The (Anti-)Politics of #GE2017:
Funneling Frustration in a Divided Democracy
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Introduction

'All general elections are interesting; some are surprising; only a few can be described as astonishing', David Denver notes in his contribution to this volume, 'The latter certainly applies to 2017'. This is certainly true but what made the election truly astonishing was the emergence of anti-political sentiment as a key resource for a mainstream party channelled through a particular blend of hybrid populism. In order to develop this argument and dissect what might be termed the (anti-)politics of #GE2017 this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section seeks to place #GE2017 within its broader historical and comparative context and places particular emphasis on the post-Brexit collapse of UKIP and how this changed the political landscape in ways that Labour would later exploit. The second section develops this argument by arguing that 'the Corbyn effect' was essentially synonymous with the adoption of a populist strategy that sought to re-frame the Labour Party as a fresh, new, anti-political, anti-establishment 'outsider' party. This re-positioning of the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn represents arguably the most 'astonishing' element of the 2017 General Election and helps explain how the party exceeded expectations to secure 'a glorious defeat'. The final section steps back to reflect on the long-terms risks of this strategy in terms of the perils of playing with populism.

1.   The Anti-Political Context of #GE2017

The aim of this section is to provide the historical foundations and social context that framed the (anti-)politics of #GE2017, in general, and the strategic positioning of the Labour Party, in particular. It therefore begins from a fairly broad focus on anti-politics and narrows down to a focus on British politics in the run up to #GE2017. The core argument is that the political opportunity structure within the British party system altered significantly in the wake of Brexit and that this allowed the Labour Party to adopt an explicitly anti-political 'outsider' status under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. It was the replacement of one anti-political lightning rod (i.e. UKIP) with another (i.e. 'New Old' Labour). But in terms of understanding this transition it is necessary to take five steps. The first step simply acknowledges the existence of a burgeoning and international seam of scholarship on democratic decline and political disaffection within which the words 'death', 'end', 'suicide', 'crisis' and 'hatred' loom large (see, for example, Tormey, 2015; Roberts, 2017). This literature reveals not only the rise of anti-political sentiment in advanced liberal democracies but also the rise of populist politicians and 'insurgent parties' in light of the widespread perception amongst large sections of the public that democratic politics is somehow failing. The existence of anti-political sentiment in the UK is therefore by no means exceptional but what might be more unique from a comparative perspective is the manner in which

#GE2017 involved a mainstream party stepping into the anti-political space created by the implosion of an insurgent party.

Our second step is therefore concerned with understanding the social and economic drivers of anti-political sentiment and how they might relate to the British context. Two drivers or explanations deserve brief comment. The first is the economic inequality perspective that highlights 'overwhelming evidence of powerful trends toward greater income and wealth inequality in the West, based on the rise of the knowledge economy, technological automation, and the collapse of manufacturing industry, global flows of labor, goods, peoples, and capital (especially the inflow of migrants and refugees), the erosion of organized labor, shrinking welfare safety-nets, and neo-liberal austerity policies' (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). It is not just that economic inequality is increasing but also that levels of economic insecurity are increasing. The 'gig economy' demands workers that are highly educated, hyper-mobile and exist in a precarious economic position where security and social protections are scarce commodities. In a manner that offers the first hint of a new axis or bifurcation within British politics (discussed below), the critical element of the economic inequality perspective is that the nature of work and employment is changing rapidly. If you are older, less educated or live beyond thriving cities then securing well-paid or long-term employment is increasingly difficult. However, even if you are young, educated and live in the sunlit cosmopolitan uplands of Cambridge, Oxford, Bristol or Exeter then work is still likely to be a fairly precarious endeavour.

This argument flows into a focus on the second and related explanation for increasing 'anti-politics': the cultural backlash theory. Democratic disaffection from this perspective is not a purely economic phenomenon but is in large part a reaction against progressive cultural change. Public support for progressive values such as cosmopolitanism, feminism, environmentalism, etc., were to some extent based on the security delivered through post-war economic growth. In a period of global economic austerity the 'cultural escalator' appears to have stopped or even to have gone into reverse in some countries as public commitment to progressive values has waned. 'The silent revolution of the 1970s' Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris conclude 'appears to have spawned an angry and resentful counter-revolutionary backlash today (2016, p.5).'

The third step involves a shift from these broad international explanations of social and political change to a consideration of their relevance in the British context. In this regard the rise and role of UKIP is critical. Put very simply, as the work of Goodwin and Milazzo (2015) illustrates, UKIP rose to become the most significant new independent party in post-war British politics by recognising and to some extent cultivating anti-political sentiment as a political resource (i.e. as a commodity to be tapped into and exploited). Under Nigel Farage, UKIP presented a populist and simple critique of mainstream politics' 'establishment elites' that focused on their perceived failure to control immigration. The party therefore cultivated a reputation as an 'outsider' or 'insurgent' party that was willing to challenge the mainstream on behalf of 'the common people' or 'great British public'. In doing so they emphasised the growth of economic inequality and insecurity while highlighting perceived threats to British culture and tradition. Moreover, the UKIP 'offer' transcended traditional partisan and class divides in the sense that it appealed to those on the right who were concerned about traditional British values and European encroachment, and those on

the left who felt the Labour Party now looked down upon traditional working class sentiments and values, such as patriotism and flying the flag of St George. Carried on a wave of anti-political sentiment, UKIP enjoyed a number of successes in 2014 and 2015 that included winning 163 seats (+128) in the 2014 local elections, securing the greatest number of votes (27.5%) of any British party in the 2014 European Parliament elections (producing 24 MEPs), winning two by-elections in late 2014 and then securing over 3.8 million votes (12.6%) at the 2015 General Election. UKIP had fractured the traditional party system and exerted a strong blackmail effect on the mainstream parties (see, for example, Ford and Goodwin, 2014; Goodwin and Heath, 2016a; Goodwin and Heath, 2016b).

To some extent the influence of UKIP had already been evident in the form of David Cameron's Bloomberg speech in January 2013 that contained a commitment to hold a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU should the Conservatives win the 2015 General Election - a commitment intended to allow Conservative MPs to fight off the UKIP threat in many constituencies. It was, in fact, the disproportionality embedded within the simple-plurality electoral system that prevented the 2015 UKIP surge being translated into seats in Parliament but the result did reveal the manner in which anti-political sentiment could be almost sown, cultivated and harvested as a political fuel or resource. The subsequent Brexit referendum demonstrated the existence of an increasingly 'divided democracy' in which anti-elite, anti-establishment, anti-European, anti-mainstream variants of anti-political sentiment could coalesce around one issue: membership of the EU. With the benefit of hindsight what was particularly noteworthy about the 'Leave' campaign was the manner in which relatively simplistic and emotionally charged statements could forge a powerful and ultimately successful connection with both longstanding British cultural idiosyncrasies vis-à-vis the EU and also more recent economic and cultural social anxieties, notably concerning immigration.

The shared and arguably most critical, but under-acknowledged, element of the UKIP surge in 2015, the Brexit referendum in 2016 and the 2017 General Election was the role of emotional resonance (or lack of). As Alan Finlayson (2017) has noted, Brexit became a campaign of 'anti-political politics organised around resentment at past losses and scepticism about promised futures'. The sense of a loss of tradition, a mythical integrity, an eviscerated global status, a romanticised past plus a nativist and nationalist anxiety were all set against the perceived excesses of a distant European elite. The weakness in the response of the mainstream parties, politicians and 'Remainers' was arguably their failure to grasp why emotions matter. Against a backdrop of economic austerity and cultural anxiety the political appeal of the rhetorical emphasis placed by both UKIP and the 'Leave' campaign on 'putting Britain first', 'taking back control', 'strengthening borders' and 'saving money' tapped into a powerful source of emotive desire. This desire may not have been 'rational' from the point of view of a scientific evidence-based analysis but the emergence of 'expert rejection' underlined the manner in which emotions trump rationality. If you feel scared, threatened, alienated, pessimistic, trapped or unloved, then no matter how many times you are told such feelings are irrational the feelings remain true. As J. D. Taylor argues in his wonderful book, Island Story (2016), 'Politics has never been a matter of reason, but of feeling' and in this regard it is possible to suggest that UKIP possessed a far more sensitive emotional antennae than the mainstream parties. This leads us to a fourth step that connects what might be termed this anti-political momentum with the shifting political

terrain on which #GE2017 was fought: the emergence of a new bifurcation or axis within British, or more specifically English, politics (see Tables 1 and 2, below).

Table 1. The 'Old' and 'New' Bifurcations of British Politics

Traditional Post-War Bifurcation	
Tory	Labour
Urban and rural, educated middle and upper classes working largely within the private sector, or with family money. Plus some working class supporters.	Traditional working class and public sector employees, largely in densely populated industrial areas.
Post-Millennium Emergent Axis	
Tory	Labour
Backwater (but needing to expand their bandwidth into the cosmopolitan sphere).	Cosmopolitan (with elements of the backwater constituencies).

Table 2. The New Tribes

	Cosmopolitan	Backwater
Exemplar	Cambridge	Clacton
Outlook	External/Global	Internal/National
View on European Union	Relatively Positive	Generally Negative
View on Immigration	Relatively Positive	Generally Negative
Ethnicity	Diverse/Integrated	Generally White/Polarised
Dominant spatial features	Integrated transport, bright, fast-paced, 24/7	Limited public transport, dilapidated public infrastructure, etc.
Urban Geography	Apple stores, juice bars, out of town mega-malls, university buildings, etc.	Pit villages without pits, fishing ports without fish, steel cities without steel, railway towns without railways, seaside piers without tourists.[1]
Employment Sectors	Knowledge economy, entertainment, financial services, service sector, etc.	Food production, agriculture, call centres, etc.
Employment status	Precarious – gig economy, fluid, flexible, 'portfolio careers'	Precarious – seasonal, minimum wage, zero hour contracts,
Progressive Values	Likely	Unlikely
Orientation	Future-focused	Backward-looking
Age/Education	Young/Educated	Older/Less Educated
Anti-Political	Yes	Yes
Psycho-geography	Anywheres	Somewheres
Identity Profile	Achieved identity (via success)	Ascribed identity (via place or group)
Epithet	'Looking Forward'	'Left Behind'

Source: Created through synthesising the complementary social profiles offered by Jennings and Stoker (2016, 2017) and Goodhart (2017)

Such simplistic binary models are clearly problematic in terms of providing a refined and sophisticated grasp on an increasingly complex social reality but the research on which they are based does point to the existence of what might be termed an increasing 'social stretch' within British society and in many other liberal democracies. What Table 1 and Table 2 succeeds in illustrating is evidence of a shift from a relatively simple and class-based divide between traditional Tory and Labour voters (i.e. the traditional post-war bifurcation) towards a more diagonal, fluid and opaque political axis in which traditional voting groups have been splintered (see Jennings and Stoker,

2016). The aim of Table 1 and Table 2 is not to suggest that the traditional 'left'/'right' spectrum no longer matters but simply that socio-political linkages are becoming more complex. The traditional post-war bifurcation, with its layer-cake type qualities, is to some extent now overlaid with a more multifaceted post-millennium axis. At the heart of this new axis is a contrast between growing cosmopolitan (southern) cities and shrinking provincial settings or 'backwaters'. The latter are home to those who generally lose out from the forces of globalisation and are therefore loci of economic deprivation and significant cultural tensions. The Brexit surge was therefore largely focused within backwater coastal resorts of the East of England and large post-industrial areas of Northern England. The emergence of this new axis matters because the political demands placed upon political parties by citizens in cosmopolitan as opposed to backwater (or 'non-cosmopolitan' areas) are likely to be very different, almost to the extent of being diametrically opposed. The demand-side expectations placed upon democratic politics are therefore arguably increasing in terms of complexity. Subsequently political parties seeking to secure a governing majority will somehow have to bridge both worlds, both 'Englands' to paraphrase Jennings and Stoker. The implication being that parties will have to offer a broad political 'bandwidth' in order to straddle these increasingly divided polarities; which, in turn, heightens the risk of political instability, rupturing, failure and therefore increased anti-political sentiment.

This is a critical point. The traditional post-war bifurcation (Table 1, above) always demanded that the two main political parties adopted a 'big tent', 'catch-all', 'wide-net' – call it what you will - approach in order to have any chance of securing a parliamentary majority. This was captured in Anthony Downs' (1957) left-right, bell-curve and its emphasis on the centre or median voter. What the initial analysis of data from #GE2017 seems to be suggesting is that voter distribution may have shifted in a centrifugal manner. This shift towards 'two Englands' or 'two tribes' is crucial due to the manner in which it arguably makes offering the political bandwidth necessary to form a stable parliamentary government more difficult. It is also important due to the manner in which a critique of 'mainstream' or 'established' politics has been a key element of this dynamic. This emphasis on bandwidth bring us to a fifth and final step that focuses upon the collapse of UKIP as the main 'outsider' anti-political party in the UK in the wake of the Brexit decision. UKIP's narrow policy focus – immigration and membership of the European Union - couched within an aggressively anti-elite, anti-establishment, anti-mainstream, anti-political posture allowed it to attract disaffected voters from both the left and the right of the political spectrum. But the Brexit vote undermined its basic raison d'être and surveys quickly revealed a hemorrhaging of support; and in the May 2017 local elections UKIP lost all of its 145 town and district councilors. The party's dismal performance in #GE2017 (securing just 1.8% of votes, a -10.8% fall from 2015) was therefore not entirely unexpected. But what was not expected was that the UKIP surge of 2015 would be replaced by a Labour surge in 2017. The argument developed in the next section is that this occurred because Jeremy Corbyn adopted an explicitly anti-political 'outsider' platform that to some extent occupied the political space created by the demise of UKIP.

2.   **The Anti-Political Content of #GE2017**

The argument is not that Labour adopted a stance of raw or aggressive populism. But it is that Labour flirted with populist tendencies and inflamed anti-political sentiment by expressing outrage against the status quo, adopting a language of 'us' (i.e. for the people)' as against 'them' (i.e. for themselves)', offering simplistic solutions to complex problems and arguably over-inflating the public's expectations as to what any party could realistically deliver should it be elected. Under Jeremy Corbyn the 'New 'Old' Labour Party' offered a mutant or hybrid form of left-wing populism and in order to explain this argument a five-part framework is developed that focuses upon: (1) the 'Corbyn effect'; (2) the 'May-(bot) effect'; (3) the 'UKIP effect'; (4) the 'Youth-effect'; and (5) the 'divided democracy'.

In many ways it is not just #GE2017 that was astonishing but that Jeremy Corbyn led the Labour Party into the election in the first place (see Goes, chapter 4, this volume). In the event, Corbyn was elected leader with a landslide of almost sixty 60% (with the support of new 'registered supporters' who had been able to pay just £3.00 in order to vote) playing a central role in his election. In many ways Corbyn was already adopting the role as a left-wing 'outsider' candidate offering a distinctive shift that recognized the impact of both the economic and cultural drivers of anti-political sentiment. The challenge, however, was for him to broaden his appeal within and beyond parliament and in the wake of his leadership victory this appeared a major challenge. In June 2016, Labour MPs passed a vote of no confidence in their leader by 172-40 and the party's vote share then declined in each of the five by-elections held from October 2016 to Feb 2017 (excluding Batley and Spen). Theresa May's decision to call a snap general election was therefore widely expected to be calamitous for the Labour Party.

And yet it was only during the actual election campaign that the 'Corbyn effect' began to emerge and it did so on the basis of cultivating, attracting and channelling anti-political sentiment. Although strangely counter-intuitive given his three decades as a full-time Westminster figure, Corbyn came across to large sections of the public as something of an anti-political cult hero. 'Corbynmania' was driven by the manner in which it exploited a rich vein of social feeling by offering a candidate that appeared principled, straight talking and – quite frankly – 'different' to the mainstream. The unkempt appearance, the scruffy beard, the cycle-clips, penchant to taking days off and sometimes shambolic interview appearances simply reinforced a view that Corbyn represented something very different to the smooth talking, media managed 'professional' politicians that he explicitly set himself against. More importantly, Corbyn understood the role of emotions and personal contact. Whereas Theresa May adopted something of a bunker mentality, Corbyn set about a quite remarkable number of speaking engagements across the UK, said to have been 122 within 33 days, which proved critical in terms of allowing him to cut through his generally negative portrayal in the media. Even his fiercest critics conceded that his rhetoric and fierce criticism of mainstream politics was injecting a new energy and dynamism into politics and the more he travelled the country 'pressing the flesh' the more the polls appeared to narrow. Indeed, political apathy amongst many social groups suddenly turned into political hope and excitement as the once 'no hoper' Corbyn suddenly became 'a crowd puller'.

Unvarnished he was and Obama-like he certainly was not but Corbyn clearly connected amongst some sections of British society in a manner that had been completely unexpected. The root of this success lay in the manner in which the Labour Party, in general, and Corbyn, in particular, had undertaken a populist makeover in order to

capitalise on the anti-political mood that existed in the wake of Brexit. This strategy was first glimpsed in December 2016 when John Trickett, then the Labour elections co-ordinator, stated that 'We [the Labour Party] need to frame an argument about Britain, its past, present and future – but we will be doing that in a carefully modulated way.' That carefully 'modulated way' translated into a strategy that exploited the existence of anti-establishment, anti-elitist, anti-political populist sentiments. To some extent this strategy seemed to 'work' and what was clear with the issue of emotional intelligence and resonance in mind (discussed above) is that Jeremy Corbyn seemed to pass the 'cup of coffee test' with more people as the campaign progressed.[2] Mrs May, however, did not pass this test, which brings the discussion to this section's second theme and the manner in which the Conservative Party did appear to connect with anti-political sentiment, but in a very negative manner.

There are at least two ways in which the Conservative campaign managed to fuse with anti-political sentiment – one political, one personal – and, of course, the two are to some extent related. The first issue reintroduces the role of UKIP and the manner in which it exerted a blackmail effect on other parties. Theresa May's 'hard' Brexit stance combined with her promise to be a 'bloody difficult women' in negotiations, and in her attack upon the 'bureaucrats of Brussels' were all intended to reassure UKIP supporters that they could now enter the Tory fold. And yet, in making this shift to appease voters on the right, May arguably alienated an increasing number of more moderate supporters. As the campaign moved on, the Tories' stance seemed to harden, to the extent that May increasingly emphasized that 'no deal was better than a bad deal' and seemed to be threatening to simply walk away from the EU.

Put slightly differently, the more the Conservative campaign progressed the more it almost seemed to prove and sustain a number of negative public beliefs about politicians. 'May-hem' was created by numerous policy reversals - a 'Remainer' who would now lead the UK to Brexit, an opponent of an early election who 'reluctantly' decided to hold one, and – critically – the u-turn on a key element of the Conservative Party's manifesto in relation to social care and the alleged 'dementia tax'. The mantra of 'strong and stable', repeated robotically in every interview irrespective of the question, quickly emerged as an electoral liability that fuelled public concerns about machine politics and the 'on-message' politicians who could not think for themselves. Indeed, in a climate when politicians are widely perceived by the public to be detached and generally disinterested in the lives of ordinary people, Theresa May's approach to the campaign seemed almost designed to fit with such beliefs. A preference for carefully scripted media engagements and an almost complete lack of spontaneous public interaction increasing made Theresa May look aloof, cold, distant and almost arrogant. Hubris rapidly descended into concerns about nemesis but by that point the phrase 'May-bot' had entered the political lexicon and would forever be linked to Theresa May. Even a carefully choreographed photo shoot that was designed to reveal a 'softer side' to Mrs May backfired when the price of her designer leather trousers was revealed. Not only did this add fuel to the fire that she was out of touch but it also sent the wrong signals to a public that was struggling with the impact of austerity.

To recap, the argument so far is double-edged. Jeremy Corbyn ran a good campaign because he cultivated his reputation as a radical anti-austerity 'outsider' candidate who was vociferous in his attack on elites and mainstream politics. He promised a 'new politics' that explicitly reached out to different communities across the emergent axis

in British politic (Table 1, above). Theresa May, by contrast, ran a bad campaign due to the manner in which it appeared to confirm pre-existing prejudices about the political class and then to alienate large sections of her core voting constituencies with the publication of a misfiring manifesto. Rephrased, the political bandwidth of the Labour campaign widened as the Conservative Party's bandwidth seemed to narrow and this was arguably evident from the moment their respective manifestos were published. Labour's was distinctive in making a broad range of bold promises – abolishing tuition fees, renationalising the railways, post office and utilities, free childcare, guaranteeing the 'triple lock' on pensions, maintaining universal benefits, etc. – which really did attempt to offer a wide bandwidth: it really was For the Many, Not the Few (the manifesto's title). The Conservative manifesto – Forward Together - was unusual for the opposite reason, containing almost no 'retail' policies. This focus on bandwidth leads into a discussion of 'the UKIP-effect' (our third issue).

Often framed in terms of 'a revolt on the right' the rise of UKIP had also been 'a problem for the left' due to the manner in which the party sought to attract large sections of the public who felt 'left behind'. It therefore cut into the Labour Party's traditional working class vote and this is reflected in the electoral geography of its strongest results (economically deprived, low income, low education, low skills and largely white parts of the country). In the wake of the Brexit referendum and their disastrous performance in the 2017 local elections the dominant assumption had been that most of the 3.9 million people who had voted for UKIP in the 2015 General Election would now vote for the Tories, thereby helping to ensure the widely expected landslide. Research by Lord Ashcroft suggests that the situation was more complex and that around a fifth of 2015-UKIP voters shifted their support to Labour in 2017 (Ashcroft 2017). The 'outsider' status of Jeremy Corbyn with his vociferous criticism of mainstream politics and anti-austerity redistributive agenda proved attractive to many who had previously felt 'left behind' and this was particularly true for younger voters.

A fourth feature of the (anti-)politics of #GE2017 was therefore the role and behaviour of the youth vote. Surveys, opinion data and election results have repeatedly revealed that: younger people tend to be more disillusioned, disengaged and frustrated with 'mainstream' politics than any other demographic group; younger people tend to be far more left-leaning and cosmopolitan in outlook; but they are also the cohort least likely to actually turn out to vote (Sloam, 2017). The challenge for the Labour Party was therefore how to energise the youth vote in order to translate anti-political sentiment into support for a 'new politics' platform. According to the analysis of Ipsos MORI this is exactly what occurred as #GE2017 witnessed the highest youth turnout in a quarter of a century. It is estimated that 64% of registered voters in both the 18-24 and 25-34 age ranges turned out to vote (from around 43% and 54% respectively in 2015) and this may explain a large amount of the unexpected Labour surge. Younger voters appear to have been energised by Jeremy Corbyn's campaign and put off by May's 'hard' Brexit stance. More importantly what #GE2017 revealed was the existence of an increasingly divided democracy involving major inter-generational tensions. Younger people expressed themselves as 'left-of-centre cosmopolitans', James Sloam (2017) argues, 'reacting both to austerity politics and the cultural conservatism found in older generations and embodied by the Leave campaign in the EU referendum'.

The (anti-)politics of GE2017 therefore revolves around the funneling of frustrations within mainstream politics into a unique alliance in favour of a 'new politics'. It was

therefore less 'anti-politics' and more 'pro-politics-but-a-different-way-of-doing-politics' that managed to offer a wide political bandwidth that could reach across the new bifurcation that increasingly exists between cosmopolitan and backwater areas. Coming to the same issue from a slightly different angle, the data suggests that Labour managed to win over a majority of 2016 Remain voters and about quarter of 2016 Leave voters which, in turn, raises the question of how it managed to straddle that divide. One response is that the party were able to channel anti-political sentiment through careful strategic framing, it also offered a very positive narrative of social change (i.e. pro-a-different-politics) and – critically – the Labour Party focused on a far wider range of issues and policy areas other than Brexit. With reference to the final row of Table 1, Labour did succeed in terms of achieving strong support in cosmopolitan areas while also winning back a significant element of their traditional working class base in the 'backwater' areas of Northern and Eastern England. The Conservatives, by contrast, largely failed to reach beyond their core constituencies and this explains the unexpected narrowness of the result. But what it also reveals is the existence of an increasingly polarized society or 'divided democracy' in England and to some extent the critical element of #GE2017 was the manner in which Jeremy Corbyn was able to build a broad alliance – almost a social movement – through the utilization of anti-political sentiment. And while widely interpreted as a dazzling success for the Labour Party, playing with populism in such an explicit manner could also be seen as an incredibly dangerous game to play, especially in the context of an increasingly polarized society.

3.   The Perils of Playing with Populism

This chapter has argued that the astonishing element of #GE2017 was the manner in which the Labour Party adopted an explicitly anti-political, anti-mainstream, 'outsider' status (almost to the extent that it existed outside and beyond its own parliamentary party). It was a strategy that delivered 'a glorious defeat' and bestowed 'an inglorious victory' on Theresa May's Conservative Party. Labour succeeded in terms of cultivating and funnelling frustration with Corbyn acting as a lightning rod for anti-austerity, anti-establishment and anti-mainstream politics. He also forged a particular connection with the young, ethnic minorities and significant sections of the white working class who had previously been seduced by the promises of UKIP. And yet the extent or nature of this (re)connection should not be misrepresented; nor the existence of a quite remarkable post-#GE2017 situation be over-looked. Put very simply - and in a manner that chimes with Tables 1 and 2 (above) - the Labour Party gained the most ground in seats with the largest concentrations of middle class professionals and rich people, while the Tories made their biggest gains in some of the poorest seats in England and Wales. And yet to make this point takes little away from Labour's achievement; what it really exemplifies is the bandwidth 'stretch' that any party must now somehow grapple with in order to secure office. Furthermore, the critical issue that this chapter seeks to bring to the fore is how Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party made such electoral strides and what it might have cost in terms of playing with populism. Put slightly differently, the dilemma for any politician or political party is that success demands a certain level of broad popularity but it also involves being able to resist the temptations of populism (i.e. to be popular but not populist). Highlighting this dilemma is valuable due to the manner in which it: (1) allows us to reflect upon where the boundary might lie between political popularity and political populism; (2) to explore

why evidence of an increasing social bifurcation might create challenges that make the temptations of populism even more attractive to all parties; and (3) why this temptation must be avoided given evidence of democratic deconsolidation in many countries.

The first question forces us to reflect upon whether it is fair to equate Corbynism with populism. Although some have rejected this interpretation, it is difficult not to see 'Jezza's' success as synonymous with anything other than a distinctive brand of populism. There was an underlying and faintly sinister streak of intolerance towards anyone who criticised the Labour leadership. This led to accusations of bullying and harassment by numerous MPs who were unhappy with the direction of the party. The campaign utilised divisive rhetorical language based upon allusions to [corrupt] 'them' (i.e. 'professional' mainstream politicians, 'the elite', 'the establishment') and idealised notions of [pure] 'us' (i.e. the public, 'the people' or 'normal' people). The opening lines of Corbyn's first speech of the 2017 campaign made this clear,

> The dividing lines in this election could not be clearer from the outset… It is the establishment versus the people and it is our historic duty to make sure that the people prevail... We don't fit in their cosy club. We're not obsessed with the tittle-tattle of Westminster or Brussels. We don't accept that it is natural for Britain to be governed by a ruling elite, the City and the tax-dodgers, and we don't accept that the British people just have to take what they're given, that they don't deserve better.

It was a left-wing strain of populism that was as monist as it was moralist. It offered simple solutions to complex problems (usually a combination of nationalisation and increased public spending) and was particularly attuned to the plucking of popular emotions. It was populism aimed carefully at the middle-classes, working classes, the precariat and the unemployed; it was a patchwork quilt of promises designed to stretch over a broad bandwidth by allowing voters to focus on the part of the quilt that was specifically designed to appeal to them. .'Our job is to make Jeremy Corbyn the Left's Donald Trump', whispered a political adviser at Labour's 2016 Christmas party 'Trump shows if we take the anti-establishment message and run with it, anything is possible' (see Evans, 2017).

And run with it they certainly did, nearly all the way to No.10. The problem, however, is that playing with populism is the political equivalent of playing with fire. I would therefore agree with Ben Chu that populism is a dangerous political virus but would also dare to suggest that, at times, Corbyn and the Labour Party strayed beyond that admittedly muddy boundary between courting popularity and invoking populism. This risk or danger with populism, however, is that it over-inflates the public's expectations about what democratic politics can deliver and therefore makes failure to some extent inevitable. This takes us back to Bernard Crick's classic In Defence of Politics (1965) and his argument about 'the disillusionment of unreal ideals' that may be created by politicians who claim to be able to make 'all sad hearts glad'. This is not to suggest that, if elected, Labour could not have achieved a large amount, but it is to suggest that at times the social momentum that the anti-political rhetoric of Corbyn-ism managed to create might have overlooked both the innate, and inevitably dysfunctional, aspects of democracy while also almost denying the constrained capabilities of national politicians in the twenty-first century. Populist anti-political waves, like forest fires, can be easy to ignite if the right economic and cultural conditions exist in the sense of widespread frustration, fear and anxiety. But populist waves, again like forest fires, can be very hard to control or contain once a degree of momentum has been established;

their destructive democratic power misunderstood until a dark and sometimes authoritarian situation has developed.

Let me just underline and reiterate that I am not suggesting that if Jeremy Corbyn had been (or ever is) elected as Prime Minister that this would have inevitably led to a situation of authoritarian rule. I'm simply highlighting the manner in which his campaign arguably adopted a risky strategy by playing with populism and that there was something both distinctive and worrying about the ease with which this occurred and its potential implications. From a democratic perspective UKIP's rise was arguably disconcerting but such concerns were to some extent allayed by the fact that it was so clearly a populist insurgency by an outsider party against the mainstream. A Corbyn-fuelled Labour victory in #GE2017 might have given more cause for concern due to the manner in which populism would have infiltrated the mainstream. Anyone wanting to understand this argument in more detail would be well served by reading John Lukacs' Democracy and Populism (2005) as it underlines how populism is fuelled by the cultivation of fear and hatred that inevitably tends to eviscerate public confidence in democratic politics and is therefore ultimately destructive. And yet this chapter's focus on British politics allows us to reflect upon and understand why the prevalence of populism appears to be increasing – advanced liberal democracies are possibly becoming harder to govern.

The crucial issue here relates to this chapter's repeated focus on the issue of party political 'bandwidth'. The established political parties are largely creatures of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that solidified after the Second World War around relatively clear and stable electoral blocs – the structures Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967) famously observed were 'frozen' to an unprecedented degree (Table 1, above). The evolution of society combined with technological developments and the impact of globalization has 'melted' those blocs which is captured, albeit imperfectly, in the contrast between the 'cosmopolitan' and 'backwater' voters, or between the 'somewheres' and the 'anywheres' (Table 2, above). The democratic paradox or challenge of governing is therefore made greater by the need to offer a coherent political 'offer' to a broader range of social groupings. The basic problem being that the more a party or candidate ties itself down to a specific policy position or decision the more likely it is to alienate a section of society whose support it needs to secure office. Put slightly differently, the challenge for democratic politics, especially in majoritarian polities, is therefore to build an electoral coalition that somehow straddles the divides created by the emergence of these new tribes while at the same time being honest about the limits of democratic politics.

In this context populism represents an easy option due to the manner in which it offers great political 'bandwidth' that can exacerbate socio-cultural or economic divisions in a manner that unites tribes against 'them'. It can be thrown like a net over the anxious or fearful, and it manipulates emotional triggers through the demonization of foreigners, bankers, immigrants, experts, elites, mainstream politicians, etc. Populism is not an ideology. It is a thin and dangerous political strategy to obtain and retain power. The paradox, however, is that in adopting explicitly negative, cynical and populist anti-political platforms in order to secure power politicians may themselves unwittingly serve to advance the deconsolidation of democracy (see, for example, Foa and Mounk, 2016, 2017; Jennings et al. 2017). The challenge for democratic politics is to resist the temptations of shallow populism and instead to take the more difficult path

that seeks to redefine, reinvigorate and most of all reimagine the theory and practice of democratic politics in order to close the worrying gap that appears to be growing between the governors and the governed. This may be the core message arising from the (anti-)politics of #GE2017.

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[1] Developed from the related arguments made by Ruth Davidson in http://unherd.com/2017/07/ctrl-alt-del-conservatives-must-reboot-capitalism/

[2] The 'cup of coffee test' simply relates to whether an individual thinks they would enjoy sitting down and having a coffee or a beer with a candidate. It therefore emphasises subjective interpretations of whether a candidate is a 'good guy' or a 'good woman' over their party affiliation or policy portfolio.