and going against their own party. According to interviewees, the Remoaner label was fueled by exhaustion with the Brexit proceedings. Politicians and voters alike simply wanted Brexit to be out of their news cycle and viewed attempts to 'water down Brexit' to be undemocratic and the actions of 'Etonian' elites who 'thought they knew better than the majority of voters.' When none of this changed under Boris Johnson's leadership, he stripped the twenty-one Conservative MPs of the whip, punishing them for betraying the new party line (BBC News, 2019). Those who did not have their whip restored were essentially forced out of their seats, as new candidates were selected for their constituencies, creating a 'much more pro-Brexit Conservative Party in Parliament.'

While Johnson was always careful throughout the 2019 campaign to 'play his cards close to his chest so that no one could know what he believed' on issues of policy, he made an 'end to the Remoaners' a priority through his "Get Brexit Done" slogan. The slogan was quite popular within swing constituencies in the North, whose Labour voters had warmed to the idea of Brexit or had become frustrated with both the Labour Party's 'lack of message' on Brexit (Stewart, 2019). Moreover, Johnson's Conservative associations in these constituencies were sure to nominate 'local people who understood' both the Brexit message and the struggles of the working class. This new intake represented 'small-c conservatives' more directly and was highly pro-Brexit in nature. They described candidates standing for Labour as 'rudderless' on the issue of Brexit and promised a return to traditional values that 'the Labour Party could not provide because they were enamored with the cities and cosmopolitan-minded voters.' This new Conservative intake that entered the House of Commons in the wake of the 2019 election, along with the small-c conservative Members of Parliament who were already there, became the largest single voice in the Conservative Party in Parliament. This new intake knew, and knows, that its electoral prospects stand on its ability to deliver both Brexit as well as prosperity for the working class. As such, the ideological makeup of Conservative MPs was pulled away from the socially liberal, yet economically austere, wing of the party that had dominated the Party in Parliament for so long. In its place stands a set of Conservative MPs that is more socially traditional, but that has sought to recapture the pre-Thatcher concept of paternalistic 'One-Nation Conservatism' that had supported a larger role for government programs to bolster citizens' well-being.

'Libertarians' versus 'Authoritarians'

This ideological shift in the Conservative Party was exemplified by a changing of the guard, so to speak, within the party's leadership. Figures such as David Cameron and Dominic Grieve — socially liberal, fiscal conservatives who supported Remain — have been replaced in leadership by people such as Dominic Cumming and Priti Patel — more 'traditionalist' voices who want Britain to 'rediscover itself as a nation that provides for its own people.' This dynamic was described to me by every single interviewee from every single background. Without passing a moral judgement, most described this divide using these exact terms, and so I choose to employ them in the same ways in this paper: 'libertarianism' versus 'authoritarianism' within the Conservative Party. I was told that, while these two factions have existed in some shape or form for decades, if not centuries (dating back to the divide between 'Whigs and Tories'), the 'authoritarians' are dominant in today's Conservative Party as a result of Brexit. By 'libertarian', interviewees referred to an increasingly small role for the British state in markets alongside an increasingly socially liberal approval of higher immigration, the LGBTQ+ community, and racial justice. By 'authoritarian', they were referring to an increasing willingness to intervene in the economy as well as willingness to support more socially conservative policies that restrict more libertarian choices, such as increasing the number of police officers, implementing a points-based immigration system, and 'making transgender issues an ideological fault line.' These words should not be construed as morally loaded; only as indicating the proclivity for Conservative Party politicians and voters to support a larger authority role for the state in economic or social affairs.

In this 'Libertarian-Authoritarian dichotomy', of

sorts, interviewees identified the Conservative Party's libertarian wing as the 'longstanding establishment' that had been the clear ideological leaders of the party since Margaret Thatcher realigned British politics along neoliberal lines. Placing new limitations on the welfare state and lowering taxes became the norm in order to 'allow the private sector and the individual to thrive.' While Euroscepticism did exist — including, to a small extent, from Thatcher herself — it was mostly cast to the sides of the political mainstream by the influence of the Tory Reform Group (TRG) and the Conservative Group for Europe (CGE), which were described to me by interviewees as 'instrumental in promoting pro-European Union views and social progress.' The TRG was described to me as particularly influential and as having been crucial to the maintenance and preservation of the National Health Service as well as to social policy victories for British progressives, such as the Conservative Party-led legalization of gay marriage. Indeed, most Conservative Party Leaders in the post-Thatcher years — John Major, Michael Howard, David Cameron, and Theresa May — have either been directly affiliated with the TRG or have actively praised its brand of socially liberal, one-nation conservatism (Tory Reform Group [TRG]; TRG, 2016; TRG, 2019).

On the other hand, the ascendant 'authoritarian' branch of the Conservative Party sought to 'reclaim traditional values' and legitimize itself as the coalition of the working class that could deliver one-nation conservatism. Proponents of this type of conservatism heavily emphasize 'sovereignty as a reason for a strong government role in the economy.' One interviewee shared that '[t]he United Kingdom now has something to prove, which is that the national government can provide for its own people better than Brussels could," and this sentiment was shared by the other interviewees who were supportive of Leaving the European Union. For instance, while Cameron had spoken about the Conservative Party's 'Northern Powerhouse' policies that would reignite the economies of the North of England, these constituencies felt that change had not come and that Cameron's government had 'focused on the cosmopolitan interests of London and Brussels.' Amongst these interviewees, the Johnson Government's message of 'Leveling Up the North' has already been successful through the process of instituting a points-based system, ending free movement from Europe, and through economic stimulus in the face of the coronavirus pandemic rather than austerity. Immigration, of course, was at the top of voters' minds ahead of the referendum (Blinder & Allen, 2016). Interviewees often cited the European Research Group (ERG) as an example of an organization that pushed these ideological values within the party apparatus. Political figures and Leave Campaigners such as Priti Patel, Michael Gove, and Steve Baker had described the globalization and European integration that was heralded by the pre-Johnson Conservative Governments as having failed to protect the 'core people of England.' Implicit in the 2019 election was the idea that these 'Remoaners' who claimed to espouse the ideals of one-nation conservatism had actually forgotten about the people that the government was meant to serve. To these voters and interviewees, a bipartisan Major/Blair/Cameron policy consensus had emerged in the cities, and austerity and European integration had 'hung the North of England out to dry.' In this way, this 'authoritarian' branch was able to claim one-nation conservatism for themselves by grouping 'libertarian' Conservatives and the Labour Party as one and the same: serving establishment, Etonian, cosmopolitan elites at the expense of 'the silent majority.' At the same time, social issues such as increasing police funding have become priorities within the Conservative Party.

As such, the left-right spectrum that the Conservative Party had traditionally possessed has been supplanted. Rather than Conservative voters or politicians disagreeing with each other on social or economic issues, the Party's political spectrum is now defined by the degree to which one supports policies that ostensibly 'protect' the cultural traditions or economic power of the nation.

The result of this shift towards the 'authoritarian' wing of the party is a disaffected center/center-right group of Conservative libertarians, who 'tend to be middle class cosmopolitans' who fall into one of two camps: they have either begrudgingly accepted what the right/far-right touts as the 'democratic argument' in favor of honoring what the new Conservative constituency wants, or 'they have left the party.' Those who do not agree with some of the decisions that have come along with the new majority — such as Boris Johnson's EU Withdrawal Bill's new customs union between Northern Ireland and Britain across the Irish Sea, which undermines the 'traditionally Unionist nature of the Conservative Party' — have now 'lost a place in mainstream British politics' and have been replaced by 'a much larger, much noisier electorate that is less middle class and more working class.'

A 'Do What It Takes to Win' Mentality

Regardless of whether or not an interviewee had personally been pro-Remain or pro-Leave, virtually all of them repeated some version of the following line: 'The Conservative Party will do whatever it can to win, and that is why it is the most successful political party [at winning elections] in the world.' As such, in the face of fracture during the defeats of Theresa May's Government, the Conservative Party rallied around what it knew best in the wake of the 2019 election: "Get Brexit Done" appeared to be a winning slogan, the Labour Party could be portrayed as weak and as lacking a decisive message, and libertarian "Remoaners" who were not on board with any aspect of the Johnson Government's agenda could be lamented as going against the tides of democracy.

Interviewees, as well as the media in general, see Boris Johnson as the embodiment of this 'do what it takes to win' approach. It was abundantly clear to both Remainers and Leavers that, in 2016, "Johnson sniffed the chance to become prime minister, and — in Union jargon — decided at the last minute to back the [Brexit] motion" (Kuper, 2019). Despite 'personally being a libertarian who represented social liberal ideas as the Mayor of London', Boris Johnson has reinvented himself entirely around the issue of Brexit. As Prime Minister, he has promised to 'take the European Union to task' in his Withdrawal deal and has embraced a No-Deal Brexit as not his first choice, but a choice that 'Britain is strong enough to get behind if it must.' He has become someone heavily in favor of a bigger role for government in welfare and in local economies; he has been 'the first Conservative Prime Minister in a long time to veto local Councilors' ordinances.' Additionally, he has embraced his party's willingness to intervene on social issues: He has named Priti Patel his Home Secretary, who is reshaping immigration by imposing points-based limits that favor high-skilled labor from Commonwealth member-states in place of free movement of labor to and from Europe. Similarly, the Government is now hiring new immigration and police officers and have promised the British people that the United Kingdom is strong enough to grow on its own without any trade deal with the European Union if necessary.

Given the 2019 election results, this approach appears to be wildly successful from the perspective of the Johnson Government. Even though 'some of the voters in the center have been left without a party,' the new Conservative plebiscite exerted a heavy influence on the party; 'voters who granted UKIP the third-largest vote share in the 2015 elections have now delivered the Conservative Party an unquestionable right-wing mandate.' As such, voters who had "fled the center," as Hobolt and Tilley (2016) say happened across Europe in the wake of the Great Recession due to fears over "EU integration, austerity, and immigration," have fully realigned the Conservative electorate away from the libertarian wing of the party.

View of the Labour Party Today

Interviewees also shared their views on the Labour Party in the wake of the 2019 elections. Those who considered themselves to be more pro-Remain or more libertarian tended to see the election of Keir Starmer as leader of the party as a positive step for the Labour Party 'so that it can be a party that holds Conservatives to account.' These interviewees saw a robust opposition that the public could support as 'crucial to British democracy.' They also viewed the Labour Party as a real challenger in future elections due to 'more competent leadership that can win back the North by the end of the 2020s if Boris Johnson falters.'

Those who tended to be more pro-Leave, or who belonged to the office of an MP that had been newly elected from the North in 2019, saw things much differently. To these interviewees, Starmer represented a 'far-left Corbyn lieutenant' who 'tried to overturn democracy with a second referendum.' Dismayed, they told me that Labour was 'opposed to absolutely everything', though they did note that the Labour Party had broadly supported the Johnson government on policies to mitigate the coronavirus pandemic. They said that, in the North, voters view the Labour Party as far-left and 'anti-British', asserting that Labour had become 'too city-based' and 'no longer [had] a love of country, [but a] hate [of] traditions.'

Amongst these interviewees, the difference in views towards the Labour opposition between those who subscribed to the 'libertarian' versus 'authoritarian' branches of the Conservative Party was stark, and indicative of the party's changing nature. 'When America sneezes,' one senior staffer from a freshman MP's office told me, 'Britain catches a cold.' They saw 'culture issues in the United States' as having arrived on British soil; pushing Labour and 'professional, white-collar Conservatives towards extremes.' Only these new Conservatives, several believed, could 'reject the status quo and restore Britain' without these efforts being hampered by globalization or by the European Union.

CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

Contemporary populism and nationalism have never been more salient than they are today, both within scholarship and society at-large. Within the European context, no populist movement has seen greater or more consequential success than the Brexit movement, which has successfully shepherded the United Kingdom out of the European Union. These populist ideas have co-opted the mainstream British Conservative Party in a way that has pushed it further to the political right, both in policy and rhetoric. In this study, I sought to understand Brexit within the context of this surge of far-right populism, which continues to persist in the United Kingdom and Europe at-large. To learn both why the Conservative Party has changed so markedly in response to the ongoing Brexit negotiations and what realities explain the Party's rhetorical and general policy changes as well as its factional shifts, I analyzed interviews with Conservative Party actors in accordance with the 'Third Way' school of thought. A rising framework within the scholarly literatures on populism and nationalism, the "Third Way" school of thought, has been especially well-articulated by Vines and Marsh (2018), who argue for a recognition of the relationship between politicians and citizens rather than a focus on either of these parties. In summary, this study found the key themes of contemporary British populism to be Euroscepticism, sovereignty, and immigration. It also found three mechanisms of action that mobilized

populist discourse within the Conservative Party and the voters: A feedback loop between the English working class and the Party apparatus, an active dispute between 'libertarians' and 'authoritarians' in the Party, and a 'do what it takes to win' mentality amongst Members of Parliament that has allowed the Conservative Party in Parliament to re-establish party unity around the new ideological consensus.

There has been a "decoupling of political authorities and citizens" in the lead-up to Brexit, and this has continued between Conservative Party political authorities and its voters until the 2019 election (Vines & March 2018). Local activism for the Brexit vote by UKIP and the Leave Campaign promised an interactive democracy could do what the status quo could not (Bang, 2009). Reciprocally, the Conservative Party has been realigned by these voters and locally-raised Parliamentary candidates who have been elected to 'deliver Brexit themselves' and succeed where the libertarians had failed (Bang, 2009).

This decoupling of the huge swaths and voters from their typical political loyalties, such as the Labour Party in the North or a more 'politically moderate' sect of the Conservative Party, has occurred because of a feedback loop between the working class and Conservative politicians from the 'authoritarian' wing of the party. Both the 'suppliers' and 'demanders' of populism have engaged in this feedback loop (Vines & March, 2018). Each brought ideas that major parties in the United Kingdom had mostly rejected for decades into the political mainstream: an isolationist, 'go-it-alone' approach towards Europe, a shift towards pre-Thatcherite economics, and a desire to 'look inward, rather than outward.'

A perfect storm of events contributed to this political realignment, and the Brexit referendum was the spark: The Great Recession, agenda-setting by UKIP and Nigel Farage, the Eurozone crisis, austerity policies, and the systemic move towards policies that support the British middle- and upper-classes by the Conservative and Labour Parties for decades. This realignment cannot be attributed to supplied populism or demanded populism, and must be attributed to a highly "interactive and iterative" process of communication between the Conservative Party and a shifting, restless base of disaffected voters (Vines & March, 2018). As such, while others such as Mete, de Búrca, and Mondon provide valuable contributions to the study of either supplied or demanded populism, the British case of populism indicates that we should view supplied and demanded populism as a "duality," not a "dualism" (Mete, 2010; De Búrca, 2018; Mondon, 2015; Vines & March, 2018). The first key moment within this supply-demand conversation occurred in the wake of the 2015 elections, when a Brexit referendum was formally promised after UKIP had established itself as a major player that had clearly tapped into latent disaffection and anti-political ideas. Next came the 2016 Brexit referendum itself, which explicitly demonstrated voter demand. In the wake of the

referendum, a further inflection point was the failure of the libertarian wing of the Conservative Party to 'win the day in the Commons'; voters simply became more disaffected with traditional politics. Finally, the 2019 elections solidified the political alignment, and crystallized disdain for 'Remoaners', austerity, globalization, and cosmopolitanism; this disdain now exists both within the Conservative Party in Parliament and within the party's base. This has been clearly communicated by the deselection of 'libertarian' members who were labeled 'disloyal' and as 'Remoaners', and by the new intake of Northern English MPs who are more 'authoritarian' in their policy outlook and are 'not Etonians, and represent the people who elected them.' Today, this shift means that the Conservative Party's voters expect their party to be more socially right wing (on issues such as immigration, policing, and gender identity) and more economically paternalist (to be more 'sovereign/independent' and 'powerful/capable of providing'). So far, the Johnson government has succeeded in either delivering these new types of policies, or at least appears to be delivering in the face of heavy government spending in the face of the coronavirus pandemic (Mattinson, 2020).

Future researchers can expand on these findings in four main ways. First, researchers should continue to analyze the state of British populism after Boris Johnson's government succeeds or fails to avoid a 'no-deal Brexit'. The degree to which the Northern working class stays with the Conservative Party, as well as the degree to which libertarian-leaning Conservative MPs return to the cabinet in a post-deal cabinet shake-up, will determine how strong the bonds are between the new Conservative electorate and the Johnson government's appeal to the right. Second, future papers can employ the Third Way approach to other cross-national examples, such as to the French National Rally, populism across the political spectrum in Germany, or could depart from Western Europe entirely to examine the rise of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and his continued grip on populist support. Third, scholars should examine the Conservative Party's 'libertarian-authoritarian' dichotomy that was described at length by this paper's interviewees, both with respect to the Conservative Party and with respect to other political parties around the world. For instance, future studies may ask whether this dichotomy is useful in understanding contemporary or historical political realignments, with or without respect to populism.

Finally, this paper holds that disaffected voters and politicians will quickly establish a feedback loop that advocates against globalization, supranational unions, and socioeconomic elites in the education system. As such, a fourth area in which both policymakers and researchers should continue to explore is the impact of increasing income inequality and urban economic prosperity that globalism has produced. The policymaking and scholarly communities should pay special attention to the impact of

supranationalism on the collective identity and collective psyche of rural populations. For instance, scholars should test whether or not successful government interventions that redistribute some of the earnings of globalization's 'winners' to globalization's 'losers' are successful at breaking this anti-political feedback loop and restoring the honor and self-image within rural communities that have seen stagnant wages, high unemployment, or underdeveloped infrastructure. Researchers should also examine the effect of mainstream parties' austerity policies on third-party populist rhetoric.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DATA

Total interviewees	15
Job Title*	
Parliamentary assistant or staffer	8
Senior parliamentary staffer, communications officer, or senior office manager	5
Local Councilor	2
Young Conservatives member	2
Member of Parliament	1
Parliamentary assistant or staffer	
Voted to Remain	5
Voted to Leave	9
Did not disclose	1

* Includes overlapping job titles

APPENDIX B: LIST OF CODED THEMES AND EXAMPLES

<u>Theme Categories</u>

	Supplied and Demanded Populism	*Brexit*	*Conservative Party Change*	*Other*
Themes	Corruption*	Chequers plan**	2019 Election:***	British Commonwealth*
	Economic anxiety***	European Research Group**	Messaging**	Devolution**
	Globalization***	Foreign labor***	New composition***	Dominic Cummings**
	England/Wales**	Healthcare/NHS***	New electorate***	Dominic Grieve*
	English Midlands*	Irish backstop**	New intake***	Jeremy Corbyn**
	Etonianism/'Oxbridge'***	Labour Party/'failures'***	Red Wall**	John Bercow**
	Euroscepticism***	Leavers***	'Authoritarians'/'Whigs'***	Keir Starmer*
	'Federal Europe'**	'Nasty'/'messy' politics**	Boris Johnson***	Nigel Farage***
	Feedback loop***	Nigel Farage/UKIP***	David Cameron***	Northern Ireland**
	Immigration***	Protectionism**	'Do what it takes to win'***	Priti Patel***
	Nationalism**	Remainers***	John Major*	Scottish independence**
	Northern England**	Tory Reform Group**	'Libertarians'/'Tories'***	Social media**
	Sovereignty***	Withdrawal Agreement(s)**	Margaret Thatcher**	Tony Blair*
	Working class***	Young vs Old Leavers*	One-Nation Conservatism**	
			Theresa May**	

* Least frequently mentioned
** Commonly mentioned
*** Always/almost always mentioned; highest frequency topics

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