

Political Science Department

Comparative Politics

The populist radical right in Western Europe:
Ideology and agenda impact on international
issues

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i. Acronyms and abbreviations

AfD: Alternative for Germany

ANEL: Independent Greeks

Conservatives: Conservative Party

DF: Danish People's Party

EP Election: European Parliament election

EU: European Union

EUROSC scale: Eurosceptic scale

FN: National Front

FPÖ: Freedom Party of Austria

FrP: Progress Party

Labour: Labour Party

Lib Dems: Liberal Democrats

LIBRES scale: Liberal-restrictive scale

LN: Northern League

LS-CA: Golden Dawn

PRR: Populist radical right

Ps: Finns Party

SVP-UDC: Swiss People's Party

Tories: Conservative Party

VB: Flemish Interest

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1. Introduction

The present thesis deals with populist radical right (PRR) parties in contemporary Western Europe, a phenomenon which has attracted an increasing amount of attention in both public and academic debate. The thesis has two paramount goals: conceptualizing and empirically assessing the common ideological fabric of these parties, and studying the political consequences of these parties at agenda-setting level. Two main research questions will be evaluated here. First, I will investigate whether PRR parties indeed share a common ideological make-up combining nativism, authoritarianism and populism. Second, I will try to demonstrate that PRR can have a profound impact on the systemic agenda concerning issues of international relevance, like immigration and the EU. More specifically, the proposition will be tested that this type of impact is not automatically determined by a single variable like the electoral weight of a PRR (Green-Pedersen & Krogsdrup 2008), but it is rather shaped by a set of dynamic variables and strategic considerations of the competing parties. In order to answer this question, I will lay out a set of hypotheses concerning the patterns of agenda-setting influence (also indirect policy impact) of PRR parties on their mainstream contenders. These hypotheses will be then tested in a single case study dealing with the impact of UKIP on the immigration and EU agenda in the UK from 2005 to 2015.

PRR parties are today extremely relevant as they raise a whole set of questions on the future path taken by liberal democracy in the countries where they have seen their support surge in the last few decades. Most studies on the PRR have focused on the major factors accounting for the extraordinary electoral growth of these parties, which has allowed them, in countries such as Austria, Italy and Denmark, to exert considerable influence over policy outcomes (Betz 1994, Carter 2005, Norris 2005, Kitschelt 2007, Art 2011). These studies take into account sociological, class-based and attitudinal variables to explain the electoral support for PRR parties. Another field of research has instead focused on the major ideological characteristics of these parties. The idea behind this line of research is that the success of the PRR family has to do with their distinctive programmatic supply, namely the set of issues and policy preferences that they offer to the electorate (Mudde 2007, Rydgren 2007). In a context of declining class-based voting and decreasing salience of the traditional socioeconomic cleavage (Mair 2002), the idea is that parties can attract new voters by proposing issues which resonate highly with them (Kriesi 1999, Mair 2002, Mouffe 2005, Rydgren 2017). The present study builds on the second line of research, as it seeks to single

out the key ideological features shared by these parties. However, this studies also goes a step further, as it also aims to fill a remarkable gap in the existing research on the PRR party family, namely the dimension of these parties' political impact (Mudde 2016).

Political impact can play out on two different levels. First, impact can occur through the more direct channel of decision-making, as parties enact and implement legislation. A plausible explanation why the question of PRR political impact has remained widely unexplored could hence be that these parties have so far largely remained on the sidelines of the political space, due to both external constraints and internal limitations. With the exception of Austria and Italy, no PRR party has so far entered government position in West European democracies (Mudde 2013). Given this record, it is not that surprising that the political consequences of rising PRR parties have been largely neglected. However, parties can exert political impact also in an indirect, more subtle manner (Minkenberg 1998, Schain 2006, Williams 2006). This dynamic is more relevant for smaller, niche parties which can thus hope to bring about change even from outside the mainstream. This type of indirect impact would occur as niche parties manage to alter the structure of priorities of large shares of the electorate and induce other parties to assume or coopt some of their distinctive issues in their programmes (Harmel & Svåsand 1997, Abou-Chadi 2014). In order to evaluate the PRR indirect impact, it is hence crucial to grasp some key dynamics of inter-party strategic interaction. The two dimensions of party impact and inter-party interaction are thus clearly intertwined, as political influence of a PRR challenger party unfolds according to the logics of parties' strategic interaction.

The thesis is structured as follows. In the second section I will carry out a conceptualization of the PPR party family. In subsection 2.1, I will point out that in this study the classification of the party family is steered by the observation of the ideological appeal of the parties, rather than by the shared sociological characteristics of their voters. In subsection 2.2, the major structural issues related to PRR classification will be discussed. Subsection 2.3 will instead offer an overview of the most influential scholarly contributions to classification, also touching upon some of their most remarkable limitations. Subsection 2.4 will then single out the core ideological features of the PRR family. Drawing on Mudde's (2007) seminal work, a twofold definition will be employed, composed of a minimal definition and maximal definition. The illustration will serve to avoid simplistic definitions and labels and provide a more far-reaching conceptualization of this much-studied political phenomenon. Finally, subsection 2.5 will seek to map the ideological profile of the parties most often associated with this party family. For each medium-large Western European democracy, the country's

main PRR party will be examined, with a brief historical note and the assessment of its ideological layout against the benchmark offered by the provided definition.

The third section will be devoted to the theoretical framework which will be then employed for the empirical case on the UK. The two main pillars of this framework, as anticipated, are approaches to party strategy in electoral competition on one side, and theories of parties' indirect policy influence on the other. Subsection 3.1 will review the most influential approaches to dominating the research field of inter-party competition. I will thus discuss the theory of positional or spatial competition (Downs 1957), as well as its revised version (Stokes 1963) and the alternative theory of salience issue or salience-based competition (Robertson 1976, Budge & Farlie 1983, Carmines & Stimson 1993). In addition, I will deal with key concepts which will then serve as useful reference points within the empirical case study: issue ownership (Petrocik 1996) and issue politicization (Carmines & Stimson 1986). Subsection 3.2 will then draw the attention to the cited dynamics of parties' political impact at agenda-setting level. The paramount notion of indirect policy impact of peripheral or niche parties (Schain 2006, Williams 2006), the ultimate object of the present thesis, will be discussed extensively. Alongside, I will deal with the related concept of programmatic contagion or issue cooptation, also discussing some of the main factors behind this phenomenon as identified by the literature. Finally, subsection 3.3 will set out the research design, by presenting the main variables of interest for the case study. As for the independent variable, a compound set of potential factors, based on the theoretical illustration, will be singled out, and will underpin four main hypotheses.

Section 4 will be devoted to the empirical case study of PRR indirect policy impact, through the said dynamics of programmatic or issue cooptation. In subsection 4.1 I will explain the employed method and illustrate the operationalization of the variables. Then, in subsection 4.2, the major actors at play will be clarified, namely UKIP and its mainstream contenders. Subsection 4.3 will focus on the agenda impact of UKIP as far as the immigration issue is concerned. To this end, I will first review the various parties' immigration platforms ahead of general elections from 2005 to 2015. Then, I will seek to gauge possible agenda shifts over time, by means of a LIBRES scale specified in the methodology part. Finally I will empirically test the cited hypotheses, by drawing on the parties' electoral results, as well as on survey data concerning issue ownership and public saliency of the immigration issue over time. The same process will be followed in subsection 4.4, which deals with the agenda impact of UKIP on the EU issue. The major difference is that a LIBRES scale will be

replaced by a EUROSOC scale in this case. Finally, a conclusive section will summarize the main findings of this thesis, also illustrating some possible limitations of the present inquiry.

2. Defining the Populist Radical Right (PRR)

Parties such as the French National Front (NF), the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the Italian Northern League (NL) have recently emerged as prominent actors in Western Europe. They feature more and more in public as well as academic debate. These parties are generally considered as members of a distinct family, indicated by a wide array of labels: extreme right, far right, anti-immigration, nationalist, xenophobic, populist, fascist and so forth. While consensus on proper definitions is still lacking, most observers agree that these parties do share certain policy objectives and rhetoric traits. These parties have attracted a great deal of resonance due to their staggering electoral rise in Western European democracies since the late 1980s (Betz 1994, Norris 2005, Kitschelt 2007, Art 2011). In countries like Austria, Denmark and Switzerland, they have managed to garner around one-fifth or one-fourth of the total vote between the 1990s and the 2000s. However, success has been more limited in most other European democracies, owing both to external constraints --such as majority electoral rules or high threshold to representation-- and organizational or leadership variables at party level.

Achieving a more accurate theorization of this political phenomenon is deemed necessary to improve and harness the vibrant academic debate on the topic. Before delving into the study of potential political impact of populist radical right parties in West European democracies, it is thus crucial to better understand the ideology which underlies the programmes of such parties. By drawing on the relevant literature, I will attempt to point out the core features of these parties, in order to provide an operational definition of what is meant by the party family of the populist radical right (PRR).

The goal of this descriptive section is to clarify the nature of the populist radical right and offer an overview of these parties' stances on international problems such as EU integration and immigration. The section is divided into three parts: first, I will discuss some of the major problems in trying to conceptualize and categorize the populist radical right, while also presenting some of the most interesting academic contributions in this respect. Second, I will provide an overview of the ideological fabric of this party family, which is constituted by a dynamic combination of nativism, authoritarianism and populism. Finally, I

will verify if these ideological characteristics are actually observed in the parties commonly included within this party family.

2.1. Ideology as a parameter for classification

A great deal of existing literature on populist radical right parties is devoted to classification efforts and aims to define the most relevant features which distinguish PRR parties from other parties. This section builds on this strand of research and seeks to single out the smallest common denominator of those parties generally associated with the populist radical right. Therefore, here I will lay down the necessary and sufficient elements which any party should display to be included in the populist radical right family.

In this thesis, attempts at classification will be guided by the observation of the ideological appeal of these parties, rather than by the analysis of the common socioeconomic characteristics of their voting base. The latter approach followed the traditional cleavage models like the one elaborated by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). These accounts insisted on the link between socioeconomic conditions and party choice, assuming a close tie between parties and their class-based constituencies. However, class-based voting and rigid party preference were downplayed by far-reaching social changes such as de-industrialization and the atomization of the working class, prompting scholars to search for alternative cleavages not based on social class (Rokkan 1997, Kriesi 2010, Evans & De Graaf 2013). More specifically, in countries such as Norway and Denmark, this pattern of social-structuring voting has declined dramatically to the point of fading away (Aardal, 2003; Andersen & Borre, 2003). Related to this, classifying parties by looking at key characteristics of their electorates is complicated by the increasing trend of electoral volatility, whereby voters are much more prone to switch their vote even in the short term (Mair 2002). Therefore, if one considers the political arena as an electoral market (Norris 2005), this study shifts the attention to the supply of parties, determined by their programmatic and ideological positions. This supply-side approach is here employed both to conceptualize the populist radical right and to later assess its impact on the policy agenda of other parties.

While authors have tried to overcome such limitations by connecting these parties to new post-materialist or value-based cleavages (Inglehart 1990, Ignazi 1992, Minkenberg 1992), a large number of scholars point out that the link between social structures and voting choices has grown more and more feeble, so that the cleavage approach to party classifications has lost some of its appeal (Mair & Mudde 1998: 216, Jungar & Jupskas

2014). With this in mind, it is safe to conclude that the socioeconomic or sociocultural characteristics of the voters are not appropriate criteria to theorize the category of PRR parties. The present work hence looks at the distinctive ideological attributes to outline the prototypical PRR party. This is indeed a preliminary step necessary to later develop the empirical part of this thesis.

Despite the richness in the relevant literature, the populist radical right family turns out to be particularly difficult to define, and consensus is still limited around the most appropriate criteria to distinguish it from other categories of parties. Before going through the most important literature contributions on the classification of these parties, it is worth underlining a basic demarcation line which separates the parties here analyzed from other far-right formations. Specifically, most researchers have made a case for dividing far-right parties into two different categories: “extreme right” parties and “radical right” parties (cfr. Eatwell 2000, March and Mudde 2005). The former label refers to those fringe parties at the far-right end of the political spectrum, with the crucial specification that these parties generally contest the democratic “rules of the game” and may endorse the use of violence to gain power or counter their opposition. Extreme right parties have often inner circles which keep ties with neo-fascist formations or violent militants. In contrast, parties within the radical right category generally accept the basic democratic principles (e.g. multiparty system, majority rule, government alternation), while still voicing contempt for many aspects of the current constitutional order. While such distinction is undoubtedly useful, it may sometimes be difficult to discriminate between the two categories, as extremist parties may decide to disguise their true political ambitions. This work exclusively deals with the latter category, and more specifically with the “populist” variant of radical right parties.

2.2. Classification issues

In stressing the definitional complexity surrounding this category, Hainsworth notes that parties which are generally included in it tend to be quite heterogeneous and thus difficult to capture under a single, satisfactory definition (2000: 4). Another source of complexity has been often ascribed to the fact that parties such as the National Front, the Northern League, and the Party for Freedom do not display a shared ideological pedigree nor are united in the same international party organization, as much as social democratic or conservative liberal parties do (Mudde 2000, Norris 2005: 43). Partly owing to this complexity, most conceptual frameworks of this political phenomenon are plagued by a

considerable “terminological chaos” (Mudde 2007: 12). Lack of clear-cut definitions and conceptual confusion have thus generated a plethora of different names for this kinds of parties, such as: “extreme right” (Schain et al. 2002a), “national populism” (Taguieff 1984), “neopopulism” (Betz & Immerfall 1998), “xenophobic populism” (DeAngelis 2003), “anti-immigrant” (Gibson 2002, Fennema 1997), “populist nationalism” (Blokke 2005), and “fascist” (Ford 1992, Laqueur 1996). As noted by Mudde (2007: 12), some authors even refer to these types of parties in more than one way within the same study.

Norris (2005) detects similar terminological shortcomings in this field of research. Theorization of these types of parties often falls prey to circularity insofar as labels like fascist, racist, anti-immigrant, and xenophobic tend to be employed without prior justification. Therefore, a more suitable term is found in the “radical right”, first popularized by Bell (1963). According to Norris (2005), considering these parties as radical right avoids prejudging their programmatic profile, and simply implies that they are placed on the far-right end of the political left-right continuum. The term radical right hence better serves the purposes of scientific inquiry compared to the colorful variants mentioned above, which are often the product of value judgments and seem to belie a pejorative connotation (Decker 2007). This study avails itself of the same terminology for the benefits just illustrated. However, the present study is concerned with a specific variant of the radical right –the populist radical right--, namely those parties which also add a populist doctrine to their ideological profile.

2.3. Towards a PRR family: major contributions

If one has to assess the political impact of populist radical right parties by means of comparative research, it is indeed crucial to first find a concise and working definition of what these parties are and what politics they embrace. This definition will also need to be universal and able to travel across different national contexts if it is to be employed for purposes of comparison. In this regard, terms like anti-immigrant parties (Fennema 2000, 2003) appear ill-suited as they may not be easily applied to geographical contexts where immigration does not represent a salient issue in electoral campaigns and policy debate. By the same token, besides the risks of circularity just explained, defining these populist radical right parties as fascist may not be a wise decision as the term does not tell much in contexts which did not experience fascism in the first place.

These classification issues have led some authors to cast doubts on the usefulness or even the possibility to attain a satisfactory conceptualization and find common properties shared by all populist radical right parties (Beyme 1988). Other scholars have attempted to flesh out a common denominator for these kinds of parties, but still qualifying them into internal sub-classes to attain a characterization as broad as possible. For example, in Ignazi's (1992) own typology, radical right parties are those on the far-right political axis which exhibit an antisystem outlook. Within such group, the author then distinguishes between *old* type parties, who display ties with interwar fascism while fostering antisystem sentiments, and *new* type radical right-wing parties, who detach themselves from fascist legacies while still taking an antisystem stance. The work of Falter and Schumann (1988) has presented ten core features which are found to be shared by radical right-wing parties, namely extreme nationalism, ethnocentrism, anticommunism, antiparlamentarism, antipluralism, militarism, law-and-order thinking, a demand for a strong political leader or executive, anti-Americanism, and cultural pessimism (Falter and Schumann 1988: 101).

Other scholars have attributed to radical right-wing parties a sort of oppositional connotation, stressing their “anti-everything” philosophy which is corroborated by the fact that most of these parties define themselves by what they stand against rather than what they aim for (Taggart 1995: 37). In the same strand of research, Betz (1994) has adopted a protest-party approach by arguing that radical right-wing parties manage to harness popular frustrations with the status quo, both economic and political, and thus capitalize on the voters' acute dissatisfaction and societal grievances. Lane and Ersson (1999) have similarly proposed their category of so-called “discontent parties”, who tap into popular unease with the political system and also tend to display populist attitudes and a charismatic leadership. This said, it is worth stressing that these discontent and protest features may also belong to parties on the left-to-center political space.

In his exhaustive conceptual framework, Kitschelt (1995) observes that most radical right parties share the ability to mobilize large shares of voters by placing emphasis and taking stances on issues which have been neglected by rival parties before (Kitschelt 1995, Rydgren 2005). These parties exploit the opportunity which stems from the trend of ideological convergence between opposed mainstream parties on several political dimensions. Such convergence may result from the vote-seeking motives parties to moderate their agendas in order to place themselves where there is the largest distribution of votes (Downs 1957). Yet, this pattern can in turn legitimize the narrative promoted by radical right parties that mainstream parties “are all the same”. In addition this convergence of the

established parties on the socioeconomic dimension may contribute to depoliticize that dimension, creating the opportunity for flank contenders to mobilize on a different dimension, generally the sociocultural one, and politicize new issues which resonate with considerable segments of the electorate (Kriesi 1999, Mair 2002, Mouffe 2005, Rydgren 2017). In sum, a peculiar feature of populist radical right parties would be their ability to shifting the political debate towards new issue which are deemed to advantage them and have generally not been addressed by mainstream parties. This is a topic which will be addressed in greater detail in the following sections, as it is particularly relevant to the dynamics of party competition and issue cooptation that this thesis is meant to explore. In a similar way, Meguid (2005, 2008) characterizes PRR as examples of niche parties, whose distinctive feature is to campaign on a limited number of issues, generally cutting across the traditional socioeconomic cleavage and largely ignored by mainstream parties.

Despite this abundance in scholarly contributions, as observed by Williams (2006), some of the classifications just presented include characteristics which do not seem to be the preserve of populist radical right parties. For instance, conventional parties too have been increasingly apt to capitalize on voters' widespread discontent by adopting a populist discourse, and to focus on new issue dimensions which are deemed important by large shares of the electorate. A further drawback is that in some of the cited characterizations of the PRR party family, features like populism are attached to these parties without prior conceptual argumentation. It seems that these parties are dubbed populist on the basis of common sense, whereas no systematic definition of the concept of populism is offered beforehand.

Several of the existing accounts, moreover, present a number of subcategories and subtypes, contributing to making the conceptual boundaries fuzzy and reducing clarity. List-of-features approaches to classification are likewise problematic, resembling a sort of garbage-can model. As for the typology by Falter and Scummann (1988), it can hardly be argued that all radical right-wing party display the entirety of those features at once –let alone the fact that attributes such as anticommunism appear somewhat obsolete today. Another of the features singled out by the scholars, namely antiparliamentarism, besides its vagueness, also seems more a trait of extreme right parties than radical right ones, who generally do not challenge the constitutional order (Williams 2006: 14). Antiamericanism, moreover, is remarkably absent in parties like the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), which one may find difficult to exclude from the category of populist radical right parties. In light the above lines of criticism, a more accurate and comprehensive categorization of this political phenomenon can only be achieved if one singles out the peculiar ideological characteristics distinguishing

these parties from the others. The next chapter will thus present the political vision that populist radical right parties in Western Europe are found to share.

2.4. The ideological fabric of the PRR

This part aims to point out the major ideological features of populist radical right parties, before moving on to investigate the dynamics of policy impact in the empirical part of this thesis. Drawing on the work by Mudde (2007) we will present both a minimal and a maximal definition of the populist radical right. The minimal definition identifies the ideological backbone of this type of party; while having the advantage of clarity and parsimony, it also risks excluding some parties who are considered by many researchers as members of the populist radical right family. The maximal definition constitutes a more inclusive characterization: although it runs the risk of making demarcations lines more blurred, it reduces the potential bias of exclusiveness, and may thus better serve the research ends.

Previous studies on populist radical right parties have attempted to single out some relevant ideological elements, which could contribute to explain the rise of PRR parties within a supply-side approach. In contrast with the view that these parties are simply protest parties (Betz 1994, Fennema 1997), it has been argued that they succeed in attracting voters by virtue of the ideologies and the proposals they put forth. Rather than simply single-issue parties or anti-everything parties with no clear programmatic profile, most PRR parties are today widely characterized as organizations with a distinct and full-fledged ideological platform (Zaslave 2004: 100).

As concerns the ideological profile of PRR parties, some authors have showed that they have increased their consensus by espousing a neoliberal stance on the socioeconomic dimension combined with an authoritarian stance on the sociocultural dimension (Betz 1994, Kitschelt 1997). However, the preeminence of a neoliberal position in the ideological outlook of PRR parties is rejected by the majority of scholars today, as it finds no sound basis in empirical reality. A party which seems very close to economic neoliberalism is the Norwegian *Progress Party* (FrP), whose membership in the PRR party family is in fact questioned by some observers and experts (Jungar & Jupskas 2014: 216). Contrary to the analyses stressing the neoliberal ingredient in PRR party ideologies, other scholars have observed that contemporary PRR parties have adopted a centrist position on the socioeconomic dimension (Kitschelt 2004, De Lange 2007), to maximize their electoral

results. To some extent, this repositioning has put them closer to the social liberalism typically advocated by Christian democratic and conservative parties.

Although the appeal of PRR parties may clearly have to do with their specific socioeconomic agenda, their ideology is better understood as one which prioritizes sociocultural and value-based rather than economic issues (Rydgren 2005, Mudde 2010, Abou-Chadi 2014, Han 2015). It is their position on multiculturalism, national sovereignty, and their populist and authoritarian attitudes which resonate with the electorate and are relevant to the “winning formula” of the PRR. Within this approach, Rydgren (2005) claims that the French FN has succeeded in devising a new effective “master frame” consisting of ethnopluralist views and an anti-political establishment attitude. Therefore the core of the new PRR ideology, which arguably contributes to account for these parties’ electoral breakthrough, pertains to cultural issues rather than economic ones. Adopting this sociocultural approach to the study of the PRR programmatic fabric, I will now offer an overview of their distinctive ideological features. The minimal and maximal definitions of the PPR ideology will be elaborated in turn. Moreover, for each of the core ideological features identified, empirical examples based on the policy platforms of West European PRR parties will also be provided.

2.4.1. A minimal definition

As concerns the minimal definition, a widely cited notion which seems to capture the essence of this party family’s ideology is related to nationalism. This term refers to the doctrine proclaiming the congruence of the national entity with the political one, namely the correspondence between nation and state (Mudde 2007: 16). The chief nationalist ambition in its extreme form, therefore, is the accomplishment of a mono-cultural state, to be pursued by a combination of “internal homogenization”, guaranteeing that the state is only inhabited by members of the nation, and “external exclusiveness”, meaning that all extraterritorial nationals come to live with the territory of the state (Koch 1991).

As underlined by Wimmer & Schiller (2002), nationalism in its factual manifestations is generally not limited to the ethnic dimension but also encompasses a civic or political dimension. The latter kind of nationalism implies that those who share the same values or principles are considered as members of the nation. This holistic approach to the analysis of nationalism was indeed adopted by Mudde in his seminal study of the populist radical right (Mudde 2007: 17). The advantage of using this approach rather than one exclusively focused

on ethnic nationalism is that of avoiding the well-known problems of excluding parties usually associated with the PRR party family. The downside, however, is that a holistic approach in explaining nationalism may result in conceptual confusion and blurring of demarcation lines. A problem with using nationalism as a parameter to draw lines between party families is that in several countries (e.g. France) the concept is a legitimate and rooted element of the political discourse, and hence it does not turn out to be a fruitful criterion for separating between party families. Indeed, in some countries nearly all parties formulate a nationalist discourse, albeit in different variants and degrees.

Adopting a less dichotomous definition of nationalism which includes both elements of ethnic and state nationalism combined together has the merit of reducing the just cited risk of exclusiveness in the classification. It is in fact common to see parties which display at the same time both the ethnic and the state version of nationalism, while parties promoting just one of the two versions are more empirically rare. However, even this broader account of nationalism may be still too vague and ambiguous. While nationalism so defined is the starting point of the core PRR ideology, focusing on this doctrine may not be the best solution as it does not distinguish between “moderate” nationalists (also referred to as liberal nationalists, see Tamir 1983) and “radical” ones, who generally resemble the parties of our concern. As a consequence, it is more appropriate to use the term “nativism”, which refers to a more specific form of nationalism enmeshed with xenophobic elements (Mudde 2007: 19). Nativism is a more rigorous concept which effectively captures the lowest common denominator of populist radical right parties (Mudde 2007).

Nativism

Nativism can be defined as the political ideology which “holds that states should inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state” (Mudde 2007: 19). This doctrine has thus a markedly exclusionary element, since it calls for an ideal polity completely free of alien or nonnative elements—which are seen as a threat to the integrity of the nation. Nativism is also slightly different from racism as the fault line separating native from nonnative elements may also be on a religious or cultural layer. Contrary to the broader concept of nationalism, using the term nativism has the advantage of excluding moderate forms of nationalism (such as liberal nationalism) which are not

necessarily incompatible with multiculturalism. Nativism thus offers a more fine-grained theoretical tool to distinguish clearly between party types.

Rather than with ethnic, traditional racism, nativism has to do with ethnopluralism, a key doctrine of the European New Right's ideology of the 1960s. This is the case because nativism holds that all races are "equal but different", and that the native is to be preferred to the nonnative "exclusively on the ground of its being native" (Michaels 1995: 67). In addition, a key aspect of nativism is its non-hierarchical nature: it celebrates the alleged distinctiveness and dignity of the own national identity, not necessarily its superiority over other national identities (Betz & Johnson 2004). Besides this, a corollary argument is that mixing different ethnicities or national identity will lead to social chaos and cultural extinction. According to Rydgren (2005), the substitution of traditional racist and supremacist views (clearly associated with the fascist legacy) with ethnopluralism was a key ingredient of the new "master frame" that may explain the rise of West European PRR parties ushered in by the FN's electoral success in the 1980s.

Within this framework canvassed by PRR parties, the boundary between the native and the nonnative is by and large shaped by values and arbitrary parameters. The doctrine of nativism so understood constitutes the ideological groundwork on which all populist radical right-wing parties build, and which informs all other aspects of their policy platform. For example, welfare chauvinism can be considered as an economic declination of nativism, as it promotes a social model where native individuals are privileged over nonnative ones in the distribution of welfare benefits (Andersen & Bjorklund 1990). Welfare chauvinism is thus an ancillary doctrine, while the core belief remains the strict separation between the own nation and the other, with the implicit preeminence of the former group over the latter.

In terms of policy positioning, this nativist outlook translates into firm opposition to migration, or at least migration on economic grounds. A recurring argument by PRR party members is that foreigners coming into the country weigh on the already overburdened welfare state and put downward pressure to workers' wages. Therefore, opposition is more strongly targeted against low-skilled labor migrants, while a more open stance is taken vis-à-vis qualified migrants. On their part, PRR parties promise to prioritize the needs of the native community and keep a check on the inflow of immigrants. In nearly all PRR party platforms, illegal migrants are not tolerated and should face immediate repatriation. In the British UKIP's manifesto, it is clear how nonnative elements, namely immigrants, are deemed threatening to the unity and cohesion of the national community –in line with the interpretation of nativism offered above. Accordingly, UKIP is in favor of a points-based

immigration system which evaluates the social attitudes of migrants to ascertain that they comply with the fundamental values of the British society (UKIP 2017).

Even more importantly, nativism leads a number of PRR parties to denounce the doctrine of multiculturalism, which is deemed blind to history and conducive to the ultimate disruption of the nation as a cultural unit. The value system which PRR parties claim to safeguard against globalizing trends and multiculturalism is commonly traced back to the Christian-Judaic and the humanist tradition, especially in the programmes of the Danish DF and the German AfD. With respect to anti-multiculturalism, AfD points out in his policy platform that it the government's duty to protect the German cultural identity "as the predominant culture" within the country (AfD 2017). Most if not all PRR parties contend that the national culture and traditional way of living are to be protected against alien and destabilizing influences. To this end, integration and assimilation are prioritized and multiculturalism is openly rejected. The FN includes in its party manifesto the commitment to promote the "republican assimilation", which is defined as more far-reaching than mere integration. Further, Le Pen's party endorses the transposition into the constitution of the "national priority", which is cited as a way to make the French citizenship a privilege (FN 2017). The DF in Denmark stresses its engagement to protect and strengthen the Danish culture, even outside the national borders. In addition, it expressly opposes the transformation of Denmark into a multiethnic society (DF 2002). In Austria, the FPÖ declares that it is committed to the Austrian national identity and the "natural livelihood". As seen in other European cases, the party voices utter contempt for multiculturalism, while it presents itself as the protector of the national culture gravitating around "cultural Christianity" and the German language.

In sum, the belief that only members of the nation should inhabit the territory of the state and that outsiders (nonnative elements) represent a danger to the stability of the polity lies at the very heart of the populist radical right-wing ideology. It is a first paramount ideological feature which all parties generally included in this family display in their programmatic supply.

2.4.2. A maximal definition

While the minimal common denominator of the programmatic profile of populist radical right-wing parties is arguably nativism, a maximum definition of this party family (Mudde 2000, 2007) includes two additional ideological traits: authoritarianism and populism. I will now more closely look at these two elements which, added to nativism, make

up the structure of the populist radical right's worldview (Rydgren 2005, Mudde 2007, Rooduijn 2015).

Authoritarianism

While literature on democratization conceives of authoritarianism as a term contraposed to democratic forms of state, the notion here refers to the social psychology tradition. A seminal contribution within this research strand is Adorno's (1969) elaboration of the "authoritarian personality". This is understood as a general inclination of submissiveness and deference towards authoritative figures of the "ingroup" (Adorno *et al.* 1969: 228). The mindset which underlies authoritarianism places much emphasis on aspects related to law and order, and holds that violations of authority demand concrete punishment. Drawing on these insights, Mudde then defines authoritarianism as "the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely" (Mudde 2007: 23). Altemeyer (1981) has built on the influential Adorno's account to devise his own definition of what he calls right-wing authoritarianism. Such attitudinal scheme consists of a combination of three elements: (a) authoritarian submission, (b) authoritarian aggression and (c) conventionalism (Altemeyer 1981: 147). These are attitudinal or behavioral clusters indicating respectively: (a) submissiveness to the authorities; (b) propensity to use violence against alleged deviants and those who defy the established authorities; and the (c) belief that all members of the society should uphold the traditional values and social norms. It is worth stressing that a key aspect of authoritarianism is the importance of punishment, which is directed against those who criticize the authorities or are seen as undermining the social order. Relatedly, an inquiry of the populist radical right ideology reveals a pronounced element of moralism and ethical conformism, whose infringements are to be punished promptly and severely. Interpreted in this fashion, authoritarianism can thus be considered as a sort of sociocultural mindset which adds to nativism and populism to make up the ideological building of PRR parties.

The attitudes just illustrated are clearly identifiable in the average programmatic profile of this party family. Populist radical right parties indeed emphasize in their policy agendas themes such as more effective law enforcement and "zero tolerance" against violators, which are often framed in connection with the migration issues. For example, the French FN included in its 2017 electoral manifesto reforms related to law and order such as the recruiting 15,000 new policemen and gendarmes, creating 40,000 new places in national jails with 5 years, introducing lifelong detention for particularly serious crimes with no

possibility of reduction, and restoring minimum sentences (FN 2017). As an instance of the said authoritarian outlook, the Austrian FPÖ as well as the Swiss SVP are in favor of deporting foreigners convicted of a crime to their homeland (FPÖ 2011, SVP 2015). Of course, positions regarding repatriations are also buttressed by the underlying nativist doctrine of these parties. Similarly, the Danish DF in its party programme considers of the utmost importance that “the consequence of crime is rapid conviction and punishment” (DF 2002). The Norwegian FrP supports a judicial system with stiffer penalties, stricter laws and more effective prosecutions, and also proposes to devote more resources to law enforcement bodies (FrP 2015). The importance of internal security and conventionalism (one of the three themes identified by Altemeyer) in the Swedish SD’s platform is quite effectively synthesized by their official slogan which reads “Security and tradition”. Further, the German AfD advocates measures such as the lowering of the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years, the enhancement of accelerated penal procedures, and the use of protective custody for untreatable alcoholics and drug addicts (AfD 2017).

On top of that, what appears another common theme in these parties’ policy commitments, is the idea that internal security policies should pay more attention to the needs of the victims than to those of the perpetrators. Pleas for more effective deterrence thus play a pivotal role in the PRR rhetoric. The recurring idea is that the current legislation is too lenient with respect to convicted persons and inmates, overstating social reintegration to the detriment of punishment and deterrence. Related to this, the Italian LN has recently launched a campaign to abolish the felony of excessive self-defense enshrined in Article 55 of the Italian criminal code, and has supported the introduction of a 4-months military service to teach how to use guns (Adnkronos 2016). In the same vein, AfD opposes the tightening of firearms legislation, which according to the party would impair deterrence and make the law-abiding citizens more vulnerable to any kind of personal threat (AfD 2017).

Populism

The third core ideological feature exhibited by populist radical right parties is populism. Whereas confusion is often made between radical right parties and populist parties, as if they were two names to indicate the same political phenomenon, populism is here considered as a doctrine which can be blended with other ideologies –being it a sort of “empty shell” or thin-centered ideology (Mudde 2004). Populism is indeed a distinctive attribute of some far left parties such as Podemos in Spain or SYRIZA in Greece or parties

like the Five Star Movement in Italy which are difficult to collocate ideologically but hardly part of the radical right. In the present work, populism is thoroughly discussed as it constitutes one of the three key ideological features of populist radical right parties (Mudde 2004, 2007). This is deemed a crucial effort, as often there is lack of clarity about the exact meaning of this concept. Defining what populism really means is fundamental if one has to attribute this trait to a certain party. In fact, Hawkins points out that “the label of populist is often applied without any systematic empirical justification” (2009: 1048).

Populism has been extensively studied in recent decades, and addressed from a wide range of theoretical angles. Ionescu and Gellner (1969) were the first to conduct a systematic inquiry of populism, but eventually failed to come up with a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon. While there exists a number of scholarly contributions which enlist empirical cases of populism, scant academic attention has been devoted to the theoretical clarification of the concept itself (Deiwiks 2009, Taggart 2000). The first successful attempt to set forth a theoretical framework for populism was made by Meny and Surel, who point out three major assumptions underlying any expression of the populist narrative: (1) the centrality of the people, (2) the betrayal of the people on the part of the corrupt elites, (3) the need to restore the “primacy of the people” (Many & Surel 2000, 2002). While Taggart (2000, 2002) reaches similar conclusions, he also adds in his illustration the key element of hostility towards the logic of representative politics, which is construed by populists as a device to strip people of their sovereignty. A further insight is that a sense of crisis or dire emergency is needed for populism to arise (Taggart 2002). In a different vein, Deiwiks contends that the perception of crisis is a facilitating factor rather than a necessary condition for the emergence of populism (2009: 2).

A fruitful account of populism is provided by Canovan (1981, 1999). She conceives of populism as a phenomenon which is tightly linked to the underlying philosophy of democracy: “a shadow cast by democracy itself” (Canovan 1999: 3). A central point of this analysis is that populism seeks to build its legitimacy by appealing to engrained notions of popular power and vertical accountability. In fact, populists claim that they alone give voice to the betrayed and frustrated people, whose sovereignty has been stolen by the nasty and corrupt elites. Moreover, Canovan argues that the seeds of populism are to be found in a fundamental tension which concerns all democracies: a strain between democracy’s “pragmatic” and “redemptive” faces, which are deemed complementary and both indispensable for the durability of democracy (Canovan 1999: 10). The pragmatic face is conservative and refers to the system of rules and procedures –with an emphasis on

constitutionality and the rule of law-- which are primarily designed to enable the correct exercise of public power and to avoid autocratic drifts. On the contrary, the redemptive face - -more transformative— refers to the view that decisions taken by the sovereign people can bring about effective change and foster the collective wellbeing. Against this backdrop, populism is found to emerge in the gap between these two faces: the promise that democracy will lead to a better society on one side, and the inherent difficulties of governing stemming from the need to compromise and institutional constraints on the other (Canovan 1999: 10). Hence populists exploit this sort of performance deficit of democracy, which originates from the clash between the need to avert majoritarian tyrannies and the aspiration of social improvement through government. Populist leaders promise to accentuate the redemptive face, by fully implementing the sacred will of the people. They cast themselves as mouthpieces or agents of the constructed people and promise to stop what they see as the political game benefiting the self-serving and colluded establishment.

With the above conceptualization in mind, one can see how populism is somewhat entwined with democracy and not necessarily at odds with its underlying functional logic. To some extent, basic notions of popular legitimacy and vertical accountability are integral part of the populist message. That being said, the reasons why populism may clash with democracy more clearly emerge when one considers democracy in its *liberal* variant (see for example Riker 1985, Canovan 1999, and Mudde 2004). Populists do accept the mechanism of popular vote and rule by the majority, yet they do not look favorably on the rights of minorities and, ultimately, on the existence of a pluralistic society. The people to whom populists reach out in fact refers to a community depicted as homogenous and virtuous, whose imagined home is the “heartland” (Anderson 1983, Taggart 2000: 95). Also their will, which must be the source of any political output, is constructed from above as a monolithic unit, thus removing the need of deliberation processes. Besides that, a further source of tension with key liberal principles lies in the fact that populism seems to care more about the community than the individual (Taggart 2000, Swyngedouw & Ivaldi 2001: 16). As a consequence of its negative attitude towards checks and balances, the rights of minorities and the reality of a pluralistic society in general, it is then evident that populism may result incompatible with some fundamental democratic principles. This is all the more so if one takes into account the influential polyarchy approach of democratic theory (Dahl 1956).

Having seen some of the most illustrative contributions, what lies at the heart of populism is the Manichean contraposition between the elite and the people. The nature of this contrast is framed as moral and thus leaves little or no room for compromise or

reconciliation. A widely accepted definition thus posits that populism is an ideology splitting the society in two homogenous and antagonistic groups: the “pure people” and the “corrupt elites” (Mudde 2004: 544, Albertazzi & McDonnell 2007). On top of that, populism includes the aspiration that political outcomes reflect the uniform will of the people, which should not be intermediated or reshaped in any way through the decision-making process (Mudde 2004). Moreover, a pronounced anti-elite sentiment, as said on moral grounds, is a typical signal of populism. Populist parties often call themselves the only real opposition force, as they portray both governing parties and non-incumbents as players of the same game concealed by the fiction of democratic government. It follows that in the populist narrative the status of politician tend to assume a pejorative connotation: all members of the establishment are considered as belonging to a sort of caste, whose sole ambition is to retain both power and material resources. As a result of the centrality of the people and calls for more direct democracy, populism may clash with representative democracy insofar as it views representative institutions as undue obstacles to the full empowerment of the people (Taggart 2000).

In contrast with the definition just presented, it is common to find interpretations in both academic and public debate which portray populism as the tendency of politicians to adopt a simplistic and straightforward language with a view to reducing the gap between them and the voters. However, this communicative strategy is more related to a broader trend of mediatization and personalization of politics (Mazzoleni 1999) and it is better designated by the term demagoguery (Mudde 2004: 542-543). Populism so construed, moreover, appears quite difficult to operationalize for empirical purposes. A second faulty interpretation treats populism as the behavior of buying voters’ support with popular decisions which may not coincide with the most optimal or rational solution for the community: a notable example is lowering taxes just ahead of elections. Still, this political conduct has less to do with populism than with a form of political opportunism, which is fairly widespread in the contemporary political arena and hardly the preserve of PRR parties (Mudde 2004: 543).

Conceptualizing populism as the belief in a sharp and unresolvable contrast between the people and the elite –with the former group who has to be redeemed and given back his control over public decisions— is a fruitful way to understand this paramount ideological component of the populist radical right. Political organizations generally included in this list seem to display the abovementioned indicators of populism. Especially salient is these parties’ agendas is the pledge to strengthen instruments of direct democracy, in order to

finally give voice to the people and their real needs. For example, the FN clearly embodies in its official slogan reading “in the name of the people” the idea that political decisions should reflect the will of the people, and that politicians ought to act as mere executors of their demands. More concretely, the French party wishes to expand the use of popular referendum under Article 11 of the Constitution to propose new legislation. The introduction of referenda to vote on legislation passed by the Parliament or initiate constitutional reform is also a key component of the AfD’s manifesto, which explicitly draws inspiration from the Swiss model. AfD also defines as the guiding principle of its programme the conviction that the “German people themselves, wherever possible, should be able to determine the run of political events” (AfD 2017). On the same line, the Dutch PVV aims to increase direct participation of the citizens, by introducing binding referenda (PVV 2017).

The proclaimed centrality of the people in the political process and the playing down of intermediary institutions are indeed fundamental elements of these parties’ political message. The second key dimension of populism as defined above is a pronounced anti-elite sentiment, which has a strong moral connotation. Some of these parties’ manifestos in fact include references to “career politicians”, who allegedly do not listen to the community but only to their pockets. The usual argument goes that all the woes of the time are to be ascribed to this group of selfish and greedy politicians, who have largely ignored the interests of the people. In its party manifesto, AfD epitomizes these notions when it affirms that “behind the scenes a small and powerful elite within the political parties is secretly in charge, and is responsible for the misguided development of past decades”. The party holds that this “political cartel” has generated an illegitimate status quo which only the empowered German citizens can halt (AfD 2017). As concerns this anti-elite content, populism creates a dichotomous narrative of “us versus them”, and constructs the “people” negatively, in juxtaposition to the external “enemy”. Such adverse entity may not only refer to the elite (be it political, financial, intellectual or judicial), but also to other groups such as migrants and ethnic or religious minorities. Collusion and conspiring is perceived not only among the politicians themselves, but also across the various groups other than the people. A sort of siege mentality is thus created, as if all outgroups were plotting together against the interests of the people.

In summary, what seems to bind together parties like the French FN, the Italian NL, the Austrian FPÖ, and the Dutch PVV is a combination of (1) nativism, implying the primacy of the national over the alien and the separation between the two; (2) authoritarianism, which professes obedience to the authorities and calls for more severe punishments against

perpetrators; (3) and populism, which aims to implement the unified will of the honest people oppressed by the corrupt elite. Most other aspects of their policy programmes are generally linked to these three core ideological dimensions. For example, one could consider Euroscepticism as an instance of a populist attitude specifically targeted against the European, bureaucratic elites. EU democratic deficit is also viewed as incompatible with the said notion of unconstrained popular sovereignty. Moreover, the concept of the homogeneous and pure people in the populist mentality is constructed as excluding outgroups, who generally tend to be nonnatives and immigrants. Nativism is so entwined with populism. Therefore, one can see how PRR parties have devised a dynamic ideological system which blends together the three cornerstones of nativism, authoritarianism and populism.

2.5. Assessing the definition: PRR parties in Western Europe

This section provides an overview of the most electorally significant populist radical right parties in Western Europe. The parties here evaluated are generally included in the party family of the populist radical right, in academia as well as in media. This section thus seeks to demonstrate that they indeed exhibit the core ideological features presented above. As already suggested, parties can be considered as populist radical right if they cultivate a policy agenda characterized by a combination of nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Mudde 2007, Rooduijn 2015). Such elements constitute the core of these parties' ideologies and also crucially shape most of their positions on issues of international character (Liang 2007). These remarks stem from the belief that parties should be classified according to their programmatic supply (Rydgren 2007, Jungar & Jupskås 2014), namely the key issues that they submit to the electoral "audience" (Schattschneider 1960) and the positions they assume on those issues. This approach is contraposed to the one which deals with classification of parties by looking at the social characteristics or attitudes of their voters, which instead represent the demand-side of the electoral market.

This study looks at the most electorally relevant populist radical right parties in contemporary medium and large-sized West European democracies. The guiding criterion to select these parties relates to their ideological profile and policy platforms, rather than the socioeconomic characteristics of their core electorates, or their membership to transnational party associations (Jungar & Jupskås 2014). The parties included in the examination belong to the party family known as the populist radical right (Mudde 2007, 2010, Rooduijn 2015, Verbek & Zaslove 2014), which was defined more comprehensively in the previous section.

Therefore, the attention is exclusively devoted to parties which lie on the far right of the political spectrum espousing mix of nativism, authoritarianism and populism, yet do not aim to subvert or destroy the democratic institutions. Rather, this latter category of anti-democratic or revolutionary parties is generally referred to as the “extreme right” by most scholars (March & Mudde 2005).

I will now proceed by describing the major PRR parties in each of the examined countries. The following PRR parties are included in the present examination: The Sweden Democrats (SD) in Sweden, the Danish People’s Party (DF) in Denmark, the Finns Party (Ps) in Finland, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the United Kingdom, the National Front (FN) in France, Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany, the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, the Flemish Interest (VB) in Belgium, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in Austria, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP-UDC, here SVP for simplicity) in Switzerland, the Northern League (LN) in Italy, the Independent Greeks (ANEL) in Greece.

It is worth spending some words on the borderline cases which were excluded from the present analysis. Golden Dawn (LS-CA) was removed from the analysis despite its considerable electoral weight in Greece (with 7 percent of the votes won in 2015), as it is considered by most experts as belonging to the extreme right party family rather than to the radical right one, in conformity with conceptual distinction just presented. There is some disagreement between observers and scholars on the proper ideological location of the Norwegian Progress Party (FrP). I decided to leave aside this party, as nativism does not represent a core feature of its political vision (Mudde 2007). The party has been plagued by internal frictions between its more moderate leadership and its more nativist wings, yet the former has generally prevailed through its use of expulsion and firing (Decker 2004).

Denmark: the Danish People’s Party (DF)

The *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF) or Danish People’s Party was founded from a splinter group which had broken out from the influential ultra-liberal and anti-tax Progress Party in 1995. The split was due to the contrast between “hardliners”, who favored a more confrontational either-or strategy, and “slackers”, who supported the politics of compromise and envisaged cooperation with the mainstream political forces to push their agenda (Meret 2010: 97). The new party was co-founded by members of the latter group. Under Pia Kjaersgaard’s leadership, the DF immediately sought to distance itself from its

forerunner by stressing the need of internal discipline –also resorting to expulsions–and a more centralized model of governance. These steps were part of the broader attempt of enhancing the party's reliability and building its image as a legitimate actor on the political scene.

In the first legislative election of 1998, only three years after its foundation, the party garnered 7 percent of the votes, winning 13 seats in parliament. The real electoral turning point came with the 2001 legislative election, where the party almost doubled its votes share with 13 percent of the ballots and 22 elected deputies. This striking result made the DF a necessary partner to form a coalition cabinet. Indeed, the party supported the conservative-liberal coalition government from 2001 to 2011, and had the opportunities to see some of its policy objectives implemented in exchange of its support to the cabinet. In this regard, the party had a pivotal role in the drafting of the restrictive immigration policy package adopted in 2002. The constant electoral growth continued through the 2000s although at a slower rate. After four years in the opposition starting from 2011, the DF took 21.1 percent of the votes at the 2015 legislative election, the highest score of its entire lifespan.

The political message of the DF reveals a combination of nativism and anti-immigration stances, populist and anti-establishment positions, and a right authoritarian attitude with a strong emphasis on law and order. The key components and the evolution of the party's ideological profile are discussed at length by Meret (2010: 97-143). It is worth stressing that the party was widely influenced by the agenda of the Progress Party from which it originated.

In its first years of activity, the DF embraced a position supportive of massive tax cuts and neo-liberal reforms, which were also the two cornerstones of the Progress Party's policy platform. The populist element was particularly pronounced, accompanied by calls for a less bureaucratic and less expensive administrative apparatus. The first ideological profile of the DF thus included a neo-liberal agenda on the socioeconomic dimension, reflecting the characterization of the radical right winning formula provided by Kitschelt (1995).

However, from the end of the 1990s and the start of the 2000s the party shifted towards a more pragmatic economic agenda and gradually adopted a pro-welfare stance, combined with nativist ideas and an authoritarian attitude in the sociocultural domain. In official party statements, especially from 2001, tax cuts were approached in a more pragmatic way, and it was made the point that they should not have a negative impact on the level welfare and social security. This effort to adopt a more social-liberal economic profile was arguably induced by the fact that the party attracted disproportionately more working class

voters. The same pro-welfare positioning may corroborate the finding that many PRR parties have come to adopt a more centrist economic policy agenda while maintaining an authoritarian stance in the sociocultural domain (De Lange 2007).

To justify the inclusion of the DF into the populist radical right category, it is important to draw the attention to the introduction of new specific issues in the party's rhetoric and programmatic toolkit. Most notably from 2001, a nativist agenda was promoted by placing much emphasis on identitarian themes like the need to protect the Danish cultural heritage from external threats –mainly posed by mass immigration—while avoiding the deleterious consequences of multiculturalism. Further, the anti-immigration discourse was combined with the said pro-welfare position, through the argument that incoming foreigners constituted an unbearable burden to the already precarious system of social benefits.

As concerns the authoritarian component of the DF's political message, issues related to law and order have gradually come to occupy an increasing portion of the party's policy platform. Again, nativism is effectively blended with authoritarianism in that immigration is often framed as a negative phenomenon for its alleged positive correlation with higher crime rates. Therefore, the policy programmes of the party, especially since the 2000s, included several references to measures such as the lowering of the criminal age to 12, harsher punishments for offenders, and way more resources to the police forces. A policy of prompt and effective deportation of foreigners with a criminal conviction is also a linchpin of the party's idea of law enforcement.

Among the core ideological features of the PRR, what seems the most marginal element in the DF is the populist and anti-establishment narrative. This aspect was clearly more pronounced as long as the party remained at the margins of the political space, and anti-elite criticism was mainly related to the responsibility of mainstream parties for the loose immigration policies and the surrender of national sovereignty to the EU institutions (Meret 2010: 114-115). When the DF entered the majority supporting the cabinet, however, populist discourse was particularly tempered since it would have not been easy to conciliate with the party's cooperation with the government. On the contrary, populist ideas and themes were especially salient in the policy agenda of the DF's "parent party", the Progress Party, which for instance advocated the introduction of frequent popular referenda and expressed disdain against both the political and the intellectual elite, both depicted as unproductive segments of the society (Andersen 2006).

Finland: the Finns Party (Ps)

The Finns Party (Ps) was founded in 1995 as a successor of the dissolved Finnish Agrarian Party (SMP). From its first election in 1999 to 2007 the party always increased its voting base yet never managed to take more than 4 percent of the ballots. The first remarkable electoral result occurred in the 2011 legislative election, where the Ps became the third largest political force with 19.1 percent of the votes and 39 elected MPs. In the 2015 legislative election, the party stood out as the country's second main party: it polled 17.7 of the ballots while losing one seat in the parliament.

The policy agenda of the Finns Party contains the core of nativism, sociocultural authoritarianism and populism which underpin the ideology of the PRR. As concerns the first element, the Ps is in favor of policies to curb the inflow of economic migrants and asylum seekers. Multiculturalism is seen as costly and ultimately harmful to social harmony. These nativist and anti-immigration stances became gradually more marked by 2007. In its 2015 programme, the party frames mass immigration as a danger to the integrity of the nation (in line with above conceptualization of nativism), and a seed for religious radicalism and ethnic conflict. The party similarly backs more restrictive policies regarding family reunification, citing the positive example offered by countries such as Denmark and the UK. The Danish experience is also mentioned with respect to the need to stop the practice of so-called marriages of convenience that foreigners may resort to with the prospect of a full residence permit. In addition, the principles of multiculturalism are particularly contested and more value is placed on integration and assimilation. Related to this, the party calls for the obligation for Social Services authorities to inform the Immigration Service if an alien is continually applying for financial support and should accordingly lose its eligibility for a residence permit (Ps 2015). In light of these proposals, the party can also be characterized as a welfare chauvinist. The above list of political goals is permeated by a tangible identitarian thinking. Indeed, a central element of the Ps's political rhetoric is the notion of "Finnishness" (Arter 2010), considered as a fundamental cultural capital which has to be both properly harnessed and protected from external threats (Ps European election manifesto 2009).

In the policy agenda of the Finns party, very salient are themes generally associated with a position of sociocultural authoritarianism. In particular, a high degree of conventionalism is revealed by the frequent references to what the party considers the fundamental values of the Finnish society, which are undermined by the degenerate standards (or lack thereof) of the "permissive society" (Arter 2010: 496). The party's rhetoric also

confers a crucial role to the traditional family –exclusively construed from a Christian standpoint—which is deemed the very cornerstone of the society and the economy. On top of that, the Ps takes a firm “zero tolerance” attitude vis-à-vis alcohol and drug abusers, also rejecting the liberal distinction between soft and hard drugs (Ps 2007).

As far as populism is concerned, it seems warranted to include the Ps in the party family of the populist radical right. The Ps expresses contempt for the political elite, constructing an irremediable conflict between the people and the establishment (Mudde 2004, Schedler 1996, Taggart 2000). As pointed out above, the elite which is targeted by the populist rhetoric may not be exclusively political. Indeed, the former Ps leader Soini has often voiced his disregard for the book-learned intellectuals and the “arrogant bureaucrats”, who distrust the people and are divorced from every-day life (Arter 2010: 489).

Sweden: the Sweden Democrats (SD)

Until quite recently, Sweden has lacked a prominent PRR party in its party system (Erlingsson 2014, Rydgren 2005). The populist radical right in this Scandinavian country is today incarnated by the *Sverigedemokraterna* (SD), Sweden Democrats in English. This party is fairly young compared to many of its transnational, having been founded in 1988 as a successor of the far-right Sweden Party. While the SD was initially tied to neo-fascist militant formations, in the 1990s it undertook a process of moderation and distancing of its most extremist factions (Larsson & Ekman 2001, Erlingsson *et al.* 2014). Other steps in this direction were the renewal of symbols and the banning of uniforms at party meetings. The SD was so able to gradually increase its support, also drawing inspiration from the strategies of other successful PRR parties such as the National Front (FN) in France. These changes enabled the party to increase its local representation at the 2002 and 2006 elections (Erlingsson *et al.* 2014). At national level, the SD’s electoral breakthrough occurred in the 2010 legislative election, when the party first entered the parliament with a vote share 5.7 percent and 20 elected deputies. The SD saw its electoral consensus surge by the following 2014 legislative election, where it polled 12.9 percent of the ballots and 14 percent of the available seats.

As suggested above, the programmatic profile of the SD has evolved significantly over the years. Especially since the mid-2000s, under the charismatic leadership of Jimmie Åkesson, the party made efforts to mimic other rising radical right forces in Europe, such as the Danish People’s Party (DF). Ideological ties to neo-Nazi and fascist groups were

effectively severed, in order to legitimize the party's image in the eyes of the more moderate segments of the electorate. This move included a fresh emphasis within the policy platform on new issues such as opposition to European integration and crime-related matters (Erlingsson *et al.* 2014). While several scholars question the finding that the SD has truly renounced to its neo-Nazi and fascist legacy (Lindberg 2010), other studies convene that the party today reveals an ideological profile of ethno-nationalism, combined with a pronounced social conservatism and an overall centrist economic position (Rydgren 2006: 108–116).

The policies and the rhetoric of the SD indeed resemble the core ideological outlook of the PRR as presented in the previous section. A comprehensive account of the party's ideological positioning is provided by Hellström *et al.* (2010). In the SD rhetoric, cultural and value-based issues play a more central role than economic ones. The party is focused on identity politics and espouses a nativist attitude: it depicts migration as a serious threat to the wellness and stability of the nation, prefers temporary residence permits to unlimited ones, and proposes to introduce grants as incentives for foreigners to return in their home countries. The party also backs more restrictive criteria to grant the citizenship right to foreigners. Assimilation is preferred over multiculturalism, which is viewed as short-sighted and dangerous for the integrity of the community. With respect to the populist component, the SD tend to depict themselves as the “democratic underdogs”: they consider themselves as the only true democrats, as confirmed by the fact that rival mainstream parties refuse to engage in a fair and serene political confrontation with them. Further, common is also reference to the alleged betrayal by the established parties –most notably the Social Democratic Party— who have failed to address the real needs of the ordinary people. The party argues that politics has become excessively bureaucratized and instrumental to the elite's search for power and wealth.

Finally, law and order issues, generally associated with an authoritarian attitude, are particularly salient in the SD's programmatic toolkit. In its website, the party states it is committed to fight crime and, differently from the other parties, it takes the protection of the victim very seriously (SD 2017). The SD also denounces how the police force have been neglected by the ruling class. Further, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the party's preference for a restrictive policy towards drug and alcohol (SD 2017)

United Kingdom: the UK Independence Party (UKIP)

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) came into being in 1993, when the Anti-Federalist League, a single-issue party opposed to the Treaty of Maastricht, assumed this new denomination. The electoral fortunes of the UKIP were clearly shaped by the majoritarian nature of the UK electoral system, which tends to penalize parties with wide national support but who are unable to gain a plurality of votes within the single-constituency districts. In the 2005 general election, the party emerged as the fourth biggest party with 2.2 percent of the votes yet got no seats in the House of Commons. The 2010 general election did not change much for the party, who polled 3.1 percent of the votes and again fell short of representation at Westminster. A significant step forward was made at the 2015 general election, where the party arrived third with a 12.6 percent vote share and its first elected MP. The 2017 general election –after the successful Brexit campaign–marked the almost electoral dissolution of the party, who took a mere 1.9 of the votes and lost its only MP. Having said that, it is at EU Parliament level that UKIP achieved its greatest results. Already in 2004, the party took 16.1 percent of the votes and won 12 out of 78 available seats. The trend was confirmed in the 2009 European Parliament election, where the party obtained 18.1 percent of the votes and took 13 out of 78 seats. In the following European election of 2014, UKIP reached its historical peak, winning 32.9 percent of the ballots and 24 seats. This was the first time after 1906 that a party other than the Tories or Labour obtained the largest vote share in a nationwide election.

While the UKIP started as a single-issue party whose primary goal was the country's withdrawal from the EU, it gradually expanded its agenda and started to address new issues in order to boost its electoral appeal. In doing so, UKIP basically transformed from a policy seeking to a vote seeking party (Ford & Goodwin 2014: 282). Therefore, the initial Eurosceptic message deprived of a well-structured argumentation was enriched with calls for more restrictive immigration policies and a general contempt for the political establishment. (Usherwood 2008, Ford & Goodwin 2014). At present, the programmatic profile of UKIP seems to fit under the family of the populist radical right. In this respect, one can detect several signs of nativism, authoritarianism and populism in its programme and rhetoric.

Nativist narratives are also expressed by UKIP, and serve to underpin its positions against immigration and multiculturalism. Just like its European PRR counterparts, the party strongly opposes multiculturalism, whose main supporters are framed as people with “little interest in preserving the British identity”, or with outright hostility to the very idea of it (UKIP 2017: 35). It is hence clear that nonnative elements are represented as a threat to the nation, and this conflict runs along identity and value lines. In sharp contrast with

multiculturalism, UKIP embraces civic nationalism and promotes an British-centered “unicultural” society (UKIP 2010: 13). It is interesting to note how this marked criticism towards multiculturalism is combined with a populist discourse, as exemplified by the assertion that “no-one voted for multiculturalism” (2010: 13). This observation clearly presumes the typically populist idea that politics is supposed to reflect the common will of the sovereign people (Mudde 2004). Within this message centered on identity, also active promotion of British values is regarded as a positive obligation of the government.

Populism is a distinctive trait of UKIP, which can be defined as an anti-political establishment party according to Abedi’s (2002) definition. For example, the party makes the case that all mainstream parties, whether in government or in opposition, are essentially the same, and do not really represent their people. Related to this is the frequent reference to the “LibLabCon” consensus and the conviction that the positions of all mainstream parties are basically undistinguishable (Pareschi 2016). The party thus portrays itself as the only force willing and capable to reverse the status quo whereby “ordinary people are being sold out by an out-of-touch political elite” (Geddes 2014: 29). Further, UKIP has often stressed that its policy proposals are informed by mere common sense, and aim to resolve issues which the majority of people deeply care about and are instead neglected by the old parties. This professed preeminence of the people is also implied by the calls for more instruments of direct democracy including binding popular referenda to initiate legislation every 2 years (UKIP 2017). According to Tournier-Sol (2015), the above populist, anti-establishment message was especially highlighted under Farage’s leadership, within the broader effort to attract a much wider share of supporters.

Sociocultural authoritarianism is suggested by the party’s strong emphasis on crime-related issues and its commitment to adopt a tougher approach in enforcing rules and punishing offenders. UKIP also favors the deployment of more resources and the recruitment of new policemen and prison officers (UKIP 2017: 39). In its manifesto, the party claims that its position on crime-related issues is the exact opposite of the lenient approach adopted by other parties. UKIP thus espouses a zero-tolerance attitude towards deviant behavior. The rightwing authoritarianism as theorized above emerges quite patently from the words of the party spokesman Peter Jewell “UKIP says: ‘If you can’t do the time, don’t do the crime.’ We think crime must always merit punishment. However much of a waste of a life it might seem to keep someone locked up, if that is what it takes to keep others safe, we will keep them locked up” (UKIP 2017). In addition, in what constitutes a typical PRR theme, issues like certainty of the sentence and effective deterrence are generally prioritized over human rights

concerns regarding convicted individuals. The party also endorses the UK withdrawal from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights, and human rights legislation is seen as an obstacle to the smooth functioning of law enforcement (UKIP 2017: 41).

France: the National Front (FN)

The French *Front National* is regarded by many scholars as the prototypical PRR party in Western Europe. It was founded in 1973, deeply influenced by the 1950s Poudjadist movement, the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) and French far-right formations such as New Order (ON). In its first ten years of activity the FN remained stuck at the margin of the political scene, but it later managed to broaden its base of support and stand out as an influential political actor. Between 1983 and 1984 the FN began to achieve double-digit vote shares at local and European Parliament elections. This rapid growth was partly due to a softening of some of its most extreme stances and the alliance with centre-right forces at local elections which had a sort of legitimizing effect (REF). In the 1988 presidential election, the party obtained 14.4 percent of the votes, almost doubling the score of the previous election. The 1995 presidential election gave the party a vote share of 15 percent. A major step forward occurred in the 2002 presidential election, where the party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen came second with 17.8 percent of the votes at the first round. However, he was decisively defeated by Jacques Chirac in the runoff election. The FN suffered a setback in the following 2007 presidential election, where its leader took 10.4 percent and ended up as the fourth most voted candidate. The party's performance improved in the 2012 presidential election: its new leader Marine Le Pen garnered 17.9 of the votes but failed to access the run-off vote. In the 2014 election for the European Parliament, the FN resulted the first party, with a vote share of 24.9 percent and 24 seats won. In 2017, Marine Le Pen came in second place with 21.3 percent of the ballots, before being defeated by a wide margin in the second round.

The ideological fabric of the FN clearly exhibits the core features of the PRR party family. According to Eatwell, the party has devised a successful political formula consisting in a combination of 'fervent nationalism, opposition to immigration, and a populist hostility to the political establishment' (2000: 408).

As regards nativism, the FN was deeply influenced by key conceptual frames of the French *Nouvelle Droite* (centred on the nationalist think tank GRECE), which popularized the ethnopluralist and "egalitarian neo-racist" ideas (Swyngedouw & Ivaldi 2001). The FN thus holds that ethnic-cultural differences are a matter of fact and cannot nor should be

eliminated. Nevertheless, they are seen as a source of tensions and social conflict (Taguieff 1984, Ignazi 2003: 92). Immigration was thus always rejected by the National Front as it was ideally linked to the eventual disappearance of French national identity –in addition to more crimes and a reduced provision of welfare. The exclusionary nature of the nativist thinking is evident insofar as distinct cultures and mores are seen as absolutely incompatible: different peoples have to be kept separated and this implies exclusion of foreign elements from the nation-state (Orfali, 1996: 130, McDonnell 2008).

Historically, this identitarian element of the FN's ideological formula grew more evident since the mid-1980s, when former Gaullist politician and far right intellectual Bruno Mégret joined the party. He contributed to give more of a theoretical substance to the party's anti-immigration stance, and to expand its policy platform (first concerned with security and immigration only) by embracing new sensitive themes such as identity and cosmopolitanism. On top of that, a rival ideological camp was identified in cosmopolitanism, depicted as a theory meant to cancel all national and cultural differences; loose immigration policy was portrayed as the deliberate effort to implement this perverse doctrine promoted by the enemies of the French people (McCulloch 2006: 4). When it comes to these nativist positions, another peculiar aspect of the Front National's rhetoric is that of *France d'abord*, namely "France first". In relation to the defence of the French culture, the party deemed crucial to model all future legislation around the concept of the French national preference. The 2017 presidential manifesto reaffirms this view, through its commitment to convert the "national priority" into a constitutional provision as a way to elevate the French citizenship to a privilege status (FN 2017: 15). National preference would entail special treatment for ethnic French in sectors like housing market, labour, healthcare etc. Along these lines, particularly from the 1990s, the party has expressed welfare chauvinist ideas with growing intensity (Rydgren 2008: 170 in Albertazzi)

A populist outlook is another primary aspect of the FN ideological architecture. As illustrated by its current slogan (*Au nom du 3^eleople*: In the name of the people), the party strives to appear as the real interpreter and mouthpiece of the "man in the street". Therefore, in the programme of the FN, we do find traces of the centrality of the people as a major indicator of populist attitude (Meny & Surel 2002, Taggart 2000). In terms of concrete policy goals, these notions result in the pledge to enhance people's involvement in the political process, for example by setting up binding legislative referenda (FN 2017: 3). In the FN ideology, this pre-eminence of the people is further accompanied by the negative side of the populist worldview, namely its marked anti-elite sentiment. The party has then successfully

employed a populist strategy by pitting the monolithic and honest people against the corrupt establishment (Betz 1993, Rydgren 2008). All traditional parties are depicted as constituting a single, corrupt political class, while the FN presents itself as the only party with “clean hands” and capable of properly represent the people (Marcus 1995: 167). This attempt of blurring lines between the rival right and left parties also accounts for the frequent use of the label *bande des quatre* (“gang of four”) when mentioning the mainstream parties (Swyngedouw & Ivaldi 2001: 12). As noted by Ignazi (2003: 98), the FN leadership assumed a more explicit populist attitude following the 8th national congress in 1990, when it was first recognized the need to intensify the anti-establishment message as a way to become a truly catch-all party and appear as a viable alternative to the socialist electorate.

Finally, the FN’s rhetoric features a great deal of sociocultural authoritarianism. Law and order issues are clearly salient in the party platform, especially after the 9/11 attacks (Rydgren 2008: 168): the new approach envisaged by the FN included a “zero tolerance” plan including longer sentences, increased jail capacity and a referendum for the reintroduction of the death penalty (Shields 2007: 282). Within this authoritarian framework, migration is considered a problem not only on the identitarian grounds described above, but also crucially for reasons of internal security. The FN has thus set up an effective and simple tool to construe social reality, whereby more migrants are automatically associated with diminished security. As a sub-dimension of this authoritarian outlook, sociocultural conservatism is also pronounced, as indicated by the professed attachment to traditional moral values, including rigid gender roles, the importance of hierarchy and discipline, and adherence to a traditionalist version of Catholicism (Ignazi 2003: 106). The choice of dealing with security already in the second chapter of the 2017 FN manifesto further denotes the central place occupied by authoritarianism in the party’s political narrative.

Germany: Alternative for Germany (AfD)

Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was founded in 2013 by a group including conservative and liberal economist, journalists and businessmen who were against the bailout measures to tackle the Eurozone debt crisis. In its first federal election of 2013, the party nearly surpassed the 5 percent threshold to obtain representation in the *Bundestag*, after taking 4.7 percent of the votes. A better result was achieved at the following European Parliament election in 2014; this time AfD garnered 7.1 percent of the votes and managed to win 7 seats. A constant aspect of AfD has been the presence of acute internal divisions,

especially between the more business-oriented exponents and those more focused on identity politics and an anti-immigration platform. Also due to these ideological heterogeneity, it may result difficult to fit this party under the populist radical right category.

While the primary feature of the early AfD's ideology was soft Euroscepticism and opposition to further delegation of federal powers to the EU without prior referendum (Arzheimer 2015), the party soon started to expand its policy platform and mention new objectives such as protecting the German national identity from foreign (chiefly Muslim) influences, adopting a tougher immigration policy, setting up a more effective judicial system and a "zero tolerance" approach in combating crime, and upholding traditional family values for example by rejecting same-sex marriages and adoptions for homosexual couples.

In light of this, the German party seems to have followed a similar pathway as UKIP: it started as a single-issue party focused on (soft) Euroscepticism, to later broaden its policy agenda in order to attract new segments of voters. As of today, AfD seems to conform with the conceptualization of populist radical right parties hereby adopted.

As far as nativism is concerned, the party started to sharpen its anti-immigration position in particular after the leadership change which made Frauke Petry the leader of the party in June 2015. She effectively sought to politicize new sensitive issues, such as management of the refugee crisis and internal security. In fact, references to national identity and sharp anti-immigrations views were basically absent from the 2013 and 2014 party platforms, as revealed for instance by the statement that "it is part of a humane treatment that people who are entitled to be granted asylum are allowed to work here" in the 2013 party programme (Arzheimer 2015, Berbuir et al 2015). In contrast, identity-based language and ethnocentrism were accentuated at the party congress in 2016. Here, AfD senior members argued that Islam does not belong in Germany and advocated the abolition of Muslim symbols such as minarets, burkas and the call to prayer (Wall Street Journal 6/05/2016). The party so explicitly asserts the predominant place in society of the German culture, which is traced back to Christianity, humanistic values and Roman law (AfD 2017: 46). Foreign influences are met with suspicion, as evidenced by the party's wholesale rejection of multiculturalism. Tellingly, Islam is devoted a separated section, where it is argued that some Islamic practices are utterly incompatible with the German system of values. After the leadership change in 2015, it can be argued that the party has shifted towards more far right positions on the sociocultural axis.

The populist component in the AfD's programme was evaluated in a study by Berbuir *et al.* (2015) through a qualitative content analysis of several of the party's official statements

and manifestos. AfD indeed can be characterized as populist in that its senior members have frequently launched a sharp critique towards the party system as a whole. In their political discourse, they have deliberately pitted the everyday, honest people against the political elite, which is instead malicious and divorced from reality. Common is the observation that the standard mechanism of government and opposition is not working any more, as the established parties do not really strive to represent their voters, whereas they are only interested in keeping their power positions (Berbair *et al.* 2015: 164). This conviction is also reiterated in the official party programme, where it is argued that the most serious problems of the country are to be ascribed to a “political class of career politicians whose foremost interest is to retain their own power base, status and material well-being” (AfD 2017: 7). The party hence presents itself as the only cure for a rotten system, where the will of the people is constantly neglected. In line with Canovan’s conceptualization of populism, the AfD thus elevates itself as the true defender of democracy (by shedding light on its “redemptive face”) and the only actor willing and able to address the needs of the citizens (Canovan 1999). Furthermore, another possible trace of the party’s populism –although insufficient in itself to indicate its presence— can be found in its commitment to boost popular participation in the decision-making process by introducing binding referenda to both propose draft legislation and vote on bills passed by the Bundestag (AfD 2017: 8). The theoretical groundwork for these proposals is the idea that political outcomes should mirror the common will of the people (Mudde 2004). This view is also reflected by the party’s “fundamental conviction that the German people themselves, wherever possible, should be able to determine the run of political events” (AfD 2017: 9).

A similar gradual development towards a more radical right platform the party’s positions concerning law and order issues, which are generally taken as proxies for the presence of sociocultural authoritarianism. The early party’s manifestoes, in 2013 and 2014, did not explicitly include the pledge to crack down on transgressors. On the contrary, the 2017 programme deals with such theme more extensively, in an attempt to increase the saliency of law and order issues which tap into the authoritarian attitudes manifested by large shares of the electorate. Thus the third chapter, out of fourteen, of the 2017 manifesto is devoted to “National Security and Justice”. A decline in national security is denounced, and the party commits to take decisive action to reverse this trend (AfD 2017: 23-26). Measures such as lowering the age of criminal responsibility and a general speeding up of judicial proceedings are explicitly favoured. AfD is also greatly concerned with the high representation of foreigners in crime statistics, and consequently endorses simple procedures

to repatriate offenders. Protection of the offenders' rights is met with dislike, while much emphasis is placed on more effective means of deterrence. This is a recurring notion of the populist radical right rhetoric: the idea that the current legal system is excessively concerned with rehabilitation for the offenders at the expenses of protection for the victims. The same attitude provides the rationale for AfD's opposition to tighter gun policies (AfD 2017: 24).

Netherlands: Party for Freedom (PVV)

The *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) was founded as an association in 2006 by the former conservative-liberal MP Geert Wilders, who as of now remains its only formal member. In its first general election in the same year, the party obtained 5.9 percent of the votes and 9 out of 150 seats in the House of Representatives. Four years later, the PVV jumped to a vote share of 15.5 percent, which enabled it to win 24 seats. The 2010 result was particularly important as the party became a key player in the difficult negotiations for the formation of a new cabinet. Eventually, the party agreed to support the centre-right minority government in the parliament, without ministerial positions for its members. The PVV so emerged as an influential force in the Dutch political scene, and managed to better publicize its foremost policy priorities. The support for the party dipped at the following 2012 general election, where the PVV registered 10.1 percent of the votes and lost 9 seats in the lower chamber. In the newly elected legislature, the party went back to opposition. In the 2017 general election, Wilders' party came in second place with 13.1 percent of the ballots and 20 seats won, but was excluded by all other parties from the process to form the new cabinet. At European level, the PVV started in 2009 with a vote share of 17 percent and 4 out of 25 seats. In the following 2014 election, the party gained 13.2 percent of the votes and kept its four seats in the European Parliament.

In terms of ideological classification, the PVV appears quite "slippery", as confirmed by the fact that there is no scholarly consensus around the proper ideological location of Wilders' party. It is in fact disputed whether the party better fits in the nationalist, populist, or conservative liberal family (Vossen 2011: 180). In a 2010 article on *Modern Democracy*, Mudde leans towards excluding the PVV from the category of populist radical right parties. In the author's view, Wilders' party lacks the ethno-nationalist core of PPR parties and is a much more mainstream political force, particularly eager to retain parliamentary power and enter coalition cabinets (Mudde 2010). In quite a different vein, Lucardie characterizes the

party as an eccentric yet effective member of the PRR group, and devises for the PVV the label of a 'right-wing halfhearted-liberal nationalist and populist' (2007: 181).

Vossen (2011) has provided a compelling account of the evolution of Wilders' ideology, which almost entirely shapes the rhetoric and programme of the PVV. His analysis is very insightful, as it presupposes that party ideologies should not be treated as constant and crystallized entities, but are better understood as the dynamic by-product of contextual variables and strategic adjustments by party leaderships. This consideration is even more relevant when one considers outsider parties, who tend to change their programmatic profile by emphasizing new issues at different stages in a vote-seeking behaviour (Norris 2005, Green-Petersen 2007). Turning back to the ideological outlook of Wilders, one can observe a progressive movement from an initial conservative-liberal phase until 2002, followed by a neoconservative phase up to 2006, and finally replaced by the national populist phase which endures to date (Vossen 2011).

When one looks at the last stage of Wilders' ideological development, the PVV may be thus considered as a member of the PRR family, although the party still exhibits some significant divergences from the ideal typical populist radical right party. Indeed, while the party's undisputed leader is certainly influenced by his conservative liberal roots, from 2006 he started to campaign on issues which are commonly associated with the populist radical right. Most notably, criticism towards Islam widened in the leader's rhetoric, arguably emerging as a top priority goal of the party's agenda. Furthermore, the former assimilationist stances espoused by Wilders were gradually replaced by more rejectionist and exclusionary ones; the radical proposals to ban the Koran and introduce a tax on headscarves are clear indicators of this evolution (Vossen 2011: 185). Thus, the primary target of this new nativist and anti-multicultural platform is the Muslim community. However, sporadic attacks were also increasingly launched against other ethnic minorities, as showed by the provocative idea to sell on E-bay the Antilles, presented as a nest for criminal immigrants (PVV 2010). Moreover, the centrality of the nation has become more prominent in the party's message, as suggested by the calls for promoting national pride in schools and the tepid endorsement of a merging with the Flemish region of Belgium (Vossen 2011: 185).

As just showed, nativism is therefore a distinctive characteristic of the PVV. This is also evidenced by the fact that the party places much value on the need to defend the Dutch national identity and system of values from external threats and the alleged Islamization in the West (Vossen 2008: 17-22). In the party programme, nationalism is indeed blended with ethnopluralist and exclusionary views –which ultimately is the generally accepted definition

of nativism. A further sign that the populist radical right characterization suits the PVV is the central role of the anti-Islam stance in the party's agenda. Most PRR parties, indeed, accentuate programmatic dimensions related to national identity and ethno-cultural differences, while playing down socioeconomic ones (Rydgren 2008). It is also interesting to note the distinctive nature of the PVV's form of nativism: marginalization and exclusion of the "foreign" is here advocated on religious rather than ethnic grounds. Nonetheless, the basic nativist assumption that peoples with different (religious) mores and values should be kept separated still remains. Thus ethno-pluralism constitutes an inspiring doctrine for the PVV, although the ethnic component is basically replaced by a religious one.

On top of that, populism is also a peculiar feature of Wilders' thinking after 2006, and consequently a distinctive trait of the PVV (Vossen 2011, Rooduijn 2014). In its 2010 programme, the party denounces how the elites have lost touch with reality and largely failed to ameliorate the conditions of "ordinary people" (PVV 2010: 5, Rooduijn & Pauwels 2011). Anti-elite statements also became more frequent and explicit, the primary target being the "progressive" elite who had seriously ignored the real problems of the country and especially the dangers posed by immigration (Otjes & Louwerse 2015: 67). This said, what marked the shift to a more full-fledged version of populism are the increasing appeals to the "man in the street", whose interests had allegedly been overlooked by the ruling class (Otjes & Louwerse 2015: 67). As concerns concrete policy goals, this proclaimed centrality of the people also provides the ideological basis for the parties' pleas for more direct democracy (PVV 2017). In accordance with the conceptualization of populism offered in the previous section, "the elite" is here framed as a homogenous group represented by the "progressive" establishment who monopolizes the media and the political scene (Vossen 2008: 12, Kuipers 2011).

Examining the extent of sociocultural authoritarianism in the PVV turns out to be a more complex task. As observed by Dinjens (2012: 12), Wilder's party has quite an ambivalent positioning in this respect. In fact, while on sociocultural issues including national identity, immigration and law-and-order the party is decisively leaning towards the authoritarian end of the sociocultural scale, the same cannot be said as regards ethical questions. It is in this discrepancy that one can identify the foremost difference between the populist radical right category and the PVV. Most PRR parties are indeed generally conservative and authoritarian when it comes to gay rights, abortion and euthanasia. Conversely, the PVV definitely exhibits a libertarian position regarding these issues (Vossen 2008). In spite of this, the party still resembles the typical PRR party for its emphasis on a "zero tolerance" approach in law enforcement and stronger punishments against offenders.

Two examples of this leaning are the commitment to spend “a lot of extra money for defence and police” and the proposal to denaturalize and expel criminals with dual nationality, both mentioned in the 2017 election manifesto (PVV 2017).

Belgium: Flemish Interest (VB)

The *Vlaams Belang* (VB) is the direct successor of the Flemish nationalist and far-right party *Vlaams Blok*, forced to disappear by a 2004 ruling which found that it violated anti-racism legislation. The predecessor *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Block), after few years in marginality, a constant surge in its electoral score, first reached a double-digit share in the 2003 election for the federal low chamber, gaining 11.6 percent of the votes and 18 out of 150 seats. After the name change in 2004, the party improved its result in the first election, although it saw its support wane afterwards. So, in the federal election of 2007, the VB obtained 12 percent of the votes and 17 seats. In the following 2010 election, the vote share declined to 7.8 percent, giving 12 seats to the party. This negative trend was finally confirmed by the last electoral round of 2014, when the VB took just 3.7 percent of the ballots and had three MPs elected. At EU level, the party’s most remarkable performance was a 24.2 percent of the votes (making it the country’s first party) in the European Parliament election of 2004. In the following two European elections, the party’s score dropped with a vote share of 15.3 percent in 2009 and of 6 percent in 2014.

The Flemish Interest, as well as its predecessor, has faced firm opposition by the other parties, who have basically excluded it from cooperation and cabinet formation through a *cordon sanitaire*. Within the strand of research examining these so-called “pariah parties”, some scholars have identified in this ostracism a possible factor behind the recent electoral decline of the VB. The reason would be that many voters may increasingly perceive that a vote for the party is a wasted one. The VB would so suffer from a sort of spell of permanent (imposed) opposition, which in turn impairs its electoral fortunes (Van Spanje & Van der Brug 2009, Pauwels 2011: 62).

The VB can be considered as a member of the PRR party family. It cultivates an agenda based on nativism, populism and authoritarianism, also focusing more on sociocultural and value-laden issues than on socioeconomic ones. These programmatic features, as already pointed out, are part of the most accepted definition of populist radical right parties.

After the dissolution of the Flemish Block in 2004, the Flemish Interest (VB) kept the backbone of its ancestor's agenda, mostly insisting on Flemish independence, closer ties to the Netherlands and the return of "stolen lands" formerly belonging to the Flanders (Erk 2005: 495). Nonetheless, as a consequence of the cited ruling, the new party strategically softened some of its most radical policy goals and its caustic communicative style. In this respect, some more tangible expressions of xenophobia have been gradually taken away from the party's anti-immigration rhetoric (Erk 2005). This said, the party remains committed to a nationalistic agenda, calling for the congruence of a new political entity with the Dutch-speaking nation of Belgium. Nativism is revealed by the notion that different cultural communities prosper as long as they are kept separated, a view that is also at the basis of ethnopluralism. Foreign influences are generally framed in a suspicious way, and this is particularly true for Islam, whose followers and traditions are largely deemed incompatible with the Flemish and Western set of values (VB 2012). For these reasons, the party backs complete assimilation of non-native groups, who should so embrace the culture, norms, values and tradition of their host country. Forced repatriation is laid down for those who do not manage or prove unwilling to do so. Finally, the VB advocates more complex and rigid procedures for aliens to obtain nationality or family reunification. As further evidence of the nativist trace in the party's discourse, the VB concludes its website note on immigration with the emblematic sentence "Flanders is ours". Therefore, it is clear how the party supports the congruity between the political and the national unit, to be achieved through assimilation and exclusion of non-native elements.

As far as authoritarian positions are concerned, the party again fits in the above characterization of the populist radical right. Emphasis is placed on harsher punishments for offenders and the need to protect the victim is presented as more important than the individual rights of the perpetrators. This assumption also entails the claim that self-defence or disproportionate reaction is warranted in cases of property threats (Klima 2007: 22). Many of the typical measures proposed by PRR can be found in the party platform on internal security and justice (VB 2014: 24-27). Specifically, the VB wishes a minimal use of reduced sentences and favours more rapid and less cumbersome penal procedures. Related to this, there is also the pledge to abolish the institution of the royal grace and boost the use of summary judgments. It is also a party's goal to extend the maximum length for a sentence to 40 years. A "special life sentence" is also proposed, which would imply the absolute guarantee that those found guilty of terrorism or other heinous crimes will never get out of prison. As can be observed in other member of this party family, nativist and authoritarian

themes are intertwined in several programmatic claims. Specifically, the VB maintains that attendance of aliens tends to be a significant cause of crime in itself. The underlying notion is that the foreign element constitutes a threat to the native “heartland” –the conceptual core of nativism–and so it simultaneously endangers the idealized model of a “strictly ordered society” (Mudde 2007) at the core of the authoritarian thinking. Within this ideological framework, perceived moral decay is also denounced, and calls for the return to traditional and family values are particularly salient in the party’s platform (Pauwels 2011: 61).

The populist character of the VB ideology and rhetoric is less straightforward. A tentative proxy for the populist belief in the centrality of the people lies in the party’s pleas for more participatory democracy, mainly by means of popular referenda (VB 2014). The party so holds that political outcomes should reflect as much as possible the unified, constructed will of the people (Mudde 2004, 2007), also implying that intermediate institutions and political compromise should have considerably less weight. In addition, some studies have concluded the VB indeed represents a textbook example of populism, measured by means of references to the people and anti-establishment statements (Jagers & Walgrave 2007, Pauwels 2011: 107).

Austria: The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)

The FPÖ was founded in 1956 but emerged as an influential political force only since the mid-1980s under the leadership of Jörg Haider. This charismatic leader, who withdrew from the party in 2005, has notably shaped the ideological development and consequently the electoral performance of the FPÖ. Accordingly, many studies concerning this party have closely examined his political views and strategies rather than at the programmatic profile of the party itself. In fact, the figure of Haider is fundamental to any analysis of the party, as it was him who effectively led the new phase of consolidation and ideological restructuring in a vote-seeking perspective in the 1990s (Luther 2001, Heinisch 2007: 78).

After decades of electoral marginalization, the party entered a coalition cabinet with the social democrats (SPÖ) also thanks to a gradual ideological softening and the adoption of anti-establishment and neoliberal positions under Steiger’s leadership (Meret 2010: 186). Nonetheless, the party did not witness a significant electoral growth, remaining below a vote share of 5-6 percent nationwide. After Haider’s takeover in 1986, the national election in the same year gave the party 9 percent of the votes, twice as the previous score. In the 1990 national election the party shifted its agenda towards new issues such as opposition to

migration and criticism towards the EU establishment (2010: 186). The mainstream liberal platform was largely abandoned to campaign more decisively on these policy dimensions. This change of approach proved effective in electoral terms as the party's vote share grew to 16.6 percent, resulting in 33 out of the 185 seats. In the two following elections in 1994 and 1995, the party took around 20 percent of the votes but remained in the opposition, also due to a policy of ostracism convened by the mainstream rival parties. The electoral peak for the FPÖ came in 1999: Haider's party obtained 26.9 percent of the ballots coming in second place ahead of the centre-right Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). Thanks to this remarkable result, the party entered the government in a "black and blue" coalition with the ÖVP, thus ending the era of the *cordon sanitaire*. When in office, the party started to suffer from deep internal disagreements on how to conciliate its anti-establishment pedigree with the requirements of incumbency (Luther 2001, 2007:8). Eventually, two ministerial resignations led to anticipated elections in 2002, where the party's vote share plummeted to 10 percent. In the three following elections, the party always increased its vote share but was kept in the opposition. In the last electoral round of 2013, the FPÖ obtained 20.5 percent of the votes, winning 40 seats in the lower house.

At supranational level, the party got 23,4 percent of the votes in European Parliament elections of 1999, gaining 5 out of 21 seats. At the following 2004 election, on the wake of the government crisis and the internal fractures within the party, the FPÖ saw a serious setback, as the party got a 6.3 percent of the ballots. In the last election of 2014, the party came in third place with a vote share of 19.7 percent, which gave it 4 seats.

Describing with certainty the programmatic profile of the FPÖ proves a complex endeavour. Also due to the fast electoral rise of the party and the heterogeneous nature of its voting base, the party has often changed its policy agenda. This fact has even led some scholars to claim that the party lacks an ideology altogether (Luther 1997: 299).

Nativism is quite a recent theme in the FPÖ policy platform. As noted by Heinisch (2007), the party started to campaign more on identity-related issues and patriotism starting from the mid-1990s. In this regard, the party came to stress the need to return to the old values and traditions which form the myth of the Austrian cultural identity. Tellingly, also the party's longstanding anti-immigration positions started to be framed in a more value-laden and cultural semantic. Immigrants and aliens were hence increasingly depicted as dangerous to the fabric of the Austrian society (Betz 2002, Heinisch 2007). This change of narrative indeed reveals a nativist position, insofar as the foreign element is presented as a threat to the stability of the nation, and nationalism is mixed with exclusionary or xenophobic stances. An

evaluation of the party manifesto of 2011 corroborates these observations. The second out of the ten sections of the document is titled “Homeland, identity and environment”. Here, illustrative is the statement that the party aims to protect the Austrian homeland, together with its national identity and “natural livelihood” (FPÖ 2011: 2). Again, this mention of the need to protect seems to imply that the nation is facing some kind of external threat, a peculiar element of nativism. Moreover, the nativist claim for the congruence between the national and the political units clearly emerges from the assertion that “the language, history and culture of Austria are German” (2011: 2). Cultural homogenisation is thus advocated, and is to be achieved by means of assimilation and hard integration of legal immigrants (FPÖ 2011: 3).

The authoritarian component of the FPÖ’s programmatic profile was explored in depth by Meret (2010) through a careful assessment of its official statements. One example of such ideological feature comes from the 1993 popular petition “Austria First”, where the party called for more effective policing and permanent border controls. Moreover, in the 1997 party manifesto, the point is made that full enjoyment of individual freedoms –on which the party is deeply concerned–can only happen where there is law and justice. Law and order issues are then particularly salient in its policy agenda. Relatedly, the party backs a more decisive and interventionist approach by the state vis-à-vis terrorism, crime, drugs trafficking and related social problems. In addition, the party wishes that life sentences are applied in their entirety, yet it opposes the death penalty on the grounds that there may be no absolute certainty about the guilt of the accused (FPÖ 1997: 20, 2008: 42, quoted in Meret 2010: 201). Another salient theme regards the positive, simple relationship between crime and immigration in the party’s imaginary. The FPÖ hence supports more effective law enforcement and stricter controls for those who enter the country. According to the party, convicted aliens must be deported back to their countries (FPÖ 2011: 7). As far as justice is concerned, like many of its counterparts of the PRR family, the FPÖ underlines that protecting and possibly compensating the victims of crimes must be the foremost objective of the state, and trumps any consideration about to need to reintegrate the convicted offenders. Conventionalism, a typical sign of authoritarian stances, could be detected in the party’s positions regarding the value of family in the society, which is deemed indispensable and irrefutable. Of course the type of family to which the party allude is the one formed by a man and a woman with their offspring, whereas same-sex marriages are explicitly rejected (FPÖ 2011: 4).

The populist character is prominent in the FPÖ agenda, and also quite relevant to explain its recent electoral rise. In particular with Haider at its head, the party proved able to tap into the mounting popular dissatisfaction with the Austrian political system, which was in fact going through a period of declining legitimacy. Specifically, the party started in the mid-1980s to vigorously denounce the limits of the consociational style of Austrian politics, dominated by coalition governments supported by the mainstream centre right and left parties: the ÖVP and the SPÖ (Fallend 2004: 118, Heinisch 2007: 67). Therefore, the FPÖ voiced a populist narrative, through which it presented itself as the only party able to release the “redemptive face” of democracy (Canovan 1999) from the current mechanisms of power sharing and patronage devised by self-serving and corrupt politicians. Consequently, the political mechanism made of negotiations, package deals and compromise between the two largest rival parties served as the perfect target for anti-establishment, populist attacks. As an outsider party, the FPÖ managed to garner consensus by framing itself as the only real opposition and blurring the lines between the rival mainstream parties, judged as irresponsible to the voters’ demands and only cosmetically in competition with one another (Kitschelt 1997). The FPÖ was indeed successful in exploiting this opportunity, as showed by its impressive electoral rise culminated in 1999. References to the people were also quite frequent, and the party often legitimized its agenda on the grounds that it had been shaped by citizens initiatives or petitions (Heinisch 2007: 80). This is evidence of the populist view that policy outcomes should be more directly determined by the aggregate of the people’s will. In this narrative, the party would thus become a mere implementer of the people’s ambitions and needs, minimizing all structures of interest intermediation.

Switzerland: The Swiss People’s Party (SVP)

The *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (SVP), Swiss People’s Party in English, was founded in 1971, after its descendent Party of Farmers, Traders and Independents merged with two formations of the Democratic Group. Following decades on the sidelines of the political arena, with vote shares of 10/11 percent similar to those of its predecessor agrarian party, the party finally made substantive electoral progress in the 1990s. This was also possible owing to a process of internal restructuring and programmatic evolution steered by Christoph Blocher as vice president but *de facto* leader of the party.

The vote share of the party surged to 22.5 percent in the federal elections of 1999, which marked the electoral breakthrough for the SVP and made it the strongest party in

Switzerland. While the average number of seats won by the party had been 24 seats in all elections since its foundation, the SVP this time obtained 44 seat out of the 200 in the Federal Assembly. Since the 2003 election, the vote share of the SVP stayed at around 26 percent, while the highest score ever was achieved by the party in the last 2015 federal election: the party drew 29.4 percent of the ballots and won 65 seats in parliament.

Several scholars have observed that the SVP has witnessed a process of far-reaching programmatic evolution which is also one of factors behind its considerable electoral rise started in the 1990s (Kitschelt & McGann, 2003; Kriesi & al., 2005, Mazzoleni & Skenderovic 2007). Particularly relevant to this development were emerging issues that had remained outside the electoral debate till then, for example those related to anti-establishment and anti-immigration positions. In addition, the party's fresh emphasis on anti-internationalism and authoritarian positions did not alienate the core traditionalist constituency of the SVP (mainly farmers and small business owners), but rather enabled the party to attract new groups such as blue-collar workers (McGann & Kitschelt 2005: 153). Another instrument of this strategy, especially promoted by Blocher's Zurich section since 1977, was the use of a more contentious and confrontational political communication, which would also include direct rhetoric attacks against political adversaries (Mazzoleni & Skenderovic 2007: 92).

On the wake of this process of internal evolution, the SVP today exhibits the basic ideological traits of the populist radical right category: nativism, authoritarianism and populism. Nativism and politics of exclusion are central to the programmatic make-up of the SVP. As seen, they became even more salient as the party entered a process of ideological radicalization towards radical right positions over the 1980s and the 1990s (Mazzoleni & Skenderovic 2007: 93), a path which may recall that taken by Haider's FPÖ from 1986 on. The main target of the party's nativist rhetoric were especially asylum seekers, many of whom were presented as abusers of the Swiss asylum system and associated with a whole of set of social problems (Skenderovic 2007: 170). Along with other far-right political forces, the SVP started to more decisively promote ethnopluralist views, underlining the cultural distinctiveness of alien groups and the incapacity of many of them –mainly Muslims—to truly integrate into the Swiss society. Nonnative elements were largely depicted as undermining the social order of the country, both for identity and security reasons. This relevance of identity politics and exclusionary discourse is also confirmed by the statement in the 1999 manifesto that the primary goal of the party was to give “a sense of security and create identity” (quoted in Mazzoleni and Skenderovic 2007: 93).

The SVP similarly took up firm opposition to multiculturalism that is indeed a typical reference frame for most populist radical right parties (Rydgren 2007). As observable at various stages in other European parties of the same family, this commitment to protect the national identity from external threats also provided a rationale for resistance to European integration and supranational governance. This opposition to international openness, in fact, was particularly expressed in the 2015 party manifesto, whose first chapter is devoted to preservation of national independence as one of the “Swiss pillars of success” (SVP 2015: 8). The same document reveals the exclusionist positions identified above. In the chapter on immigration policy, the party contends that excessive migration is “jeopardizing our freedom, our security, full employment, our landscape and, ultimately, our prosperity”. However, it can be observed how terms pertaining to identitarian semantics are not particularly evident, contrary to what one would expect from the rhetoric of PRR party. In other words, anti-immigration stance is presented more within security and economic frames than within identity-based ones. Identity discourse is instead more evident in the chapter dealing with religion, where the SVP contends that Western Christian values which are the roots of the Swiss society “must be preserved and cultivated” (SVP 2015: 91).

Authoritarianism is another tangible features of the ideological profile of the SVP. Law and order issues are particularly accentuated in the policy agenda, as one can see by looking at the 2015 party manifesto. In this document, the SVP voices criticism towards what it considers a toothless and ineffective criminal law. The point is made that penalties are too lenient or not properly implemented, resulting in a poor deterrent capacity of the legal system. Therefore, the party is in favor of harsher punishments for transgressors, and backs the deportation of aliens convicted for serious crimes or those guilty of less serious offence but with a previous conviction (SVP 2015: 44). Furthermore, in a way that resembles the usual “zero tolerance” stance of other European PRR parties, the SVP supports a general tightening of sanctions, the introduction of minimum sentences, shorter criminal proceedings, and the departure from an approach too focused on reintegration of detainees and on their possible needs. The last notion is accompanied by the phrase that “a term of imprisonment is not intended to be a bad or roses” (SVP 2015: 44). Thus, the party rejects the view that ensuring good detention conditions for inmates is a valuable goal. In contrast, frequent are references to the victims, and their need for utmost protection or compensation for the offenses suffered. Finally, the positions of more effective enforcement just illustrated also entail the opposition to the Schengen Agreement, whose open border are said to have created the perfect breeding ground for “criminal tourists and illegal immigration” (SVP 2015: 43).

The populist character of the SVP programme has been underlined in several scholarly contributions. Mazzoleni (2003b) notes that in the 1990s the party started to assume most attributes of a challenger party, opposed to the logics of the Swiss consociational system. A populist political style was effectively adopted, with ample use of “agitation, spectacular acts, exaggeration, calculate provocations” (Heinisch 2003: 94). The party also depicted itself as the only force with enough courage to break political and socio-cultural taboos (Mazzoleni & Skenderovic 2007: 93). As in the present study populism is interpreted as a thin-centered ideology (Mudde 2004, Albertazzi & McDonnel 2007) which juxtaposes the corrupt elite to the virtuous people, the Swiss party, at least after this historic phase of internal reconfiguration, indeed fits in this conceptualization. The SVP so constructed and fueled a structural antagonism between the elite and the people, presenting itself as the only legitimate and trustworthy representative of the latter (Mazzoleni & Skenderovic 2007: 93). Having said that, the anti-establishment discourse has generally been more subtle in the SVP than in other parties like the LN or the FPÖ. The reason for this is that the SVP and its agrarian predecessor have held a seat in the Federal Council since the 1920s, which made harder for party to portray itself as an anti-system actor (Bertz 2001: 402). As a consequence, the party was compelled to appear as an anti-elite and anti-consensus force from inside the government (2001: 402). A clear example of this approach lies in the SVP campaign against Swiss entry into the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1992, whereas all other government parties had openly endorsed it (Kriesi *et al.* 1993).

On top of that, in a populist fashion, the party often makes the point that its agenda is more legitimate as it is meant to implement the will of the people. In this respect, the Swiss institutional context appears ideal for this strategy, due to the consolidated use of popular initiatives and referendums. The SVP greatly emphasizes the belief that political outputs must reflect as much as possible the *volunté generale* of the people (Mudde 2004). As a result, the party portrays itself as the only undisputed supporter of direct democracy. Conversely, the other parties are framed as a unified group who want to progressively undercut direct democracy, insofar as they invoke international law, pre-examine the content of popular initiatives or openly warn against it (SVP 2015: 9).

Italy: the Northern League (LN)

The Italian *Lega Nord* (LN) was launched between 1989 and 1991 as an umbrella organization of various ethno-regionalist movements which in the 1980s had started to claim

for more political autonomy from Rome and fiscal federalism. Its direct precursor was the Lombard Autonomous League, founded by Umberto Bossi and some of his friends in 1983. Early on, the party had basically the same policy goals than the other ethno-regionalist movement in the North of Italy: promote and protect the cultural, linguistic and ethnic heritage of the region and loosen dependency from the central government (Abedi 2004: 56). This agenda was crucial to re-activate the old periphery/center cleavage, which had long been out of the political realm in Italy (Meret 2010: 147). Moreover, the party successfully turned the question of the North-South socioeconomic gap into a political issue.

The LN electoral rise in the 1990s has much to do with a massive scandal of political corruption (also known as *Mani Pulite*) which shattered the post-1945 political system. Italy thus entered a phase referred to as the Second Republic, while the major parties like the Christian Democracy (DC) and the Communist Party (PCI) –due to the collapse of the USSR—gradually got out of the scene. These dramatic developments paved the way for the electoral rise of the new party. In the 1992 parliamentary election, the LN won 8.6 percent of the votes for the lower house (Chamber of Deputies), resulting in 55 seats. In the following election, thanks to a new electoral rule with a strong plurality component, the party drew a vote share of 8.4 percent and 118 seats in the Chamber. Although the LN had joined the ensuing coalition government led by Berlusconi's Go Italy (FI), the party withdrew its support by the end of 1994 over disagreements on policy and unease with the most far-right force of the coalition, namely the MSI-AN party (Meret 2010: 152-153). The LN confirmed its momentum at the 1996 election for the lower house, where it got 10.8 percent of the votes without allying with other forces. However, internal divisions over the need to cooperate with the major left or right blocs weakened the party, which dropped to a 4.5 percent vote share in the 1999 European election. The more radical calls for independence were then deemphasized whereas the party shifted the attention to devolution and fiscal federalism, re-opening to the possibility of cooperating with other parties (Abedi 2004: 56). In the 2001 election for the lower house, the LN's vote share fell to 3.9, but the party once again entered the center-right cabinet. An important score was achieved in 2008, when the party garnered 8.3 percent of the votes and 60 for the Chamber of Deputies. In the 2013 election, the party – also tainted by a recent internal scandal on management of party finances—saw its vote percentage almost halved, with 4.1 percent, and lost some 40 seats. In the European Parliament (EP) elections, the highest result was a 10.2 percent of the votes in 2010, after in all previous elections the party had remained at around 5 percent vote shares. In 2014, the LN took 6.2 percent of the votes and 5 out of 72 seats in the EP.

Like in other European PRR parties, the ideological make-up of the LN has frequently changed according to contingent variables and vote-seeking incentives. However, the party today presents the distinctive programmatic features of the populist radical right (Verbek & Zaslove 2014).

First, nativism is a key point of reference in the LN's political discourse. While at the beginning the party mainly insisted on the economic and welfare costs of excessive immigration, especially that from outside the EU, in the late 1990s began to discuss the issue in identity and value-based tones (Meret 2010: 166-173). In this respect, the ability of Muslim immigrants to properly integrate in the Italian society started to be particularly questioned, in line with the ethnopluralist mentality which informs the programmes of most PRR parties. This strong opposition to multiculturalism came to be combined with the increasing anti-globalization stances in the late 1990s. It is worth mentioning that the party had been worked since its first years to dismiss the frequent allegations of racism, by focusing on cultural and value differences rather than ethnic ones, in the same direction of many other PRR parties under the *Nouvelle Droite* influence in Western Europe (cfr. Rydgren 2007). This was clearly part of a strategy by the leadership to build the image of a reliable party which could take on government responsibilities. Today, nativism is for instance evident in the proposal to adopt discriminatory policies to prioritize Italian citizens in public housing, family subsidies and social services (LN 2017: 1). This position is quite well epitomized by the following sentence: "we only ask for a simple rule: our people first, the Italian first!". Further signs of nativism derive from the party's belief in a future for the country "founded on identity" and the assimilationist position observable in the statement that: "who enters Italy must respect our millenary history, accept our habits and not impose his own" (LN 2017: 2). This is deemed a duty which must precede the right for aliens to live in Italy.

Within this framework, the anti-Muslim stance has become a key element of the LN ideology. The party, especially since the 2000s and after the 9/11 attacks, increasingly targeted the Muslim communities which were largely presented as a threat to the traditional values and mores of the native community. The LN also came to depict itself as the sole guardian of Christian values against pernicious multiculturalist trends, as showed by the 2002 proposal to impose the exhibition of the Christian cross in public buildings to remind "dangerous and impudent Muslims that they are in a Christian country" (La Repubblica 2002, quoted in Meret 2010: 176). As a further example of these attitudes, the new party leader Matteo Salvini has recently stated that "there is not even a square meter for Mosques in Italy

right now...there is no possibility to build a new mosque in any Italian city at the moment” (ANSA 2017). Yet, it is often difficult to determine to what extent this opposition is grounded on security or identitarian concerns, as often the two rationales are blended in the party’s rhetoric. In assessing the nativist traits of the Northern League, one can see that the context and substance of exclusionary politics has been modified over time (Zaslove 2009: 311-312): while originally the main targets were southern Italians, in the 1990s the object of the same nativist rhetoric was increasingly shifted to immigrants from outside the EU (Sniderman *et al.* 2000).

The right authoritarianism which underlies the programme of most PRR parties in Western Europe is also evident in the LN. The party has been effective in building a reputation for a party which takes very seriously law and order questions. Specifically, these programmatic dimensions became particularly salient since the years 2000s (Diamanti 1993). As is often the case for parties within the same family, one can notice a great deal of overlap between security and identitarian reasons behind the LN’s opposition to immigration. The party has in fact promoted an interpretative frame whereby foreigners tend to be associated with higher criminality and social unrest. The Bossi-Fini immigration law of 2002 which introduced expulsions for illegal immigrants and set tighter rules on permits of stay for aliens can be seen as the product of an agenda which highly values harsher punishments and more effective enforcement mechanisms. In the second point of the 2017 party manifesto, the point is made that uncontrolled immigration has increased “exasperation and degradation”, also undermining “legality and security” above all in the Italian peripheries (LN 2017: 1).

More evidently, the LN assumes an authoritarian position with respect to law and order matters. The party voices contempt for decriminalization of minor offences, and opposes the probable closure of a some police stations. Against this backdrop, the party maintains that Italy has turned into a “safe haven for criminals” (LN 2017: 2). To reverse this adverse status quo, the LN advocates a series of measures to reinstate legality in all its forms: reintroducing the crime of illegal immigration, halt to indults and amnesty decrees, curbing immigration which is explicitly connected to the risk of Islamic terrorism, forcing alien inmates to spend their sentence term in their home countries, and a general “zero tolerance” towards any form of criminality, smuggling and illegality (2017: 2). Furthermore, the party puts more emphasis on the need to deter violations and protect the victim than on the possible infringement of the human rights of offenders. This is for instance evident in the party’s clear opposition to the crime of excessive self-defense in cases of property violations, recently stressed by the LN leader Salvini (Adnkronos 2017). However, this general preference for a

tighter system of law enforcement and harsher punishments, does not lead the party to back the death penalty. Rather, for particularly serious crimes such as terrorism and child killing, the party leadership endorses life sentences without possibility of reduction and forced labor (ANSA 2015).

On top of that, the party's authoritarian attitude emerges from the conformist positions concerning culture and ethical questions. More evidently since 2001, family has become in the party ideology the very "heart of civilization" and the place where the "deepest core of our culture and traditions is preserved" (LN 2001: 9 in Meret 2010: 180). Moreover, in matters such as homosexuality and abortion, the party has increasingly cultivated a traditionalist profile, in striking contrast with some of its early stances on the same issues (Meret 2010: 182).

As the ideal-typical PRR party, the Northern League also adopts a political discourse which draws widely on populism. According to Tarchi (2007), populism in fact constitutes a source of ideological inspiration for the party, rather than a simple tool of opportunistic behavior. Already in the early 1990s, the party portrayed itself as the only reliable opposition to the political establishment (*partitocrazia*), only interested in retaining power for personal enrichment (Zaslave 2011). It then comes as no surprise that the party formally defines itself as a "movement", in order to underscore its differences from the other mainstream parties. Clearly, the aforesaid scandal of largescale political corruption had a confirmative effect on this kind of narrative in the eyes of the public. In addition, the LN's criticism of immigration policies was often raised in populist tones, as the party said it rejected the multiracial society that was being promoted by the ruling class "against the popular will" (LN 1994). In line with Mudde's characterization of populism (Mudde 2004), the party thus depicts a Manichean picture where the people is contraposed to the elite on a normative fault line. LN members directly appeal to the man in the street, and proclaim themselves as the true incarnation of the people itself, as recognized for instance by the Northern League MEP Borghezio during a 2005 rally in Pontida: "the Lega is the people, Bossi is the people" (La Padania 2005: 4, quoted in McDonnell 2006: 128). Further, influenced by the holistic attitude which generally characterizes populism, the party stresses the importance of reviving a homogenous community, whose values and interests would be finally safeguarded and actively pursued (Tarchi 2007: 90). Widespread are also the party's attacks against the powers-that-be (*poteri forti*), accused of hijacking the democratic system for personal aims against the general interest of the people who live in the heartland (Taggart 2000). The language of threat and betrayal is also central in the LN's political communication –be it in reference to the EU,

nonnative groups, or big business and globalisation (McDonnell 2006: 128, Ignazi 2005: 346). In sum, populism is a key element of the ideological profile of the Northern League. It is also quite illustrative, then, that the online newspaper which is *de facto* yet not formally linked to the party –LN leader Salvini being its co-director— is titled *Il Populista*.

Greece: Independent Greeks (ANEL)

The main populist radical right party in Greece, the Independent Greeks, was founded in 2012 by Panos Kammenos, former MP of the main rightwing conservative party New Democracy (ND). The newly formed party took part in the May 2012 legislative election, where it obtained 10.6 percent of the votes and 33 seats in the 300-seats unicameral Hellenic parliament. Once negotiations to form a new government failed, a new legislative election was held in June 2012. This time ANEL came in fourth place, having garnered 7.5 percent of the votes and thus falling to 20 seats in parliament. In the following election of January 2015, the party dropped to a vote share of 4.8 percent, losing 7 seats. ANEL then entered a coalition government with the populist radical left party Syriza, who came in first place winning 149 out of 300 seats. As a result, ANEL leader Kammenos was appointed as Minister of Defense. After SYRIZA had split over Prime Minister Tsipras' decision to accept the new conditions on Greek debt financing set by the EU, the left party lost the majority and a fresh election was hence called for September 2015. Here, ANEL saw its support further decline with a mere 3.7 percent of the votes, and 3 seats less than in the previous legislature. However, the party remained junior partner of the coalition government led by SYRIZA –again the most voted force— and Kammenos got back his ministerial post. In the European Parliament election of 2014 the party polled 3.5 percent of the votes, thus winning just 1 out 21 seats. Yet, the party is currently without representation at EU level as its only MEP has recently resigned. The above historical summary thus makes clear that ANEL emerged as a relevant political force in 2012, while it always dropped in consensus in the later elections.

It is not easy to determine whether ANEL presents the typical characteristics of the PRR party family. Research literature on the subject is quite scarce, also because the party is a very new creation. What seems a key concern of the party, as suggested by its name, is the commitment to keep the country as much autonomous from external influences as possible. The party, in populist veins, is also particularly concerned with the issues of corruption (Cita). ANEL, while is primarily focused on cultural issues and national sovereignty, has also wisely linked the bailout issue with national chauvinism. ANEL indeed shows nativist traits

as it openly despises the doctrine of multiculturalism, and the massive immigration which is deemed its main catalyst (Guardian 2015). The party proposed to set a limit on the number of arrivals at 2.5 percent of the population, without specifying how it would implement this measure (Independent 2015). In line with the conventionalism that was said to be a component of rightwing authoritarianism, the party also emphasizes the importance of “Greek history and culture”, while championing the “values and the timelessness of Orthodoxy” (Independent 2015). Less evident is the party’s focus on questions of law and order.

3. Theoretical framework: party competition and impact

In the previous section I discussed the ideological profile of populist radical right parties, which combines a nativist core with authoritarian and populist themes. The primary aim was thus to identify the major issues which characterize the political programmes of these parties. With the above theoretical illustration in mind, I will now set out a framework to understand strategic interaction among parties in contemporary democracies. The section is structured as follows: first, I will lay down the two paramount approaches of positional competition and salience competition which have so far dominated this research field. Second, the attention will be drawn to the literature concerning the impact of challenger parties, to which PRR parties belong, on the policy agenda of other parties. Third, I will build a research design by setting forth the main variables of interest and the hypotheses which will be assessed empirically in the case study. In this section, the mechanism of programmatic contagion (also known as agenda cooptation) will be explained at length. Before proceeding, it is worth stressing that the two research areas on positional and issue-based competition should be seen as intertwined with one another. Indeed, key assumptions from the literature on both positional and issue competition provide the conceptual groundwork for the theory of indirect policy impact assessed by the present study.

3.1. Models of inter-party competition

In order to gauge patterns of PRR parties’ political impact, an overview of the most influential models of electoral competition is particularly fruitful. In this theoretical framework, parties are construed as dynamic agents who are bound by a set of structural constraints and driven by positive and negative incentives in the selection of their strategy.

Two major theoretical paradigms of party strategy have been elaborated: (1) the positional or spatial theory of party competition, and (2) the issue or salience theory of party competition. I will now discuss each of these two theoretical approaches in turn. As it will be argued in depth down below, it is important to bear in mind that these two theories are different in several respects yet related with one another (Green-Pedersen 2007, Abou-Chadi 2014). For this reason, the empirical part of the present study will build extensively on insights derived from both accounts.

3.1.1. Positional or spatial competition

Spatial or positional accounts of party strategy are inspired by the groundbreaking theory elaborated by Downs in its 1957 book *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. This theory has in turn generated a plethora of theoretical expectations which have been tested empirically against data on voting behavior (Adams & Topcu 2009). In spatial modelling, a set of predictions are drawn concerning the mutual relationships between parties' policy programmes, rival parties' positions, and the policy preferences of voters. This model applies to a simple electoral arena, where two parties compete on predetermined policy space, generally coinciding with the left-to-right economic axis. A fundamental assumption is that parties act in a vote-seeking perspective, hence selecting the strategic choice which is more likely to maximize their chances of getting elected. As a result, they update and adapt their policy platforms in response to the attitudes and preferences of the electorate. Downs' work is based on rational choice theory, as voters are expected to act rationally in politics. They cast their vote for the party they consider will provide them "more benefits than any other" (Downs 1957: 36). These predictions work under the assumption that voters have full, complete information which enable them to compare the "stream of utility" they will receive from a party with that they will receiving from the opposing party (1957: 49).

Political parties, as much as voters, are rational agents who act in a strategic way to maximize their vote share and ultimately win office. According to Downs (1957), parties are hence vote-seeking, in that they seek to appeal to as many voters as possible in order to wield power in government. A related type of party, the office-seeking one, while apparently indicating the same strategic behavior, rather refers to the search for power through appointments and governmental posts, beyond the simple reasoning of "more votes equal more power". (Strøm 1990). When office-seeking parties are under scrutiny, the key focus is

thus on negotiations and governmental coalitions, rather than on dynamics of electoral competition.

A corollary of the assumption of vote-seeking motives is that parties do not have an inherent preference for a certain policy vis-à-vis another. Rather, they just select a certain policy to improve their electoral appeal and draw more votes (Williams 2006: 36). However, there are limits to the range of positional adjustments that parties can make. Indeed, as parties are somewhat bound by their ideological legacies for reasons of “integrity and responsibility”, they are barred from jumping over the heads of their rivals on the ideological space (Downs 1957: 122-123). Party ideological positioning thus reveals a degree of immobility or inertia. This insight seems to suggest that there is always a sort of default pull opposing the parties’ incentives to alter their ideological offer in response to a successful rival on the electoral stage. As already hinted at, within this theoretical framework, the policy space on which parties position themselves and move to maximize their electoral support is taken as a given. This ideological spectrum on which voters and candidates stand is mono-dimensional, mainly pertaining to economic issues. In this context, spatial theory of party interaction assumes that parties will select a given point on the left-right scale where there is the largest distribution of voters. This finding resembles the well-known Median voter theorem, which posits that the candidate whose proposed policy is closest to the median voter’s preference will always win the election (Black 1948, Riker 1962, Congleton 2004). According to this model of party interaction, in line with Hotelling’s (1929) modelling of entrepreneurs’ behavior, each party is thus faced with two basic strategic options: converge or diverge on the ideological scale vis-à-vis the rival party. The standard spatial approach just outlined presumes that the issues on which parties compete are exogenously predetermined, and that parties cannot alter the salience of certain issues over others (Meguid 2008: 25). Within Downs’s theoretical framework, the fundamental issue dimension on which parties compete with each other happens to be the degree of government intervention in the economy, which is represented by the conventional left-right axis.

3.1.2. Revised spatial model

Owing to the strong assumptions on which it is based, this standard model of spatial or positional competition has attracted strong academic criticism. An influential rebuttal of many of the theory’s propositions was advanced by Stokes (1963). The scholar observes that the transition from the economic competition of Hotelling’s theorization to the ideological

setting of party competition in Downs' dissertation is too easily accomplished. The author similarly notes that the political or ideological "space" is a notably complex and slippery concept, and clearly not a fixed entity like the physical space in Hotelling's (1929) economic model. Moreover, the political reality can hardly be reconciled with Downs' assumption of the mono-dimensionality of the political space on which both voters and parties are distributed. Conversely, the political conflict between rival parties is found to develop along several issue dimensions, both in two-party and in multiparty systems (Stokes 1963: 370). This empirical reality undermines the Downsian postulate that ultimate policy preferences of voters can be represented as single points along the left-right socioeconomic axis. For example, a voter may well approve the economic platform of a party, while still disagreeing on its stances regarding ethical issues or foreign policy.

Even more importantly for the present analysis, Stokes emphasizes that the political space where voters and parties position themselves is not at all a fixed and stable structure. Rather, the setting of competition and ideological shifting varies largely as different dimensions of the political debate assume different salience to the electorate over time (Stokes 1963: 371). As pointed out by the author, a more accurate theorization of interparty competition should hence come to terms with the fact that "different weights should be given to different dimensions at different times" (1963: 372). In the present study of populist radical right parties, this insight seems particularly useful in that such parties have been often depicted as issue entrepreneurs which take up in their programmes social questions to which significant shares of the electorate seem especially sensitive at the moment (Betz 1994, Norris 2005, Kitschelt 2007). High levels of political corruption, loose immigration policies, the impact of global markets, EU integration are some of the most frequent issues that these parties address to attract voters. In contrast with the findings of the Downsian spatial theory of competition, PRR parties thus manage to alter the existing domain of political contention, as more clearly stressed by the theory of salience or issue competition that will be illustrated below.

A further weakness of the Downsian model of interparty competition comes to the fore when one considers the key conceptual distinction between "position-issues" and "valence-issues" (Stokes 1963: 373). The former type refers to those issues on which parties as well as voters may advocate one out of many alternative government interventions. As far as position-issues are concerned, voters can be thus visually distributed along the points representing the various policy alternatives they endorse. The Downsian approach to party interaction has limited cogency as it deals solely with the type of position-issues.

However, the actual electoral competition is also notably characterized by valence-issues, namely those related with some condition or status quo which is positively or negatively valued by the electorate (Stokes 1963: 373). Valence-issues are those which tend not to involve room for ideological or political controversy. When it comes to these issues, parties and voters tend to agree on the same goals (Green & Hobolt 2008: 462). Economic growth or corruption are textbook examples in this respect. It is indeed rare to see voters and candidates assume diverse positions on issues like these, while the core question is generally what party is more likely to deliver public goods like national prosperity and virtuous politics. In the area of foreign policy, Stokes (1963) also mentions international prestige as instance of a valence-issue, since it is widely held as a desirable outcome. Therefore, as Green and Hobolt observe, in campaigns which are dominated by valence-issues, the main difference between parties relates to competence, while ideological position is irrelevant (2008: 462). Thus, it is these campaigns that the ownership or salience approach to party interaction works better.

Another relevant implication of valence issues is that preference for a party crucially depends on whether a past condition –either negatively or positively valued-- related to that issue is attributed to the same party. Provided this, party choice would thus be shaped by where the blame or credit for certain outcomes is assigned by the voters. Therefore, a voter may punish and vote against a candidate who was in government when a serious economic recession or particularly high levels of corruption were experienced. Having said that, whether an issue is of positional or valence nature may sometimes be difficult to ascertain. The two categories are better understood as two ends of a continuum, as the positional versus valence character of a given issue is often a matter of degree.

3.1.3. Issue or salience-based competition

The above theorization of party strategy presumes that parties interact on a mono-dimensional political scale, converging towards the point on the ideological scale where the majority of voters' preferences is located. An alternative approach in the study of party strategy is built on a stream of research intended to amend some of the cited drawbacks of the classical Downsian model. The paramount finding of this alternative approach, which is known as issue or salience theory of party competition (Carmines & Stimson 1993), is that whether a party is preferred over another crucially depends on the importance that that party gives to one or more issues within its policy agenda. Rather than the party's position, in favor

or against a given policy objective, here the object of the analysis is the emphasis which is placed on certain issues by parties in their respective platforms. These notions are related to above Stokes' (1963) point that parties have agency and can alter the domain on which electoral competition takes place. Therefore, parties can affect and shape the terms of the political contention, by stressing some issue dimensions more than others, rather than simply by taking stances over predetermined issue dimensions. This theory of issue competition has far-reaching implications for the way in which the mechanisms of voting choice is interpreted. Indeed, within this framework, a voter's preference for one party over another would depend not much on the positions that party has taken on several dimensions, but rather on how much the party emphasizes some issues compared to others. These remarks seem warranted insofar as the proximity of a party to the voter's preference on a given issue dimension may not be particularly relevant if the voter deems that issue dimension unimportant in the first place (Meguid 2008).

Importance of selective relevance

The increasing attention on issue competition in electoral behavior research is to be partly attributed to vast changes in the main determinants of voting in Western post-industrial democracies (Green-Pedersen 2007). In this regard, a number of scholars have pointed out that social-structuring voting has been largely complemented or even replaced by issue voting in many settings (Aardal & Van Wijnen 2005, Andersen and Borre 2003, van Holsteyn *et al.* 2003). Accordingly, voters' evaluations of competence and valence with regard to the parties' programmatic supply have been indicated as new important factors behind voting behavior (Clarke *et al.* 2004). A related finding is that voters have not just policy preferences but also issues priorities, and will hence tend to vote for the parties whose hierarchy of issues is closest to theirs (Green & Hobolt 2008, Van der Brug 2008).

The notion of issue competition was first introduced by Robertson (1976), who found that partisan competition in the electoral arena consists more of selective emphasis rather than of direct confrontation (see also Carmines 1991). The basic idea is that parties accentuate those issues which are deemed advantageous to them while overlooking those which are more likely to harm them. The same concept of issue emphasis was later re-elaborated by Budge and Farlie (1983), whose dissertation set the ground for their much-used dataset of party manifestos, measuring exactly the salience of various policy issues within party platforms. Carmines reached similar conclusions on party adjustments by contending

that successful politicians easily “understand which issues benefit them and their party and which do not. The trick is to politicize the former and depoliticize the latter” (1991: 75).

This line of research has thus sought to revise the standard image of political campaigns as ordered debates, where contrasting parties take clear-cut stances over the exact same issues. Nonetheless, as Singleman & Buell note, this idealized picture better represents a courtroom trial where a judge forces the disputants to address the same issues (2004: 651). In real-life campaigns, however, no such guarantee exists, and “dialogue” (Simon 2003) is often avoided as “each disputant decides what is relevant, what ought to be responded to, and what themes to emphasize” (Riker 1999: 83-84). Moreover, it is worth stressing that this model of issue competition, where parties give different weight to different issues in their respective programmes, applies particularly well to the types of valence-issues seen above (Stokes 1963).

Issue evolution and politicization

On this line of research, quite illuminating is the work by Carmines and Stimson (1986), who have added a more diachronic dimension to the above notion of issue competition. Their analysis is focused on the phenomenon of “issue evolution”, namely the process whereby new issues become relevant in partisan competition and may eventually contribute to transform the whole framework of the political debate. This phenomenon is inspired by the above Stokes’ (1963) view that the setting of the inter-party confrontation is not crystallized as in Downs’ theoretical framework, but rather the dynamic product of the growing and declining salience of issues in the electoral market. What varies in the political conflict, therefore, is not just the position of each party over a pre-determined issue dimension, but also crucially the contours of the conflict itself. On top of that, Carmines and Stimson underline that two basic conditions need to be met for a new issue to become politicized and cause a mass realignment of the electorate around it. First, voters must recognize a clear divergence in the positions of parties as far as that issue is concerned. Second, the issue at stake must elicit a certain degree of emotional response on the part of the electorate (Carmines & Stimson 1986: 903). As for the first condition, it fits easily into Kitschelt’s (1997) idea that mainstream parties’ convergence is a facilitating factor for the electoral success of many fringe radical right parties. In fact, it can result easier for PRR parties to show their positional distinctiveness when mainstream parties converge towards the center of the ideological spectrum. These theoretical expectations were then tested by

examining the evolution of the race issue in US politics. In summary, the two authors have thus made the case that behavior at elite level is crucial to transform certain issues into matters of political contention (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen 2010).

When one considers these findings on the strategic adjustments of parties in electoral competition, and the notion of selective emphasis in particular, a natural corollary seems that parties tend to focus more intensively or exclusively on those issues which are expected to advantage them. The same reasoning indeed underlies the principle of dominance/dispersion illustrated by Riker (1996), according to which parties shy away from those issues where the opposing party already has an advantage. This mechanism would in turn imply a very limited extent of “issue overlap” between rival parties (Sigelman and Buell 2004: 652). Having said that, a considerable stock of research offers a contrasting picture, as parties do reveal issue overlap in some cases (Sigelman & Buell 2004, Damore 2005, Green-Pedersen 2007). Therefore, as Green-Pedersen and Mortensen note, “although parties may in principle prefer to focus exclusively on issues that are advantageous to them, the reality is that they also pay attention to other issues, including issues ‘owned’ by their opponents” (2010: 259). In the perspective of the present study, this alleged mechanism of issue convergence, which is more related to relative emphasis of issues rather than positional convergence in Downsian sense, is extremely relevant as it provides the theoretical groundwork for the possibility that populist radical right parties might exert an impact on the agenda and policy positioning of other mainstream parties.

Issue ownership

A further key notion in this field of research is that of issue ownership, which is also closely related to the ideas of differential emphasis discussed above. According to this theory, popularized by Petrocik (1996), a party is said to “own” a given issue if it is widely held as the most competent one to handle and devise solutions for that issue. Emphasizing an issue on which the party enjoys a good reputation is thus an intuitive strategy to attract more voters. In this framework, a central concept is “handling”, which according to the author is the “ability to resolve a problem of concern to voters”. This attribute, which is crucially shaped by the candidate’s past record of attention and initiative with respect to that problem, entails the perception that the candidate is “more sincere and committed” to take action on that issue (Petrocik 1996: 826). Having explained the core meaning of issue ownership, two main dimensions of this concept can be singled out. The first one, associative ownership, is

the ability of a party of being immediately associated with a given issue by the voters. The second dimension, competence ownership, instead pertains to the cited perception of the party's handling of the issue at stake (Walgrave *et al.* 2012).

The theory of issue ownership, assuming that parties are rational and solely geared towards vote maximization, thus predicts that they will limit the focus of their campaign on the issues they own –namely those for which they enjoy a reputation for trustworthiness and competence— while downplaying the issues owned by rival parties. Once the argument is made that parties deliberately avoid to express positions on those issues that they do not own and are hence disadvantageous to them, issue convergence does not seem a likely outcome (Sigelman & Buell 2004: 651). This proposition is also consistent with the dominance/dispersion principle laid down by Riker, according to which a party will avoid to address an issue on which the opposing party already enjoys an advantage, as no issue or policy dimension can benefit both parties at the same time (2002: 64). Issue competition thus appears as a zero-sum game, where a key element to victory is emphasizing the theme which casts a good light on the party while overlooking the one on which the party lags behind.

In sum, these theoretical reflections lead to the conclusion that issue convergence, also known as dialogue or direct confrontation is “the exception rather than the rule” (Sigelman & Buell 2004: 652). In spite of this, there are limits to the possibility for parties to eschew dialogue and continue to “argue on orthogonal issues” (Austen-Smith 1993: 408). This is due to the fact that electoral confrontation involves opposing parties standing one in front the other and often compels them to express an opinion on the same issue dimensions. And this process is definitely reinforced by the growing significance of mediatized politics (Mazzoleni & Schultz 1999). Moreover, some issues may be particularly salient to the public opinion at a given moment, and deliberately avoiding to take a stance on them would thus be a costly decision for a party, even if those issues were to disadvantage the party other things equal (Sides 2007: 467). Sometimes then, issues are unavoidable as their relevance to voters can be particularly pronounced (Budge & Fairlie 1983: 129).

Structural and public opinion reasons aside, other potential factors for issue convergence and issue cooptation include the active efforts of a party to get the rival to engage in a dialogue which is advantageous to the former and detrimental to the latter. Indeed, a central element in party strategy consists in “forcing political opponents to pay attention to issues they would rather see disappear” (Green-Pedersen 2007: 609).

3.1.4. Discussion

It is worth noting that the two dominant perspectives of spatial versus issue competition should not be seen as mutually exclusive (Van der Brug 2001, Meguid 2005, Green & Hobolt 2008). In fact, as Green-Pedersen (2007) aptly observes, the importance and validity of issue competition does not rule out the existence of positional competition. The relative weight of each of these models depends on a series of factors, for example whether the electoral competition is mainly played on valence issues rather than positional issues, or the degree to which competing parties converge ideologically. Indeed, if two parties espouse very similar positions on a given issue, the voter's choice between the two will be chiefly guided by competence and "handling" assessments (Green & Hobolt 2008: 463).

With this in mind, including the dimension of issue and salience competition in the analysis, therefore, entails that actual party interaction is more complex and multi-faceted than envisaged in the standard Downsian account. In addition, stressing the importance of issue competition involves the recognition that competition over which issues should dominate the debate is as important an aspect of partisan interaction as competition over policy positions on a set of pre-determined issues.

These accounts of party interaction based on the issue competition thesis are notably compelling when one draws the attention to the rise and impact of populist radical right parties. Such parties, in fact, tend to focus on a few issues which are generally outside the mainstream political agenda. Moreover, these issues are generally separated from the traditional left-right economic cleavage, and more related to the post-materialist, sociocultural axis (Mudde 2007, Rydgren 2007, Wagner 2011). The argument thus goes that PRR have come to own specific issues, which are also clearly related to the core ideological features that were outlined in the preceding sections. Nativism and its ensuing anti-multiculturalist and ethnopluralist views, for example, have enabled many PRR parties to "own" the issue of immigration policy. Even more evidently, law and order issues, which are associated with rightwing authoritarianism, have traditionally been of great importance within these parties' platforms. Consequently, many of these parties have managed to build a reputation for commitment and competence on matters such as law enforcement and border controls, which are also clearly intertwined with the migration dimension. In light of this, populist radical right parties are widely regarded as "issue entrepreneurs" (Williams 2006, Abou-Chadi 2014, de Vries and Hobolt 2012) insofar as they shape the evolution and politicization of new issues which are generally of significant concern to the citizens, such as

excessive immigration, loss of national identity, impact of globalisation, and delegation of decision-making to the supranational level.

3.2. Understanding impact of PRR parties

The above review of the major findings on party interaction in the electoral market has shed light on the fact that parties do not just compete by taking diverging positions on pre-determined dimensions, but also crucially by emphasizing those issues on which they are largely perceived as stronger than the opponent. Consequently, this evidence on partisan interaction has far-reaching implications for the way in which niche (and in this case populist radical right) parties may have an impact on the whole policy debate. By impact or influence is meant the “ability to alter political discourse, to introduce important issues, to develop fresh ideas, and to induce action” (Williams 2006: 42). PRR parties in fact, since often lack the electoral support needed to win office, may strive to get mainstream parties to address those issues –such as immigration, EU integration and direct democracy-- on which they have built a stock of legitimacy for commitment and effectiveness. As noted by Mudde (2013), populist radical right participation in government is indeed a rare phenomenon. In fact, only 8 out of the 200 national governments which were formed from the 1980s till 2013 included a PRR party in it (Mudde 2013). This difficulty in reaching a position to wield direct decision-making power may urge these parties to search for alternative channels of political influence.

This reasoning has led some scholars to examine the existence of “contagious effects” of the emergence of radical right parties on the policy positioning of others parties (Dalton 2009, Van Spanje 2010, Alonso and Da Fonseca 2011). Impact of the populist radical right has received only scant attention at academic level, so this study is also an attempt to fill this lacuna. The key idea connected to party impact is that the rise of niche parties and populist radical right parties in particular would somewhat compel mainstream moderate parties to address the issues they campaign on most intensively. Given that the primary goal of this thesis is to evaluate the impact of populist radical right parties, it is essential to pay attention to the way in which new issues come to dominate the political agenda, building on Schattschneider’s (1960) contention that the “scope of conflict” namely the set of issues defining the electoral competition, is the “ultimate instrument of power”.

3.2.1. Ownership factors for issue cooptation

Abou-Chadi (2014) offers an interesting account of the macro-political impact of niche parties, in whose category to which radical right parties and environmentalist are included. The author argues that their electoral growth causes a policy realignment on the mainstream parties, but this effect is more nuanced than generally assumed. Building on Meguid's (2008) theorization of party strategy and the effect of issue cooptation, Abou-Chadi also assumes that while politicization of an issue may be tempting for mainstream parties, this also entails increased salience of the issue (2014: 2). As pointed out by other scholars, if an issue promoted more intensively by a niche party is addressed by other parties as well, it can thus be consolidated on the macro-political agenda (Green-Pedersen 2010 & Mortensen 2010). As a result, a degree of risk lies in the decision to absorb an issue promoted by a niche party. If the latter is seen as more competent on that issue, such cooptation or may thus strengthen rather than weakening the niche party. Therefore, the incentives for a mainstream party to increase the salience of an issue typically promoted by a challenger party are shaped by the extent to which that issue is seen as owned by the challenger. For instance, it can be expected that mainstream parties will choose not to pick up the issue of environmental protection (a typically valence-issue, which thus implies competence assessments) as on this issue green parties are perceived as more competent and sincerely committed than their opponents.

In sum, the above theoretical propositions are deemed particularly valuable for the present examination. Indeed they point to the fact that the how much mainstream right parties will place emphases on certain issues in response to a rise of populist radical right parties crucially depends on how much these issues are perceived to be owned by the latter. The mere increase emphasis of this issue, especially if it is of the valence type rather than the positional one, would run the risk of raising its salience in the public debate, thus obtaining the opposite of the intended result and favoring the performance of the populist radical right party.

3.2.2. Systemic factors for issue cooptation

Another relevant area of research on the political impact of rising radical right parties reveals that conditions of party competition determine the extent to which mainstream parties will absorb the issues promoted by PRR parties, or even converge towards their average positions on the same issues. Here, the core independent variable accounting for changes in

the political agenda due to rising PRR parties is thus the set of strategic considerations of the mainstream right bloc, rather than the actual magnitude of these issues or their public and media saliency.

In discussing how mainstream right parties coopt issues generally addressed by the populist radical right, Bale (2003) argues that it is crucial to first look at the whole structure of party competition. He notes that as new entrants join the political scene by focusing heavily on certain issues such as immigration or EU integration, mainstream right-wing parties may have an incentive to emulate part of their agenda with the prospect of a net electoral growth of the broader right-wing coalition (2003: 69). This analysis is relevant as it sheds light on the importance of considering office-seeking motivations behind party strategy, on top of vote-seeking ones (Strøm 1990). Due to these incentives, Bale observes that the mainstream right has increasingly included in its policy agenda themes traditionally picked up by populist radical right forces. If one accepts this line of reasoning, mainstream right parties thus contribute to prime (i.e. boost the salience of) the average programmatic profile of the far right, with issues such as opposition to immigration and stricter law enforcement occupying a prominent place. For the purpose of the present study, it is interesting to test these theoretical expectations when it comes to positions towards EU integration and the immigration governance. In order to do that, it will also be crucial to understand whether populist radical right parties can be considered as having ownership of these issues.

Based on similar assumptions, Green-Pedersen and Krogsdrup (2008) observe that the existence or electoral relevance of a (populist) radical right party alone does not constitute a sufficient condition for the politicization of the immigration issue. The relationship between PRR weight and adoption of the new issue is thus more nuanced than commonly regarded. The crucial intervening variable in fact lies in the strategic decision of the mainstream right-wing parties to either emulate the PRR programmatic supply or instead avoid the “dialogue” on those issues. In turn, this decision depends on the set of contingent incentives related to the structure of the party system, in line with Bale’s (2003) findings. Related to this, Minkenberg argues that how much political influence the radical right will manage to exert will depend on the perception of the overall political environment towards the new party, and for example if the niche contender party is viewed as a potential ally against political adversaries rather than as a threat (1998: 5).

Following this line of research, it can be argued that how much impact (measurable in positional and issue convergence) will occur as for the issues typically owned by populist

radical right parties ultimately depends on the agency of mainstream right parties. Namely, they will decide to adopt the PPR typical issues in the first place, or to emulate some of PPR stances on those issues, if they consider that this course of action will strengthen their right-wing coalition in the electoral market.

3.2.3. Dynamics of PRR impact

Williams (2006) has elaborated a theory of peripheral parties' political impact which is quite relevant to the present analysis. Similarly to Meguid's (2008) characterization, peripheral parties are considered as those who tend to focus on a narrow range of issues, mainly on the sociocultural ideological scale, and stand close to the ends of the political continuum. Populist radical right parties, by virtue of their programmatic characteristics illustrated above, can hence be considered as part of this group. Williams also presents a series of propositions concerning the impact of these peripheral parties on the political system (2006: 35). For example, it is argued that impact of these peripheral parties is not just synonymous with electoral strength as it can also occur through the dissemination of new ideas and interpretative frames. Further, the same capacity of impact is positively correlated with the sophistication of party organization. A particularly telling observation is that mainstream parties may attempt to strategically adjust their programmatic profiles and "co-opt salient issues from the radical right" (Williams 2006: 35). This choice will be driven by the need to forestall a potential realignment of some of their voters away from them towards their fringe neighbor on the political space. However, as shown above, it is important to bear in mind that this mechanism of cooptation is not deterministic, but rather shaped by strategic evaluations, namely (a) whether the issues at stake are owned or not by the PRR party, and (b) whether boosting one's emphasis on these issues will expectedly strengthen the broader rightwing coalition vis-à-vis the left bloc.

Broadly understood as political influence, impact of the PPR needs a more accurate conceptualization for empirical testing. While several scholars interpret impact as exclusively limited to legislative output, this is just one of its possible facets. For example, Williams outlines three levels of impact, from the widest level to the most narrow one (2006: 44). First, impact can take place at the macro-level of the agenda, which consists of the broad political discourse and the complex of ideas and opinions circulating in the electoral market. The intermediate level of impact relates to the institutions, which for example include the structure of the party system, the ideological location of parties, and constitutional or

electoral rules. It is exactly at this level that the alleged mechanism of mainstream parties' cooptation of the typical PRR issues or the repositioning towards the ideological space occupied by the PRR would occur. Finally, impact can regard the level of policy. This last dimension captures the introduction of new bills and laws which would demonstrate the ability of PRR parties to push their key issues (anti-immigration, Euroscepticism, law and order etc.) to the policy domain. However, the main problem in assessing this type of impact is that it is often difficult to attribute with full confidence a political issue to the agency of a specific party. To this end, considerations about parties' perceived ownership and handling of come into play.

Political impact of niche, radical right parties is understood by Minkenberg (1998) as a set of "interaction effects". This impact can manifest in different types and at various levels, similar to what observed by other scholars dealing with radical right impact (Schain 2006, Williams 2006). The two basic types are demarcation/confrontation on one side, and co-optation and incorporation on the other. Interaction also has two main levels: the agenda setting level, which includes public response and other parties' reactions to the niche contender, and the policy making one (Minkenberg 1998: 6). Again by focusing on the French case, the scholar thus argues that the FN was able to provoke a change of public opinion attitudes towards more intolerant views of immigration between 1984 and 1995 (1998: 7). Given that the actual number of immigrants in France had stayed rather stable through the 1980s, the argument is made that it was the politicization of the issue steered by the FN which led to this attitudinal change, rather than demographic variables (Ibid.). The radical right's direct impact at the level of decision-making is considered as merely symbolic, whereas influence could occur through the change in the policy agenda of established parties in response to the altered issue priorities of large segments of the electorate. In its analysis of impact, Minkenberg also implicitly underlines the importance of taking into account timing to isolate the effect of the niche contenders on the terms of the discourse and the relative relevance political issues. While in France, as said, it was the FN breakthrough which prompted mainstream parties to incorporate its anti-immigration issues, in Germany it was the conservative elite which first promoted a frame focused on nativism and ethnocentrism themes, which only later was picked up by the radical right (1998: 16).

When assessing patterns of political influence, it is important to bear in mind that populist radical right parties can exert impact in two ways: both directly through legislation and policy when they are in office, and indirectly by changing the structure of the party system itself –for example by causing an ideological shift of the mainstream parties towards

their issue priorities and positions (Schain 2006). The second avenue of impact, however, seems even more relevant for the family the populist radical right, as its members have rarely drawn vote shares sufficient to obtain government positions, as happened in Austria, in Denmark and in Italy. Similarly to the above analysis, Schain (2006) points out that the main incentives for issue cooptation or positional adjustment come from the need of mainstream parties to recoup some of their former voters who have switched their support to the “upstart” –in this case the populist radical right party. Therefore, even parties with a short electoral momentum may have a far-reaching impact on the issue agenda, by altering what Schattschneider (1960) calls the “scope of the conflict” (2006: 272). In his investigation of the FN impact on the political agenda, Schain points out that the French PPR party effectively managed to influence the issue priorities of other parties’ voters. The FN thus exerted a systemic impact by increasing the saliency of issues such as immigration and law and order in the partisan competition (2006: 277). A further profound political impact of the FN was detected by Schain in the party’s ability to induce voters whose sociological traits would predict their support for the left to vote for a radical right party instead, by insisting on issues which resonated greatly with them (2006: 278). This in turn caused a realignment of working-class voters from the left to right, another key dimension of systemic impact.

From this pattern of convergence in issue priorities between the constituencies of mainstream and niche parties, it follows that established parties may co-opt the PRR issues not just to get former voters back, but also to prevent a potential loss of other voters with the newly formed issue priority. For example, if the saliency of the threat to sovereignty posed by EU integration rises for most of the constituency of an established party and not only its most radical share, the established party will have strategic motivations to increase the emphasis of that issue in its policy programme. Otherwise, voters may perceive that the party they support is not committed to address the problems they are primarily concerned with, and thus look for political alternatives. This process can be defined as “agenda friction”, meaning a mismatch between the policy preferences of parties and those of their voting base (Odmalm & Hepburn 2017). Hence, if PPR parties are able to influence the hierarchy of political issues at systemic level (i.e. what themes matter in the broad political debate), mainstream parties will have even more potent incentives to engage in issue cooptation and ideological repositioning towards their niche PPR contenders. The case study below will demonstrate that these factors indeed have a great deal of bearing on the dynamics of systemic agenda change at party level.

Another dimension of impact, besides the changed priority of issues in the political agenda, relates to way in which the issues themselves are framed. Populist radical right

parties are quite successful in presenting pressing social questions in a manner which is in conformity with their distinctive worldview combining nativism, authoritarianism and populism. Therefore, a policy issue will tend to be portrayed in terms of a threat to national identity, internal security and popular sovereignty by a populist radical right party. For example, while in France the immigration issue was early discussed in relation to the labor market, it then started to be increasingly framed according to nativist, identitarian and law-and-order themes, mainly as a result of the FN agency (Schain 2006). Other scholars have highlighted this ability of populist radical right forces to formulate their most salient issues as “omnibus issues”, which are linked to a whole set of other social problems. The emblematic example is that of immigration, which within these parties’ discourse is commonly related to a wide range of social evils such as less security, higher unemployment, and what is often dubbed “cultural suicide”. In the case of the FN, immigration served as a tool to bring to the fore these and other social woes, as “Le Pen has skillfully picked up and manipulated the issue of immigration, using it as a focus for the Front’s appeal. The immigrant has been resurrected as the traditional scapegoat for all France’s ills.” (Marcus 1995, quoted in Hainsworth & Mitchell 2000). The importance of this logic of framing will be appreciated in the empirical case study concerning the indirect policy impact of UKIP.

3.3. Main variables and hypotheses

3.3.1. Dependent variable

As anticipated, the *explanandum* of this study is the presence and the extent of policy convergence of mainstream parties towards the issue profiles and positions of PRR contenders. It is worth stressing that this study takes into account two dimensions of inter-party competition: positional competition and issue competition. As showed in the preceding section, positional competition implies that parties take different stances on a pre-determined political axis, which generally concerns the socioeconomic/distributional dimension (Downs 1957). However, as just seen, many research contributions have pointed to the importance of an additional facet of electoral competition, namely the way in which policy issues are selectively emphasized by parties in their respective programmes. Consequently, parties’ programmatic shifts can take place in two different ways: (a) by altering the positions or policy preferences over a given issue, and (b) by increasing or decreasing the relative salience of an issue within the party’s programme. It is important to underline that these two logics of

party strategic interaction are better interpreted as complementary or interrelated rather than mutually exclusive.

The dependent variable of the present investigation is the extent of mainstream parties' movement towards or away from the relative issue salience and the positions espoused by their PRR competitor. In the case of UK, the PRR party is the UK Independence Party (UKIP), defined on the basis of the above conceptualization of this party family. UKIP indeed can be regarded as a PRR party, as it espouses a combination of nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Mudde 2007). This party can also be considered as a niche party, insofar as in its campaigns it focuses on a limited number of issues, often ignored or downplayed by mainstream parties (Meguid 2005, 2008). In addition, niche parties such as UKIP tend to campaign heavily on issues which cut across the traditional socioeconomic political axis (Inglehart 1977, Meguid 2005, Rydgren 2007, Wagner 2012). The EU and immigration are two complex and multidimensional issues which seem to fall into this category. The political narrative of these parties is more about "who we are" than "who gets what", and puts a great deal of emphasis on questions surrounding the polity's identity and system of values. As seen above, in the case of radical right parties, themes such as in-group vs out-group boundaries, national sovereignty, deference to the authorities and morality are especially recurrent, and all can be said to belong to the cultural domain of politics. Finally, another way to conceptualize UKIP is in terms of "challenger party", that is a party which has not governed before and hence a "loser" of the electoral competition (Vries & Hobolt 2010, 2012).

Specifying this distinction between sociocultural and socioeconomic helps understand the importance of another tool in the strategic repertoire of interacting parties, namely "framing". Besides emphasizing or downplaying issues and taking positions on them, in fact, parties can convey their preferred perspective or interpretative key through which an issue is addressed. Another indication of convergence of mainstream parties towards niche contenders can thus arguably lie in the way in which issues—in this case EU integration and immigration—are framed, namely which political meaning is attached to them and communicated to the electorate. Given that PRR parties tend to prefer the cultural and value-based cleavage, the empirical observation of mainstream parties framing their policy preferences in more cultural or identitarian fashions can be read as confirming the presence of convergence on the part of the mainstream parties.

Mainstream party's strategic responses to PRR contenders

The dependent variable of this study was said to be the degree of convergence of mainstream parties towards their PRR rival. In order to better grasp variation in the dependent variable, it is worth recalling the possible directions that a mainstream party can take when confronting a PRR competitor in the electoral market.

A party can pick up two basic strategies vis-à-vis its contenders. The first is one is “movement towards” the opponent, also known as convergence. This behavior is consistent with the classic Downsian model (1957) of positional competition, predicting that parties will adjust their positions towards the moderate share of the electorate. The opposing strategy is “movement away” from the opponent, referred to as divergence. This behavior is more closely related to the literature on issue and valence competition, which posits parties also compete by emphasizing those issues on which they are advantaged while neglecting the ones on which they have a bad record or low credibility (Robertson 1976, Budge & Farlie 1983). Thus, parties also have incentives to diverge from their contender, by focusing on their preferred issues, namely those which they “own” (Riker 1996, Petrocik 1996).

In this analysis, convergence is equivalent to what Meguid (2008) calls an “accommodative” strategy, namely increasing the salience of the PRR issue and taking a similar position as the PRR contender on it. Bale (2014) similarly labels this option an “adopt” strategy. Conversely, divergence is interpreted as an “adversarial” strategy, whereby the mainstream party addresses the PRR issues and emphasize their opposite position on them (Meguid 2008). This is what Bale (2014) calls a “hold” strategy. Besides these two strategic options, there is also the possibility that a mainstream party will engage in a “dismissive” behavior, in the attempt to divert attention away from the PRR issue and addressing only the issues which favors it. A dismissive strategy is tantamount to what Bale (2014) defines a “defuse” behavior, meaning the a party will seek to ignore or downplay the PRR issues to lessen the appeal of the niche contender, while devoting the attention to its preferred issues.

To sum up, the possible movements in the dependent variable (mainstream party's response to the PRR contender) are:

- Convergence (accommodative, “adopt” behavior)
- Divergence (adversarial, “hold” behavior)

Alternatively, the party can also select a dismissive strategy, whereby the party tries to defuse the issues at stake.

3.3.2. Independent variables and hypotheses

A theoretical cornerstone of the present study is that, as one focuses on changes in the policy agenda on immigration and EU integration, external shocks in terms of greater numbers of immigrants or growing vote shares of PRR parties do not automatically lead to a right-ward shift of the party system's agenda. If one has to achieve a more accurate theory of inter-party competition it is important to take into account additional variables which eventually prompt a party to adjust its programmatic profile. Structural variables surely have explanatory weight, but agency of parties deserves attention as well.

In light of this, the *explanans* of this investigation is manifold, based on the assumption that positional and salience shifts of mainstream parties may be attributed to a wide array of factors, both external and internal to the parties. By developing the case study of electoral competition between UKIP and its mainstream rivals in the UK, I will seek to test a number of theoretical propositions which refer to the mechanism of agenda impact of niche (PRR) parties on the whole party system. As said, the underlying idea is that peripheral parties focusing on a limited number of sociocultural issues, despite often lacking the means to wield direct decision-making power, can have a far-reaching influence on the terms of the political conflict, thus producing profound political consequences. The phenomenon inquired by this study is thus one the agenda-setting impact of PRR parties, in continuity with the research of peripheral parties' political influence (Minkenberg 1998, Schain 2006, Williams 2006). I will now proceed by outlining the major determinants of the indirect policy impact of PRR parties. For each of these variables, an hypothesis will be set out to be tested in the following empirical investigation.

Electoral performance

Parties are political organizations which generally display a high degree of ideological rigidity, also referred to as "inertia" (Downs 1957). However, programmatic change is often observed in real-life party politics. Electoral results can be regarded as key elements which help a party reduce uncertainty over the effect in terms of vote share of their programmatic supplies. Therefore, a first crucial factor explaining why mainstream parties may decide to

engage in confrontation with their PRR challenger --thus causing a systemic change in the policy agenda-- is the extent to which the PRR party is perceived or expected to affect the electoral performance of the mainstream party. Here, it is worth clarifying that simply looking at the vote share of the major PRR party is not a reliable indicator of the electoral threat posed by it.

A more fine-grained proposition is that if a mainstream party incurs in a vote loss higher than the major mainstream contender at time point ($t - 1$), it will perceive the PRR party more as a threat and will have greater incentives to shift towards the issue profile and the positions of the PRR rival at point (t) in the attempt to subtract voters from it and recoup the loss (cfr. Harmel & Svåsand 1997, Somer-Topcu 2009, Abou-Chadi 2014). In a bipolar party system with majoritarian voting, a mainstream party may see its PRR rival more as an asset than a liability. If the PRR party damages less the mainstream party than its direct mainstream contender, politicizing the winning issues of the PRR may turn out to be an effective strategy to improve one's chances of obtaining office (Bale 2003). What is crucial here to account for ideological repositioning is that the mainstream party effectively traces back the electoral loss or setback it suffered to the new successful PRR challenger. As Meguid notes, what determines the mainstream parties' strategic response is the "percentage of votes the niche party is stealing from one mainstream party relative to another and the importance of those votes to the established parties" (2008: 16). These reflections lead to the first hypothesis concerning the systemic agenda impact of PRR parties:

Voting hypothesis (H1): *A relative electoral loss of the mainstream party vis-à-vis its mainstream contender due to the PRR party will prompt the mainstream party to increase salience of the EU integration and immigration issues and shift towards the PRR party's positions on them.*

Mainstream party's issue ownership

The above theorization has stressed the importance for parties of enjoying ownership over a policy issue, namely being regarded by the electorate as the most committed and competent party to handle that issue. In this thesis the assumption is made that a mainstream party will have greater incentives to address an issue mobilized by the PRR rival if that issue is expected to advantage the former. As Meguid (2008) and Abou-Chadi (2014) observe, mainstream parties' incentives to converge may be offset by the knowledge that taking a

position on the issue owned by the PRR party will make it more salient on the systemic policy agenda, thereby risking to boost the electoral appeal of the niche contender rather than weaken it. These remarks on the relevance of issue ownership to explain patterns of systemic impact of successful PRR parties lead to the second hypothesis of this inquiry:

Issue ownership hypothesis (H2): *The more the issues of immigration and the EU are owned by the PRR party vis-à-vis its mainstream contender, the lower the incentives of the latter to coopt these issues and articulate its positions on them.*

Opposition / government status of the mainstream party

In assessing positional and salience adjustments of established parties as a reaction to rising PRR actors in the electoral market, it is important to consider that the coopting the agenda of the opponent is not an easy and inexpensive strategy for a party. While Meguid (2008) observes that when a mainstream party adopts an adversarial strategy against a niche contender it reinforces the rival's ownership of the issue and thus its electoral appeal, her analysis seems to neglect the risks associated with an accommodative strategy. The scholar in fact argues that a mainstream party can contain the electoral threat posed by a niche rival by coopting its agenda. Indeed, once convergence takes place, reputation for competence, experience, and higher visibility to the electorate will tend to favor the mainstream party over the niche opponent (2008: 29). What occurs, thus, is a transfer of ownership of the issues first introduced by the niche challenger towards the established party adopting an accommodative behavior. Meguid hence maintains that a mainstream party can cause a vote loss of the niche rival by engaging in an accommodative strategy, as voters will tend to prefer the mainstream party over its niche contender (2008: 29).

The present analysis takes a different approach to party strategic choice and instead builds on the assumption that ownership (i.e. credibility for handling an issue) cannot be easily transferred from one party to another. Indeed, there are several reasons to expect that a mainstream party coopting the agenda of its PRR rival will harm rather than benefit the former. In other words, patterns of direct confrontation and issue capture may be less likely than commonly regarded. Similarly to the findings of Abou-Chadi (2014), "issue trespassing", namely formulating one's positions on the issues so far owned by the opponent is instead a notably risky strategy for a party. Thus, unless the PRR party represents a particularly alarming threat, one would expect that mainstream parties will by default decide

to downplay or neglect the issues on which the PRR party enjoys a higher reputation. There are a number of reasons backing this proposition: requirements of ideological consistency, potential alienation of core voters, exacerbating internal factionalism, degree of leadership autonomy and so on.

Alongside, some scholarly contributions point to the inherent difficulties in gaining ownership over (i.e. capturing) policy issues already owned by other parties (Walgrave *et al.* 2009, Van de Wardt 2015). Simply moving into the opponent's programmatic terrain may entail significant political costs for the mainstream party, by reinforcing the PRR rival and producing the opposite of the intended outcome. On the basis of this recognition of the risks associated with issue and positional convergence, it can be expected that a mainstream party will undertake this strategy when it has less to lose than its mainstream challenger. Van de Wardt (2015) hence observes that a party in opposition has more incentives to accommodate the PRR agenda as, being in the domain of losses, it is also more risk-taking. Meanwhile, the party in government, in the domain of gains, will be more risk-averse and thus refrain from converging towards the PRR programmatic offering (see Tversky & Kahneman 1979 on prospect theory). Consequently, a further hypothesis concerning mainstream parties' response to PRR can be formulated:

Opposition/government hypothesis (H3): *A mainstream opposition party is more likely to select an accommodative strategy vis-à-vis a PRR contender than a mainstream government party.*

Public saliency of the issues

A great deal of research underlines the importance of public concerns and attitudes on societal issues to explain parties positioning on the electoral stage. These accounts are part of the literature on the demand-side of the electoral market, namely what are the most pressing needs and claims of the electorate. Provided that parties are somewhat compelled to provide answers on the most salient demands of voters, one can expect that at party competition level it is those issues which resonate the most with the electorate which are more determinant to explain voting behaviors. Therefore, mainstream parties facing a rising PRR contender will clearly be more induced to adjust their positioning and relative emphasis on those issues which are also significant to the eyes of the voters (Odmalm & Bale 2015). In assessing parties' shifts on the issues of EU integration and immigration, therefore, I will look at data

on public attitudes on those dimensions. The following hypothesis is set out on the basis of the above theoretical expectations:

Public saliency hypothesis (H4): *The more the issues of immigration and the EU are salient to the public, the more likely the mainstream parties will address these issues and formulate positions on them as a response to the rising PPR party.*

4. Assessing PRR indirect impact in the UK (2005-2015)

This section aims to empirically assess the dynamics of electoral interaction between mainstream parties and their PRR contenders in contemporary democracies. Many scholars have argued that globalizing trends and increased interdependence have deeply changed the contours of domestic political conflicts (Kaiser 2007, Kriesi *et al.* 2008). Today, structural and class-based voting has waned dramatically, leaving more space to issue voting and electoral volatility (Franklin & Mughan 1977). Another evident pattern relates to the increasing domestic repercussions of international events, as epitomized by the implications for national governments of multilevel governance at European Union level. Based on these premises, the present study seeks to break down the mechanisms through which PRR parties can change the terms of the political debate over international questions of particular relevance to the public. Hence, the focus of this thesis is the “conflict over conflicts” (Schattschneider 1960), namely the way in which emerging parties attempt to shape the set of issues and themes dominating the electoral debate.

By developing a case study of electoral competition on the issues of EU integration and immigration in the UK from 2005 to 2015, I will seek to verify the main theoretical expectations deriving from literature on party competition set out above. The objective is to identify the factors which contribute to explain whether or not mainstream parties will converge towards the agendas of their PRR rival for strategic reasons. Therefore, the phenomenon under scrutiny is the indirect policy impact of PRR parties in the areas of immigration and the EU. These two issues were selected as they arguably constitute two typical items characterizing the average programmatic profile of the PRR. Moreover, they are largely multidimensional issues, which do not align neatly with the economic line of political contention (Meijers 2017). This is a reason to expect that they feature intensively in a PRR party’s platform, on the ground of what has been discussed above. For this reason, assessing

how mainstream parties' programmes vary on these issues can offer some insight on the degree of political impact wielded by a PRR contender such as UKIP.

A building bloc of this analysis is the conceptual distinction between parties' direct and indirect political influence (Williams 2006, Schain 2006). Indeed, while PRR parties are usually prevented from exerting direct influence over policy outcomes in light of their difficulties in reaching government positions (Mudde 2013), this thesis builds on the claim that their political impact can still be significant at indirect level. The basic argument is that PRR parties, as they emerge and make inroads at electoral level, can induce their mainstream contenders to converge towards their issue appeals and their policy preferences on them. If they are perceived as a significant threat, they can prompt their mainstream rivals to alter their programmes and hence profoundly affect the whole policy agenda. In this way, political impact would not occur through the more straightforward mechanism of policy formulation and implementation by the party in office, but more subtly through the channel of systemic impact on the agendas of other parties, and possibly also the ones holding government positions. It is exactly these patterns of indirect impact that are the object of the present analysis.

4.1. Methodology, operationalization and case selection

For the present investigation I will carry out a qualitative content analysis of the parties' election manifestos in order to measure their programmatic positioning. Manifestos are widely used in research on party politics and party competition, as they constitute authoritative, parsimonious and reliable statements of the policy preferences of a party (Budge 1994: 455). They offer an aggregate picture of the parties internal factions, and can thus be used as shortcuts to locate parties on the ideological space. Manifestos offer us an understanding of the parties' rationales behind proposed reforms, as well the set of priorities that a party will pursue if elected (Walgrave & Nuytemanns 2009). Having said that, some scholars have questioned the notion that manifestos accurately reflect the policy trajectories envisaged by parties, and that they can provide comprehensive indicators of the parties' policy platforms (Pelizzo 2003, Green & Hobolt 2008). More broadly, I will rely on process tracing in order to draw causal inferences on the cited dynamics of political influence of a PRR actor (George and Bennett 2005, Mahoney 2007). Process tracing can be understood as the "systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator" (Collier 2011: 823).

While many studies resort to quantitative data which code manifestos along a series of variables, here I will avail myself of a qualitative in-depth analysis of the parties' manifestos in the election campaigns under examination. The most influential and widespread of these dataset is the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), which assign scores on a series of scales based on the parties' coverage of specific issues. The main drawback of this tool, or better an aspect which does serve the purpose of this study, is that it employs a salience-based approach while failing to adequately account for positional nuances between parties (Odmalm & Hepburn 2017). As anticipated, I will evaluate agenda change in the whole party system, representing the indirect policy impact of the PPR, along two key issues, immigration and the EU. These are central themes in the political discourse of UKIP, and will hence provide a good starting point to assess the degree and the nature of programmatic shifts towards and away from UKIP's agenda. In line with the theoretical framework presented in the previous section, I will focus on both the positional and the salience component of a party's programmatic supply which, as said, is retrieved from its electoral manifesto.

First, as concerns the issue of immigration, I will resort to what I call a LIBRES scale, where higher values reflect a more restrictive platform and lower values represent a more liberal one. The total LIBRES scale will be calculated by summing up the single scores assigned to the party on each of the dimensions making up the whole immigration issue. Immigration, by reason of its complexity and multidimensionality (Meyers 2002, Messina 2007), will be divided into four dimensions: economic immigration, asylum, family reunifications and/or students' immigration (from now on, family/study immigration) and integration. Based on a matrix tool used by researchers to measure party positions (Pelikaan *et al.* 2003, De Lange 2007), each of these items or dimensions will receive a +1 if the party exhibits a restrictive position on it, -1 if the party takes a liberal position, and 0 if the party's position is either ambiguous or not expressed at all.

For example, on economic immigration, a restrictive position may coincide with the commitment to tighten rules on work visa, set a numeric quota on the number of yearly arrivals, reduce the incentives to migrate by restricting benefits for foreign workers and so on. On asylum, a typical restrictive position may consist of the proposal to force asylum seekers to apply for refugee status in a third safe country, the use of national own criteria for awarding the refugee status, disregarding relevant international law instruments, or reducing migrants' rights of appeal in case of rejected claims. A restrictive score on family/study immigration may result from stricter rules concerning spouse unifications, the pledge to fight abuses of the student visa system, to reduce the duration of student visas, or to include

students in immigration statistics. Finally, integration capture the more domestic dimension of immigration policy. A restrictive position on this item will be suggested by the commitment to raise the required standard of linguistic knowledge to certain jobs, the explicit contempt for multiculturalism or support for cultural assimilation, and tighter criteria to obtain citizenship or resident permits.

From one campaign to the next, the degree of LIBRES change will be measured, in order to detect possible programmatic movements. A reduction in the LIBRES distance between a party and UKIP will denote convergence, or an overall accommodative strategy towards UKIP. Conversely, wider LIBRES distances between a party and UKIP over time will indicate the adoption an adversarial strategy vis-à-vis UKIP, or divergence.

In the section concerning the EU issue, I will use a parallel measurement tool based on a EUROSC scale. As suggested by the name, higher scores on this scale correspond to a more Eurosceptic agenda, whereas lower scores indicate a more Europhile agenda. The EU issue will be divided into two main dimension. The first, dubbed “membership”, refers to the party’s view of British membership of the EU. A value of +1 on this dimension implies that the party is at least sceptic about the need or the importance of keeping the country within the EU. A -1 value instead suggests that the party supports continued membership or does not even mention the possibility of leaving the Union. A 0 score means that the party’s position on the question is hard to determine. The second dimension of the EU issue is “political integration”, related to how a party considers deeper European integration. A +1 will be assigned if the party is sceptic or openly opposed to further integration, while a -1 will indicate a favorable view of deeper integration or supranational delegation of some powers, for example a position in favor of joining the Eurozone. A 0 score will instead be given in case of unclear or ambiguous positions.

The score tool just presented is meant to gauge the degree of programmatic shifts of the studied parties on the issues of immigration and the EU. As said, these agenda changes constitute the dependent variable of this study. As far as the various independent variables are concerned, I will rely on the ParlGov and on the Election Resources on the Internet databases for the electoral performances of the various parties within the studied period. For a more evasive concept like issue ownership, I will draw on survey data gathered by national polling agencies such as YouGov and Ipsos MORI. The same kinds of sources will be used to determine changes in the public significance of the studied issues over time. When such data are either missing or difficult to interpret, I will refer to the literature in order to operationalize the independent variables of interest.

As already said, this inquiry will focus on the single case of the recent role of UKIP in the British political landscape. The time frame under examination is the period between 2005 and 2015. I started my analysis from 2005 because it was the first general election after UKIP's first electoral breakthrough, that is a 15.6 percent (third place) at the 2004 European Parliament election. I have selected the UK on the ground that its political system allows to better study the political influence of a party which has little chance of reaching office, and thus of exerting a direct policy impact. This constraint clearly depends on the institutional nature of the British polity, with its uninominal, plurality, first-past-the-post voting system. Beyond the well-known insight that majoritarian systems negatively affect smaller, emerging parties (Duverger 1959), the British institutional setting also favors the occurrence of psychological effects when voters have to cast their ballot (Norris 2005). For example, in a two-party system with plurality voting such as the British one, a voter could engage in strategic or tactical voting, by choosing its second preferred candidate if it feels that picking the smaller preferred party amounts to a wasted vote (Cain 1978, Franklin & Whitten 1994). Elites themselves are obviously aware of these potential effects, and often mainstream parties' candidates call on their voters not to vote for a party with no significant change of getting a plurality as this would end up advantaging the mainstream rival.

Having recognized the structural hurdles that the UK polity poses for the PRR, the mechanisms of indirect policy impact through a programmatic realignment of UKIP's mainstream contenders can be explored.

4.2. The actors: UKIP and its mainstream contenders

The major political actors considered in the present case study are the mainstream parties, namely the center-right Conservative Party (also Conservatives, or Tories), the center-left Labour Party (Labour), and the centrist Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems) on one side, and their PRR contender UKIP on the other. By tracing the programmatic development of these parties and the strategic interactions between them from a supply-side perspective, I will seek to evaluate the cogency of the theoretical propositions provided above.

UKIP is the central actor of the present investigation, as it is the party whose indirect policy impact is assessed, by examining the rival parties' repositioning or lack thereof in response to its electoral rise. UKIP is considered as a PRR party in line with the conceptualization offered in the first section of this thesis. The party indeed espouses a nativist worldview, enmeshed with rightwing authoritarianism and anti-establishment

populism (Mudde 2007, Goodwin & Milazzo 2015). Particularly relevant to the party's platform is the notion of national sovereignty, which would be undermined by the "EU Superstate" (UKIP 2010: 10) and the delegation of national powers in several policy areas. UKIP is thus a PRR party, but can be equally considered as a niche party campaigning on a few, largely noneconomic issues (Meguid 2005, Adams *et al.* 2006), or a challenger party who is likely to mobilize new issues in the political debate by acting as an "issue entrepreneur" (Vries & Hobolt 2012).

UKIP fits particularly well the latter characterization insofar as it started a single-issue party whose primary goal was to attain British withdrawal from the EU (Ford & Goodwin 2014). In the following years, the party underwent a process of restructuring and ideological adjustment, broadening its programmatic appeals in a direction similar to many West European PPR parties like the Italian LN. While at the beginning "hard Euroscepticism" was the cornerstone of the party's platform, it later became more of a channel to achieve a wide array of policy goals: reducing immigration flows, getting rid of excessive EU red-tape and regulation, and relaunching the British economy. Therefore, the party came to assume most of the ideological and rhetoric traits associated with the PRR. This strategic evolution also relates to the dynamic of "framing" described above. Parties play a crucial role in politicizing new issues by attributing them their preferred meanings or by connecting to other policy goals which are expected to resonate highly with voters (Carmines & Stimson 1986).

4.3. Immigration: Explaining PPR indirect impact from 2005 to 2015

4.3.1. Reviewing the parties' agenda on immigration

2005

First I will consider the programmatic offerings of the key players before the 2005 general election. Ahead of the election, UKIP was still a very small actor at electoral level, having obtained a mere 1.5 percent of the vote share in the previous 2001 election. UKIP's manifesto of 2005 devoted a quite synthetic section to the immigration question. In terms of framing of the issue, the party deliberately connected the growing numbers of immigrants to membership in the EU and the free movement of workers with its territory. The manifesto included the typical proposals that one would expect from a member of the PRR party family, namely more controls on incomers and stricter criteria to award work permits. These

positions were also conveyed in a populist fashion, made evident by the statement that “all British people [...] want immigration under control” (UKIP 2005: 11). UKIP also favored a points-based system to facilitate the matching of the skills needed by the British economy and the new entrants (2005: 11). As regards asylum, UKIP proposed to devise Britain’s own criteria to grant protection, regardless of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Concerning family reunification, UKIP called for tighter controls of applications (2005: 11). As for the domestic side of immigration, namely integration, the party endorsed an assimilationist model, with “Britishness tests” for foreign residents to ensure the highest level of integration of foreigners into the British society (2005: 11). Interestingly, the party did not call for the introduction of quotas for both labor migrants and asylum seekers, believing that its proposed measures would alone lead to the long-term target of zero net immigration (2005: 11). Except for the Britishness test proposal, UKIP’s programme of 2005 did not yet feature markedly nativist and identitarian tones, while the immigration issue was implicitly portrayed as more of an economic than a cultural problem.

The attention will be now drawn to the Conservative agenda on immigration for the 2005 general election. The manifesto chapter on the subject is quite emblematically titled “It’s not racist to impose controls on immigration” (Conservatives 2005). The party, recognizing the dramatic surge in the number of net arrivals every year, committed to tackle the problem seriously, by bringing immigration under control. Several policy measures were proposed as part of this strategy (Conservatives 2005: 19). For example, the party supported the introduction a British Border Control Police to engage in full-time monitoring of national borders. In the area of labor migration, the party proposed a points-based system on the Australian model to concede work permits and ensure that newcomers would make a concrete contribution to the British economy. Turning to asylum policy, the Tories pledged to withdraw from the 1951 Geneva Convention and taking the powers back from Brussels in the management of refugees. More tellingly, the party also proposed to set a maximum quota on the numbers of allowed refugees, and to process applications outside the British territory (2005: 19). The party also stated it was the only party to take the issue seriously enough to impose a numeric limit on the arrivals, hence emphasizing the uniqueness of its platform compared to its contenders.

The issue of immigration governance was included by the Labour in their chapter on crime and security within the 2005 election manifesto. This choice may suggest that the immigration issue was partly portrayed within a security-based frame. However, the party took an overall liberal position towards labor immigration, emphasizing the economic

benefits of foreign workers in a period of short supply of British jobs (Labour 2005: 51). In spite of this, a points-based system was proposed to ensure a better selection of those willing to enter the country (2005: 53). Besides presenting its positions, the party underlined its successful record in cutting down both the number of asylum applications and the average period for processing the claims. The party similarly stated that it managed to more than double the number of repatriations of rejected asylum claimants. This was clearly meant to convey the party's reputation of a credible and committed party to handle this issue, in the attempt to reinforce ownership. Among its policy proposals, Labour called for faster evaluations of the asylum claims, broader use of detention of irregulars, and less room for appeals in cases of rejected applications (2005: 52-53). Again linking immigration to security, Labour committed to stricter border controls, fingerprinting for those needing a visa to enter the country, and mandatory IDs for visitors planning to stay more than three months in the UK (2005: 52).

Finally, the Lib Dems' programme on immigration can be reviewed. The party has a tradition for tolerant and open stances towards immigration, especially the labor type. In the 2005 election manifesto, the party underlined the distinction between the issues of labor migration and asylum (Liberal Democrats 2005: 3). Concerning the former, the Lib Dems reaffirmed the extremely beneficial impact of foreign residents on the British economy and culture. The party thus endorsed a continued policy of openness towards economic migrants, stressing the short supply of skills and jobs in the British economy in a way similar to Labour (2005: 16). As concerns asylum seekers, the party was tacit about the need to introduce controls on the number of newcomers, while committing to work for a fairer and more transparent system of application assessment, also through the creation of a new dedicated agency (2005: 13).

It is worth summarizing the various positions of the parties under observation during the 2005 election campaign. UKIP, as expected, assumed a restrictive stance on immigration of both the economic and asylum type, aiming towards a zero net immigration in the long run. The Conservatives as well exhibited a restrictive agenda on immigration, stressing the need for stricter controls and promising to set numeric caps on the number of yearly arrivals, for both labor migrants and asylum seekers. Labour was not far from the other parties' restrictive positions, yet it was more positive in its portrayal of economic immigration. In addition, it framed immigration as a security issue more than any other party. The Lib Dems by far had the most liberal and open position on both economic and asylum immigration, also downplaying its possible negative domestic repercussions.

2010

Despite its modest score at the 2005 general election, UKIP could exploit the momentum gained with the electoral success at the 2009 EU Parliament election, where it polled 16.5 percent of the national vote. The party made the point it was now a reliable and stable force on the political arena in the foreword of its 2010 election manifesto, and a vote for it would not be a wasted vote (UKIP 2010: 2). With increasing populist tones, evidenced by the mottos “Empowering the people”, “Straight talking” and the pejorative mention of the “LibLabCon-sensus” (2010: 2), the party upheld its restrictive agenda on immigration. Compared to the previous manifesto, the chapter on immigration now ranked third out of eighteen chapters, and was sensibly more detailed. This change arguably denotes an increased salience of the immigration issue within the party’s agenda.

In positional terms as well, the UKIP hardened its profile. The party introduced the sweeping proposal of an immediate five-year freeze on immigration for permanent settlement (2010: 5). Other related measures included equal treatment for EU and non-EU foreigners, recorded entries and exits of non-UK travelers, binding undertakings for those applying for a “permanent leave to remain” to respect the laws or face deportation, and a signed pledge to uphold Britain’s “democratic and tolerant way of life” for those willing to obtain UK citizenship (UKIP 2010: 5). As regards asylum, the party endorsed the replacement of the Geneva Convention with a domestic Asylum Act, limited right to appeal for rejected applications, and the obligation to seek asylum in the first safe country they enter (2010: 6). The party also committed to crack down on bogus spouse reunifications by reintroducing the “Primary Purpose Rule” --obliging those willing to enter the UK to demonstrate that marriage and not residence is the primary purpose of the application (2010: 6).

The Conservatives held their fairly restrictive stance on immigration. In the 2010 election manifesto, the party stated made the point that foreign workers doing jobs which could be made by British citizens were not welcome (Conservatives 2010: 21). Also, the famous pledge was included to bring the number of annual arrivals from the then hundreds of thousands back to the tens of thousands of the 1990s (2010: 21). In order to do so, the party envisaged an annual limit on the numbers of admitted non-EU economic migrants. Interestingly, the only mention of immigration in this manifesto was limited to the economic type, and no policy preference was expressed on asylum seekers and family reunifications, except the vague commitment to continue to provide a safe haven for refugees and the

proposal to impose a language tests for foreigners coming to the UK to get married (2010: 109). Therefore, adopted a dismissive (defuse) strategy on asylum in its agenda prior to the 2010 general election. Yet, the party assumed an accommodative strategy vis-à-vis UKIP on labor migration, proposing radical measures such as the annual quota on non-EU immigrant workers.

In the Labour 2010 election manifesto, immigration is first mentioned in the chapter titled “Crime and immigration”, confirming the securitization of the issue already tangible in the 2005 manifesto. After stating its past success in bringing down asylum claims and making net immigration decline, the party again proposed an Australian-style points-based system to ensure only immigrants with the skills most needed would enter the country (Labour 2010: 36). Moreover, the party took an adversarial approach against the Tories, firmly opposing the arbitrary annual limit on non-EU economic migrants (2010: 36). Other mentions of the immigration issue denote a degree of identitarian and nativist tones, the ones commonly associated with PRR parties. For example, the party stated that “We are committed to an immigration system that promotes and protects British values” (2010: 40), seemingly implying the immigration can be a threat to the British way of life – indeed a recurrent theme in the PRR political narrative. The rather nativist mention was also made of the need to tighten immigration criteria in line with “the values of British citizenship” (2010:40). The party claimed credit for the new Border Agency with police-level powers and the introduction of biometric visas, again in an attempt to boost its ownership of the immigration issue. The central tenet of the party platform on immigration was that the country would “get the migrants our economy needs, but no more”, not too far from the Conservative framing of the issue (2010: 40). This ambition was to be ensured by keeping the points-based system on the Australian model. It can be argued that Labour took an even more restrictive position on immigration than before, by calling for a halt of unskilled migration from outside the EU, proposing to advertise skilled jobs in advance for British citizens, and priority for local entities in public procurement (2010: 40). As regards citizenship applications and the rights of alien residents, the party pledged to strengthen the test of British values and traditions, scrap the automatic link between duration of stay and citizenship, make residence permits more contingent on the points-based criteria, and reduce access to benefits and social housing for non-UK citizens (2010: 40). Apart from the cited reduction in the number of asylum claimants, the party did not address the question of refugees nor proposed concrete policy preferences on the subject, hence denoting a dismissive behavior on this dimension.

The Lib Dems again stood out as the most liberal party on immigration among the four. Immigration was framed in largely positive tones, with significant emphasis on the economic benefits associated with foreign workers. The party, by virtue its opposition status, criticized the present status of immigration management, denouncing the obstacles to proper integration caused by the government, and the presence of illegal immigrants in the country (Liberal Democrats 2010: 75). Alongside, the party committed to reintroduce exit checks at all ports airports to ensure the prompt expulsion of those without a regular visa (2010: 75). A further proposal concerned the introduction of a regional points-based system to ensure a more adequate matching of between the demand and the supply of immigrant workers' skills (2010: 75). In addition, the party was the only one to propose more controls on business and employers in order to cut the exploitation of illegal labor (2010: 76). The party's section on asylum seekers was clearly more extensive than that of other parties. The party stated its commitment to abide by international law obligations on the acceptance of refugees, proposing a set of interventions to ensure maximum protection: creating a new independent agency for asylum on the Canadian model, promoting increased coordination at EU level for a fairer distribution of refugees, stopping the detention of children in immigration detention centers, using measures alternative to detention such as electronic tagging, and ending the practice of deporting rejected asylum seekers to countries where their safety would be guaranteed (2010: 76).

In summary, UKIP's agenda on immigration became even tougher, with new proposals such as a five-years freeze on new arrivals, the withdrawal from the 1951 Geneva Convention, stricter implementation of the Dublin Regulation forcing the state where an asylum seeker first arrives to deal with the application, and more controls on spouse citizenship claims. The Tories assumed a more restrictive stance, confirming the proposal to set an annual limit for non-EU economic migrants and arguing that no immigration in excess to what the domestic economy required would be tolerated. At the same time, the issues of asylum and family reunifications were left unaddressed. On its part, Labour adopted a remarkably tough agenda on the issue, again pursuing its strategy to merge immigration with the security issue. The party showed its willingness to address the issue of economic immigration, also proposing tighter policies. The Lib Dems did not move from their overall open policy towards immigrants, devoting special attention to the exploitation of illegal labor and the protection of asylum seekers and child immigrants. The only sign of a Lib Dem partial co-option of a more restrictive agenda was found in the mention of exit checks to be reintroduced in ports and airports.

2015

The UKIP manifesto for the 2015 campaign was far more comprehensive and detailed than the last one (76 pages compared to the 16 of the 2010 manifesto). The party also gave wider coverage to the immigration issue (increasing its salience), while attacking what it deemed the lax and reckless Labour immigration policies and the Tory failure to meet its promise to bring the phenomenon back to the “tens of thousands” per year. Likewise, UKIP pointed out what it regarded the serious negative impacts of the large numbers of annual arrivals, in terms of “economy, public services, culture and environment” (UKIP 2015: 11). The party also for the first time referred to the immigration issue as one of high concern to citizens, and hence worthy of the utmost political attention (2015: 11). Some of the proposed measures were not particularly innovative: take control of the borders, implement the Australian points-based system, address the problem of “sham marriages” to obtain residence permits (2015: 11). Tellingly, the party framed the handling of immigration even more as a matter demanding immediate and proactive response. UKIP then stressed the adverse consequences of the present mass inflows, seen as reducing the “breathing space” needed by the country and thwarting the creation of “harmonious and integrated communities” (2015: 11). This kind of discourse indeed fits the ideological profiling of PRR parties which was offered above in this work.

Again, UKIP was able to display programmatic consistency by stressing that full control of immigration could not be achieved while remaining bound by the EU-sanctioned freedom of movement. The party thus highlighted that the other parties were not being honest about their commitment to curb immigration while supporting continued membership (UKIP 2015: 12). This can be interpreted as a move to undermine the mainstream parties’ ownership of the issue, by questioning their competence and trustworthiness on the subject. Further UKIP’s proposals in the agenda included: the creation of a Migration Control Commission to oversee the implementation of the points-based system and further reduce the inflows, a limit of 50.000 visas for skilled migrants from both EU and outside EU combined with a freeze of all low-skilled and unskilled immigration, and a crackdown on abuses of the student visa system and family reunifications (2015: 11-12). Concerning asylum, the party made a sort of U turn, promising to comply fully with the Geneva Convention provisions, while speeding up the overall process and overcoming existing logjams (2015: 12).

The governing Conservative party, in its 2015 platform on immigration, first mentioned its achievements in terms of reduced numbers of non-EU immigrants and renewed the target of bringing annual arrivals down to the “tens of thousands”. The party in fact admitted it had failed to attain the goal due to unexpected flows of economic immigration from the EU (Conservative 2015: 29). The party also first dealt with the problem of welfare provision for EU labor migrants, a theme usually raised by UKIP. The Tories thus promised to re-negotiate the rules with the EU, so to ensure that economic migrants would have to stay for a minimum number of years before having access to social benefits (2015: 30). The party also introduced new proposals to expand the use of deportation, and stiffen rules on non-EU citizens joining their EU spouses in the UK. The problem of student visa abuses and overstaying was also mentioned, similar to UKIP’s platform (2015: 30). A new element in the Tory agenda was the commitment to tighten controls on employers profiting from illegal labor, an issue typically raised by the Lib Dems (2015: 31). On integration, the party said it would require a high level of English from civil servants working in a customer-facing role. Again as regards integration, particularly emblematic was also the sentence “we will protect British values and our way of life”, evoking the PRR rhetoric (2015: 31).

Labour’s programme on immigration was not that distant from the Tories’. Besides criticizing Cameron’s government for failing to meet his famous “tens of thousands” promise, the party recognized the need to keep a rein on immigration, especially the one of low skilled workers. The party committed to tackle illegality, proposing to deport immigrants charged with serious crimes, to introduce full exit checks and to prevent abuse of the student visa system (Labour 2015: 49). Referring to the aspect of workers exploitation first brought up by the Lib Dems, Labour engaged to pass legislation aimed at stopping “employers undercutting wages by exploiting workers”, and to ban recruitment agencies exclusively hiring from overseas (2015: 50). Importantly, the party also declared it would keep the Coalition’s annual cap on non-EU migrant workers (2015: 50), thus coopting a Conservative policy. In the same vein as the Tories, the party addressed the issue of welfare for non-UK citizens. Its main proposals on the subject were to set a requirement of two-years stay before being entitled to benefits and a stop on child benefits being sent abroad (2015: 50). When it comes to asylum, the party assumed a more tolerant and liberal platform usually associated with the Lib Dems. In concrete terms, it pledged to ban indefinite detentions and detentions of pregnant women and those having undergone human trafficking or sexual abuses (2015: 50).

The Lib Dems did not move substantially from their previous stance on immigration. Their overall open attitude is evidenced by the positive portrayal of economic immigration, and the reaffirmed value of giving “sanctuary to refugees fleeing persecution” (Liberal Democrats 2015: 33). The party also pointed out the Coalition’s record in fighting illegality and loopholes in the immigration system –for example by reintroducing exit checks at borders (2015: 118)-- as a way to boost its image of a committed and competent actor on the issue. The party engaged to speed up the processing of asylum claims, aiming to reduce the time genuine refugees have to wait before settling in the UK (2015: 126). Targeting abuses of the student route --a policy goal first mentioned by UKIP-- was also included in the Lib Dem 2015 agenda (2015: 126).

The various parties’ offerings on immigration ahead of the 2015 general election can be now summarized. UKIP presented an even more restrictive agenda, highlighting the plentiful negative consequences of immigration, and reiterating its concrete steps to dramatically reduce the arrivals. On asylum, UKIP moderated its positions and pledged to comply with international law obligations. Finally, UKIP enhanced its “fusion strategy” (Dennison & Goodwin 2015), whereby immigration control was effectively linked to withdrawal from the EU. The Conservative Party maintained the bulk of its previous agenda, but also addressed new issues such as access to benefits for non-UK citizens, and abuses of the student route. Asylum immigration was instead neglected. Labour held a restrictive view on low skilled immigrants and stated it would maintain the annual cap on labor immigration from outside the EU. The party took similar positions on access to benefits and treatment of foreign criminals as the Tories. In contrast, the party made positive mentions asylum immigration. The Lib Dems again confirmed their status as the most open and liberal party on the issue. They framed economic immigration as basically positive for the country. Moreover, the party stressed the need to improve protection of asylum seekers.

4.3.2. Gauging the agenda change on immigration

Having examined the policy platforms of the various parties on immigration through the period 2005-2015, I will now proceed by providing a measure of their ideological evolution. The overall party’s agenda on immigration is measured by means of a liberal-restrictive scale (LIBRES scale), which takes into account the salience and position of the various dimensions constituting the broader immigration issue. For each dimension or item of the immigration agenda, a +1 point will be given for a restrictive position, a -1 will indicate a

liberal position, while a 0 will be assigned in case of ambiguous positions, remarkably moderate or centrist views, or if the dimension is not addressed at all by the party. As far as the integration item is concerned, a +1 indicates a more assimilationist position, while a -1 means a more multicultural/cosmopolitan position. To gauge the overall LIBRES score of the party's immigration agenda, the values for each item will be summed up. Higher values on the LIBRES scale thus indicates an overall more restrictive agenda. When a party reduces its LIBRES distance from UKIP by adopting a more restrictive agenda, it engages in an accommodative strategy, which indicates convergence. In the opposite scenario, the party assumes an adversarial behavior, hence denoting divergence.

	UKIP	Conservatives	Labour	Lib Dems
Economic	+1	+1	0	-1
Asylum	+1	+1	+1	0
Family/Study	+1	0	0	0
Integration	+1	0	0	-1
LIBRES score	+4	+2	+1	-2

Table 1: Parties' agendas on immigration, 2005

In 2005, UKIP featured the highest LIBRES score, in line with the theoretical expectation. The PRR party obtained a score of 4, resulting from its restrictive views on economic migration, asylum, family and/or student route, and integration. The Tories ranked second with a LIBRES score of 2, resulting from their overall restrictive platform on economic immigration and asylum, and the absence of proposals on both family/study immigration and integration. In third place, Labour scored 1 on the LIBRES scale, due to its ambiguous stance on economic immigration, its restrictive stance on asylum, and its dismissive approach to both family/study immigration and integration. The Lib Dems, finally, stood out as the most liberal party of all, scoring a total -2 on the LIBRES scale, by reason of their liberal position on economic immigration, their ambiguous position on asylum, their dismissive approach to family/study immigration, and their cosmopolitan position on integration.

	UKIP	Conservatives	Labour	Lib Dems
Economic	+1	+1	+1	0
Asylum	+1	0	0	-1
Family/Study	+1	+1	+1	0
Integration	+1	+1	+1	0

LIBRES score	+4	+3	+3	-1
<i>Net change</i>	0	+1	+2	+1

Table 2: Parties' agendas on immigration, 2010

In 2010, UKIP again totaled a +4 on the LIBRES scale, in light of its restrictive agenda on economic immigration, asylum, family/study-related immigration, and integration. The Conservatives rose to a LIBRES score of +3, resulting from a restrictive position on economic immigration, a dismissive approach to asylum, a restrictive position on family/study immigration as well as on integration. Also Labour rose to a LIBRES score of +3, by reason of its restrictive proposals on economic immigration, its dismissive approach to asylum, and its restrictive platform on both family/study immigration and integration. Once again, the Lib Dems turned out to have the most liberal offering, with a total -1 LIBRES score resulting from their dismissive stance on economic immigration, their liberal position on asylum, and their neglect of both family/study immigration and integration.

	UKIP	Conservatives	Labour	Lib Dems
Economic	+1	+1	+1	-1
Asylum	0	0	-1	-1
Family/Study	+1	+1	+1	0
Integration	+1	+1	+1	0
LIBRES score	+3	+3	+2	-2
<i>Net change</i>	-1	0	-1	-1

Table 3: Parties' agendas on immigration, 2015

In 2015, UKIP dropped to a total +3 LIBRES score, resulting from a restrictive agenda on labor immigration, a (surprisingly) neutral and moderate position on asylum, and restrictive proposals on both family/study immigration and integration. The Tories again obtained a +3 LIBRES score, by reason of their restrictive position on economic immigration, their neglect of asylum, and their restrictive stance on family/study immigration as well as integration. Labour fell to a +2 LIBRES score, keeping its restrictive platform on economic immigration, adopting a more liberal and humanitarian profile on asylum, and again endorsing restrictive policies on both family/study immigration and integration. Finally, the Lib Dems obtained a total -2 score, as a result of their liberal agenda on economic

immigration and asylum, combined with an unclear position on family/student immigration and a neglect of integration.

Some conclusions concerning the systemic agenda change can be now drawn. Throughout the period under scrutiny, UKIP confirmed to be the party with the most restrictive agenda. It always proposed restrictive policies on all immigration dimensions, with the exception of a moderate stance to asylum immigration in 2015. The Conservative Party had the most similar immigration agenda as UKIP through the entire time frame. It converged towards UKIP from 2005 to 2010 (+1 net change), by advocating tougher policies on family/study immigration and integration, and simultaneously neglecting the asylum dimension. From 2010 to 2015, the Tories maintained their agenda unaltered (0 net change), again proposing strict policies on all dimensions while leaving asylum unaddressed. Labour converged significantly towards UKIP from 2005 to 2010 (+2 net change), hardening its platform on economic immigration, family/study immigration and integration, while overlooking asylum. By 2015, Labour diverged from UKIP (-1 net change) by adopting a liberal and humanitarian agenda on asylum while keeping its restrictive positions on all other dimensions. The Lib Dems were by far the most liberal party on immigration over the analyzed period, as showed by the fact that they always obtained a minus-score. Their movement towards the restrictive end from 2005 to 2010 (+1 net change) was due to their decision to deemphasize their previously liberal stance on both economic immigration and integration, while emphasizing their liberal and humanitarian position on asylum. From 2010 to 2015, the Lib Dems again moved toward the liberal end (-1 net change) by again emphasizing their liberal platform on labor immigration while keeping their liberal views of asylum. Therefore, it is worth bearing in mind that the Lib Dem apparent convergence from 2005 to 2010 was not determined by more authoritarian positions but rather by a reduced salience of its previously liberal positions.

4.3.3. Testing the hypotheses for immigration

So far, I have mapped the development of the party system agenda on immigration from the 2005 to the 2015 general elections. The above analysis has showed that among the three mainstream parties, both Labour and the Tories indeed absorbed part of the more restrictive UKIP's agenda on the issue, thus witnessing a partly accommodative strategy vis-à-vis UKIP. On the contrary, the centrist Lib Dems remained closer to their original overall more liberal stance, adopting a mixed adversarial-dismissive approach. I will now seek to

identify which factor can account for this systemic shifts, by testing the four hypotheses laid out above.

Voting hypothesis

The first dynamic I will address is that of the “performance hypothesis”, implying that parties may respond to past electoral losses they attribute to a challenger party by partly converging towards the agenda of that party (accommodative strategy). In order to ascertain whether the hypothesis held in the case study, it is hence necessary to look at the parties which suffered an electoral loss they would attribute to UKIP. According to the hypothesis, these parties are expected to display a degree of programmatic movement towards the agenda of the PRR contender.

I will first consider the degree of agenda change between 2005 and 2010. In order to properly test the voting hypothesis, it is thus necessary to look at the electoral performance of the various parties at the last general election, in 2005. On that occasion, the only party among the ones studied to suffer an electoral loss was the governing Labour, under Tony Blair’s leadership. The party indeed saw a negative change in its vote percentage of -5.5, losing 47 seats in Parliament. In spite of this, the electoral drop could hardly be attributed to UKIP, which fell short of expectations and gained a mere +0.8 percent relative to its 2001 result, again failing to win a single seat in Westminster. In Thanet constituency, then MEP Nigel Farage took just 5.04 percent of the votes, while he had been predicted to poll some 20 percent by UKIP leader Knapman (BBC News 2005). Labour’s loss favored both the Tories, who saw a vote change of +0.7 and 33 additional seats, and the Lib Dems, improving their vote share by +3.8 percent and obtaining 11 additional seats. However, in order to have more complete picture, one may also consider the outcome of the 2009 European Parliament (EP) election in the UK. Here too, the only clear loser was Labour, which fell down by -6.6 percent and lost 5 seats. Again, it is difficult to argue that the loss was due to UKIP, whose performance was almost the same as in 2004, around 16 percent. Labour downfall rather advantaged minor leftist and environmental parties (House of Commons 2009).

In 2010, despite the absence of a substantial electoral threat from UKIP, the above assessment shows that Labour indeed adopted more restrictive policies on immigration, signaling a partial accommodative behavior vis-à-vis its PRR contender. The party assumed more nativist tones by referring to the need to defend British values. Specifically, it endorsed new tough measures such as a stop on unskilled migration from outside the EU, the

tightening of rules on benefits for non-UK citizens, and positive discrimination of UK citizens in jobs advertising and public procurement. The party continued to deal with immigration through a security-based frame more than any other party. At the same time, the asylum issue was deemphasized in Labour's platform, thus revealing a dismissive strategy vis-à-vis UKIP on this issue. The final picture thus shows a Labour party which, although could not reasonably ascribe its electoral decline in 2005 and 2009 to UKIP, adopted a mix of an accommodative (on labor immigration, family reunifications and integration) and a dismissive strategy (on asylum). As said, the party underwent a LIBRES change of +2, thus getting closer to UKIP's positioning in aggregate terms. The voting hypothesis seems thus partly ill-suited in the present case. This quite significant programmatic change could hardly be linked to UKIP's electoral growth. A further element countering the hypothesis is the fact that the Tories, although did not experience an electoral setback in 2005 nor in 2009, became tougher on family/study migration and more assimilationist on integration, while overlooking the asylum dimension. As seen above, they converged towards UKIP by a +1 LIBRES change.

The same hypothesis can be now tested for the degree of systemic agenda change between 2010 and 2015. To this end, the outcome of the 2010 general election has to be considered. The election was won by Cameron's Conservative Party, which saw a +3.6 percentage vote change and won 96 additional seats, enabling it to form a coalition government with the Lib Dems. A dramatic electoral loss was suffered by the incumbent Labour Party under Gordon Brown. The party underwent a vote change of -6.2 percent and a net loss of 97 seats in Westminster. The Lib Dems made small progress, with vote change of +1 percent but a loss of 5 seats. Whereas Labour experienced a serious electoral decline, and could hence be suspected to have more incentives to coopt the PRR agenda, its loss could hardly be imputed to the rise of UKIP. The PRR party guided by Roger Knapman improved its vote share by a mere +0.9, again failing to win a single seat in Parliament. Its performance fell largely below expectations. For instance, in the party's main target constituency, Buckingham, candidate Nigel Farage came third with 17.4 percent of votes (BBC News 2010). In this case, Labour confirmed its tougher stances on all types of immigration, also addressing new typically PRR issues such as access to benefits and treatment of foreign criminals, whereas it exhibited a liberal and humanitarian agenda on asylum. Overall, the party became less restrictive compared to 2010 by reason of the new stance on asylum, but still more restrictive than in 2005. Yet, the party did not diverge from UKIP insofar as the Farage's party took a more moderate position on asylum –with both parties becoming overall

more liberal by 1 LIBRES point. Thus, the voting hypothesis here is not entirely rebutted, as Labour did not coopt UKIP's agenda in that its vote loss could not be directly attributed to the PRR party.

If the focus is turned to the 2014 EP election, the major losers were the Conservatives (-3.8 percent) and the Liberal Democrats (-6.7 percent). At the same time UKIP came first with 26.6 percent of the votes, a 10.6 percent increase compared to 2010. It is then safe to argue that this setback had much to do with UKIP's rise, as it is also confirmed by the well-recognized appeal of UKIP for disillusioned Conservative voters (Webb & Bale 2014, Evans & Mellon 2016). Following the voting hypothesis, the Conservative Party should have then converged towards UKIP's agenda. What the case study showed, however, is that there was no further convergence between UKIP and the Tories. While their relative LIBRES distance was reduced to zero, this occurred because UKIP now adopted a more ambiguous stance on asylum. The Conservatives, on their part, maintained their previous restrictive agenda, but they also addressed new issues first brought up by UKIP, such the need to control EU immigration by tightening welfare provision for EU immigrants. Moreover they framed their positions in more nativist tones, alluding to the need to protect British values in immigration policy. Therefore there was some degree of agenda cooptation by the Conservatives, despite very limited. This backs the voting hypothesis when the 2014 EP election is considered. As far as the Liberal Democrats are concerned, the above findings show that they clearly maintained their ideological distance from UKIP. To explain this, it is possible that they considered convergence towards UKIP's formula more costly (in terms of alienating its core supporters) than beneficial. To buttress this presumption, it is also true that UKIP's electoral harm to the Lib Dems was far less than to the Tories. Of the UKIP 2014 voters, 18 percent had voted for the Lib Dems in 2010, while 52 percent had voted Conservative in 2010 (Ashcroft 2014).

To sum up, as far as the agenda change between 2005 and 2010 in concerned, the hypothesis appears partly flawed. Labour did suffer electoral losses in 2005 and 2009, yet these could hardly be attributed to UKIP. Consequently, it is possible that the party nevertheless sought to reposition itself in the attempt to reverse its declining trend. The more restrictive programme endorsed in 2010 could have been the result of this attempt, or a way to respond to public concerns about immigration, a factor which will be assessed below. It is easier to test the hypothesis for the 2010-2015 period. In 2015, both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats had underwent a previous loss at the 2014 EP election, which could be partly attributed to UKIP's impressive rise. The former party indeed partly converged

towards UKIP, by coopting its issues of cutting down on benefits for EU migrants and maintaining its previous restrictive views on all types of immigration, except asylum. The Lib Dems, on the contrary, maintained their markedly liberal platform, possibly because they deemed ideological realignments too costly and UKIP constituted a small threat to them than to the Tories.

Issue Ownership Hypothesis

I will now test the second hypothesis, which predicts that a mainstream party will have more incentives to coopt a typical PRR issue if the PPR party's ownership of the issue is not particularly strong. In other words, a party will be clearly more prone to include an issue in its agenda if the issue is unlikely to disadvantage it vis-à-vis other parties.

We have seen that from 2005 to 2010, both Labour and the Conservative Party could be seen as adopting an accommodative strategy vis-à-vis their PRR contender UKIP, testified by their growing emphasis of the immigration issue and their generally more restrictive stances towards labor immigration combined with a dismissive approach on asylum, in the attempt to defuse UKIP's tough positions on the same issue. At the same time, the Lib Dems did not show any sign of convergence in both salience and positional terms towards UKIP's positioning. Now, one has to determine which party could be regarded as enjoying ownership of the immigration issue by the 2010 election. Based on the hypothesis, one would expect that UKIP did not have strong ownership of the issue in that year, as both Labour and the Tories indeed absorbed part of UKIP's issues, thus increasing their salience in the whole policy agenda. The caveat is also needed that issue ownership generally, yet not always, resembles the ideal type of a zero-sum game, insofar one party's ownership of an issue tends to come at the expenses of rival parties' reputation over the same issue.

A useful indicator of party ownership of an issue can be derived from a YouGov survey asking respondents "which political party would handle asylum and immigration best?" (figure 1). This question indeed seems to capture the core meaning of issue ownership as conceptualized by Petrocik (1996). The data are not available for the period immediately preceding the 2010 election. Still, in June 2010, the Conservatives were indicated by some 40 percent of the respondents as the best party on immigration. Labour stood far below, with around 15 percent picking it as the best party. Finally, 6 percent of the respondents mentioned another party as the most competent on immigration. These numbers seem to indicate that the Conservatives could be regarded as the owners of the immigration issue compared to any

other party also right before the 2010 election, on the assumption that ownership is quite sticky and does not change too quickly.

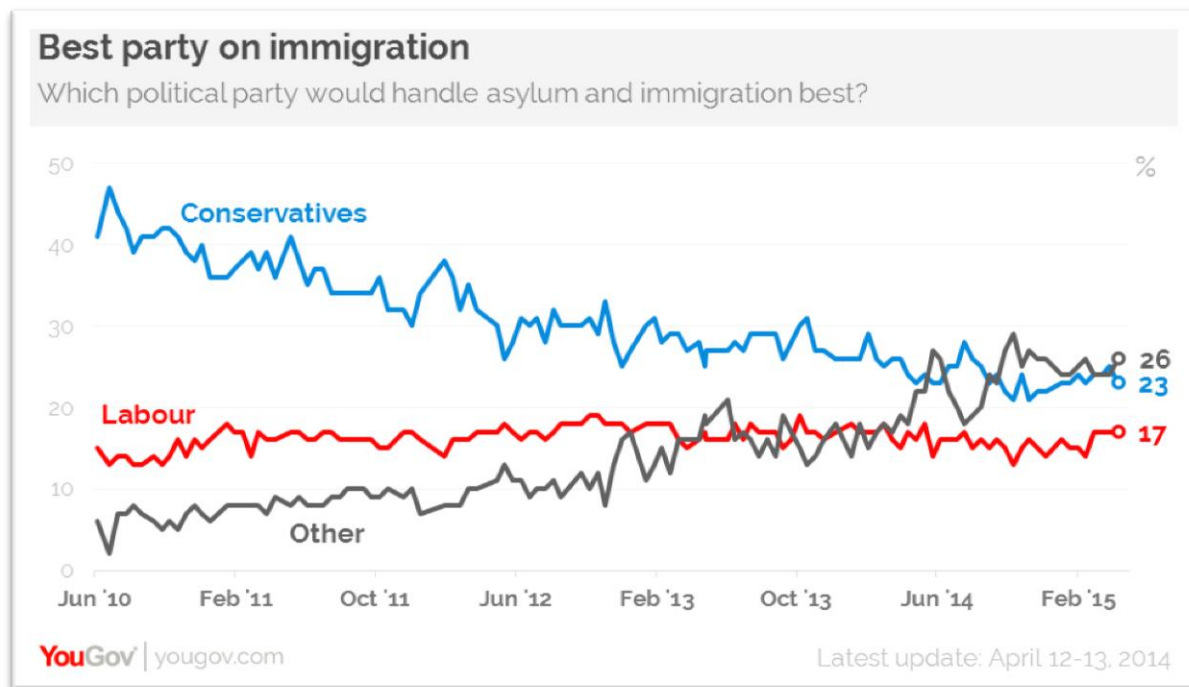


Figure 1: Ownership of the immigration issue, 2010-2015 (YouGov 2015)

As regards the possible reasons for these ownership differences, it can be argued that Labour was not deemed the most competent on the issue by the fact that it had governed since 1997, when net migration was just 48.000, whereas in 2010, the election year, this number had grown to 256.000 (figure 2, Migration Observatory 2016). As seen, the party claimed its accomplishments in reducing yearly net migration –which it actually did-- in its 2010 manifesto as an attempt to boost its image on immigration. Despite these efforts, the party's ownership could have been tainted by some crucial events such as Blair's decision in 2004 not to impose transitional controls on people coming from newly accessed EU countries in Eastern Europe (the so-called "A8" group). While research of the Home Office had predicted the arrival of around 13.000 EU workers (The Guardian 2010), the number of EU nationals entering the UK more than doubled compared to the 2003 figure, touching 130.000 in 2004. Inflows from the EU rose to 152.000 in 2005, 170.000 in 2006 and 195.000 in 2007 (Migration Observatory 2017). At the same time, public attitudes towards immigration were not particularly favorable in those years, as revealed by a 2007 survey finding that a combined 69 percent of Britons strongly agreed or tended to agree with the statement that

there were too many immigrants, while a mere 15 percent tended to disagree or strongly disagreed with the statement (Ipsos MORI 2007). Another illustrative piece of information is that in 2007 a total 72 percent of the public were dissatisfied with the way the government was dealing with immigration and asylum, compared to a combined 15 percent of people fairly or very satisfied (Ipsos MORI 2007).

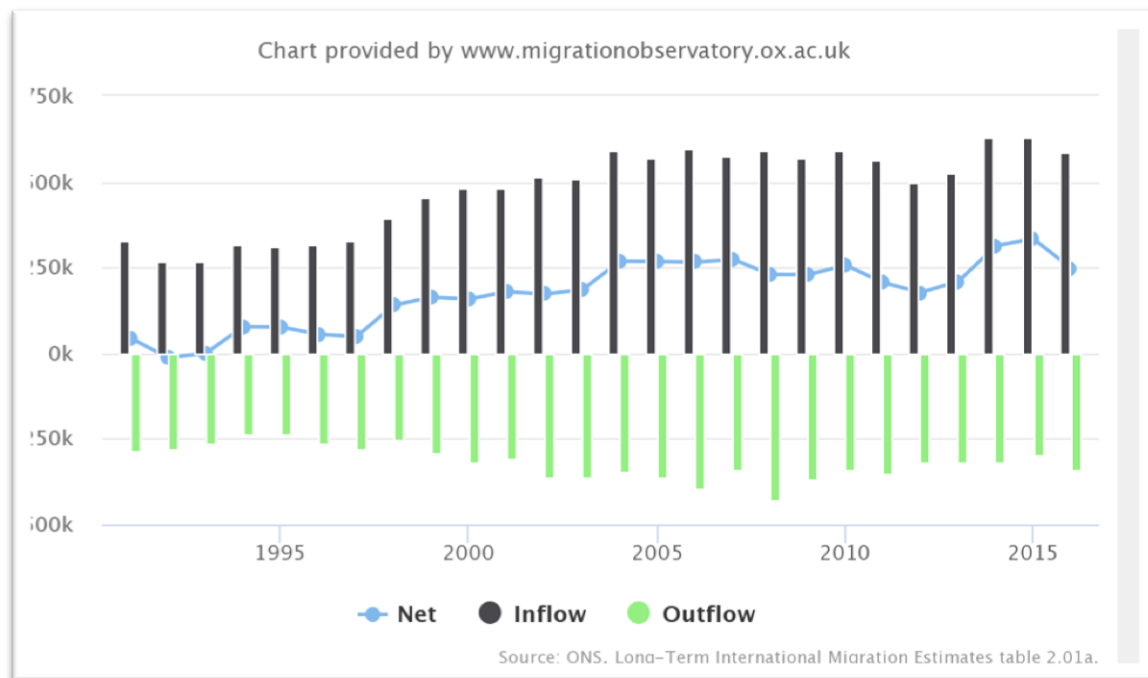


Figure 2: Immigration flows in the UK by year, 1990-2016 (Migration Observatory 2016)

Therefore, rising numbers of migrants along with overall negative views of immigration and the government's handling of the problem may explain Labour losing ownership of the issue to the advantage of the Tories at the opposition. Indeed, as illustrated in the section on the theoretical framework, issue ownership is directly linked to performance base reputation, and is partly "conferred by the record of the incumbent" (Petrocik 1996: 827). Conservative ownership of immigration could also depend on more deep-rooted reasons, like the fact that controlling or managing immigration have been traditional concerns informing the center-right agenda in Western Europe (Bale 2008). In light of the above, one would also expect to observe a higher degree of convergence towards anti-immigrant positions by the Tories compared to Labour. Boosting salience of immigration controls and coopting a PRR agenda, indeed, could not but favor the Conservative Party, which enjoyed the best reputation for commitment and competence on that issue. As seen, the Tories indeed

adopted a more restrictive agenda in 2010, converging towards UKIP's stance on immigration (+1 LIBRES net change). However, partly contradicting the hypothesis' proposition, Labour endorsed more restrictive policies in 2010 by an even larger degree than Conservative (a +2 LIBRES net change).

The hypothesis holds insofar as in 2010 UKIP was not widely deemed the owner of the immigration issue, and both the Conservatives and Labour faced smaller risks out of increased saliency of immigration stemming from their accommodative strategy. The somewhat puzzling finding that Labour was even more accommodative than the Tories despite a far lower ownership of immigration could be attributed to number of external reasons, for example the party's underestimation of its gap in the ownership of the issue, or the will to catch up with the Conservatives on this dimension by proposing even more restrictive policies. Alternatively, the costs of downplaying the issue (as theory on salience-based competition would predict) were deemed too high by Labour, possibly due to other factors such as public concerns. The cogency of this alternative explanation related to public opinion will be examined below. As far as the Lib Dems are concerned, they did not engage in agenda cooptation in 2010, adopting a mixed adversarial-dismissive behavior. This strategy indeed seem to adhere to the hypothesis, given that Lib Dems are included in the "other party" group which was designed by just 6 percent of the voters as the most competent on immigration, evidencing a lack of ownership. The party thus refrained from championing issues on which it was particularly weak vis-à-vis the other parties.

The attention can be now drawn to the programmatic change of mainstream parties between 2010 and 2015. Ahead of the 2015 general election, the picture of the distribution of immigration ownership among the various parties had changed considerably. Data from YouGov show that in April 2015, the Conservatives had fallen to 23 percent of responses as the best party on immigration (a loss of almost 20 points compared to 2010), with Labour remaining basically stable at 17 percent. These numbers clearly denote a gradual decline of the Tories' ownership of the immigration issue. Tellingly, in 2015 the "other" party group was indicated by 26 percent of respondents as the best party on immigration, surpassing both Labour and the Conservative Party. It is safe to assume that in the wake of UKIP's staggering result at the 2014 European Parliament election, people mostly had Farage's party in mind when answering "other". Other data from Ipsos MORI show that in September 2014, UKIP was regarded as the party with the best policies on asylum/immigration by 20 percent of the Britons, ahead of the Conservatives (19 percent) and Labour (18 percent) (Ipsos MORI 2014).

Further evidence points to the decline in the Conservative lead on the immigration issue up to the 2015 election. In 2012, to the answer: “how likely or unlikely do you think it is that David Cameron will be able to deliver the pledge to reduce net immigration into Britain from hundreds of thousands to “tens of thousands”?”, 77 percent answered “unlikely”, whereas just 15 percent answered “likely” (YouGov 2012). This seems to suggest that Cameron’s party was seeing its reputation on immigration policy erode, largely to the advantage of UKIP. Given these developments, one would expect to observe a more recalcitrant attitude of the Conservatives and the other mainstream parties to further approaching UKIP’s agenda. Possible incentives to coopt their profile should have been offset by the newly acquired lead of the PRR party on the immigration issue.

The expectations seem supported by the behavior of the Conservative Party, which did not alter its agenda between 2010 and 2015, keeping restrictive views on all immigration dimensions except asylum. This lack of convergence may be explained by the fact that UKIP had effectively stolen the ownership of immigration from the Tories. Labour became slightly more liberal by reason of their new humanitarian platform on asylum, yet it neither converged nor diverged vis-à-vis UKIP in relative terms. Again, this outcome can be reconciled with the hypothesis, in that an ownership lead of UKIP relative to Labour was followed by a non-accommodative behavior by Labour. The Lib Dems were seen as weaker than UKIP on immigration by a larger degree in 2015, and became even less restrictive in line with the prediction.

In sum, the issue ownership hypothesis is corroborated by the programmatic movements of the various actors over the 2010-2015 period. When immigration was not owned by UKIP, in 2010, both the Tories and Labour coopted part of their agenda. Instead, such convergence did not take place in 2015, at time when UKIP was deemed the best party on immigration by the majority of the electorate.

Opposition/government status hypothesis

The third hypothesis is that parties in opposition tend to discount the inherent political risks of entering the opponent’s terrain by adopting some of its distinctive issues and policy preferences (Van de Wardt 2015). The underlying idea is that an opposition party is more prone to take risks, driven by the incentive to recoup its loss and increase its chances to regain a government position. This dynamic seems to apply particularly well to the British case, where parties have often greater room of maneuver as they often manage to govern

alone. The first-past-the-post plurality system usually results in a solid parliamentary majority for the winning party, although this was not the case in 2010, after which a Liberal-Conservative coalition cabinet took office.

In 2010, the Conservatives were in opposition for the thirteenth consecutive year. Therefore, they could be regarded as more predisposed to coopt UKIP's agenda than their governing opponent, that is Labour. However, as seen, this behavioral divergence was not confirmed by the facts. Both the Conservatives with their "tens of thousands" pledge and Labour, championing tighter policies on labor migration, converged towards their PRR challenger on both salience and position. Moreover, Labour's degree of convergence was even larger than the Conservative Party's. Nonetheless, this apparently contradictory result is primarily explained by the fact that in that year, as just shown, UKIP could not be said to own the immigration issue. Therefore, the core assumption of the above hypothesis—that addressing an issue considered to be owned by a niche contender risks bolstering rather than harming the niche party—does not apply to the present case, and specifically to 2010. As regards the Lib Dems, as said, they did not adopt an accommodative tactic despite their opposition status. Perhaps, their lack of credibility on the issue and requirements of ideological coherence barred them from undertaking an accommodative strategy in this scenario (Downs 1957, Budge 1994).

Turning to the parties' positioning ahead of the 2015 election, the hypothesis would imply that Labour, as an opposition party, was more likely to engage in accommodative behavior than the governing Conservatives. Moreover, this time UKIP fared better than its rivals on the immigration issue. What the above assessment reveals, however, is a lack of clear convergence on the part of Labour, which obtained a lower LIBRES score by reason of its liberal view of asylum. Having said that, the party maintained some of its restrictive proposals, but certainly was not more accommodative towards UKIP than the Conservatives. The Tory lack of convergence seemed more consistent with the hypothesis, possibly by reason of their risk-averse approach related to the government status. As for the Lib Dems, the above considerations of ideological constituency hold.

To summarize, the opposition/government hypothesis is not supported by the empirical observation. In 2010, the precondition of the hypothesis (i.e. ownership of the issue by the niche contender) was not even present. Therefore, Labour's convergence despite its government status does not necessarily refute the hypothesis. As regards 2015—where instead the hypothesis' assumptions were valid as UKIP stood as the owner of the immigration issue—only the Tory behavior adhered to the expectations in that the governing party

refrained from coopting UKIP's agenda. Conversely, Labour's opposition status did not urge the party to adopt an accommodative strategy. Yet, in favor of the hypothesis prediction, Labour did not refrain from further emphasizing its positions on all immigration dimensions, despite a considerable ownership gap with UKIP on the issue. This approach seems to indicate a risky strategy possibly induced by the opposition status of the party. In both election years, the Lib Dems did not converge towards UKIP's programme despite their opposition status. In light of this evaluation, the opposition/government hypothesis is only partly supported by the evidence in the present case study.

Public saliency hypothesis

The final hypothesis was that the more an issue is of direct concern to the voters, the more likely a party will give importance to it and sense pressures to converge towards the PRR agenda on it. Many surveys reveal that immigration has become a question of rising concern to the voters since the turn of the 21st century. Alongside, aggregate public attitudes have grown notably negative about immigration. From 2005 to 2010, it is worth looking at the way the public opinion perceived immigration in the UK, in order to gauge how salient the issue appeared to the electorate. In April 2010, right before the general election, 29 percent of the Britons deemed immigration as one of the "most important issues" facing the country (Ipsos MORI issue index. In Migration Observatory 2016). While the figure was almost the same (30 percent) on the same month in 2005, since 2008 immigration had started to decline in salience following an upward trend, with economy rising as an important issue. After 2012, the economy started to fall as a key public concern, while immigration again went up, touching 36 percent in April 2015. While there was not a tangible change in the public salience of immigration between 2005 and 2010, in both elections the issue stood among the top three most salient issues to the electorate. In 2005, immigration was only less important than the NHS (National Health Service) to the public, while in 2010 it was second to the economy as the top concern.

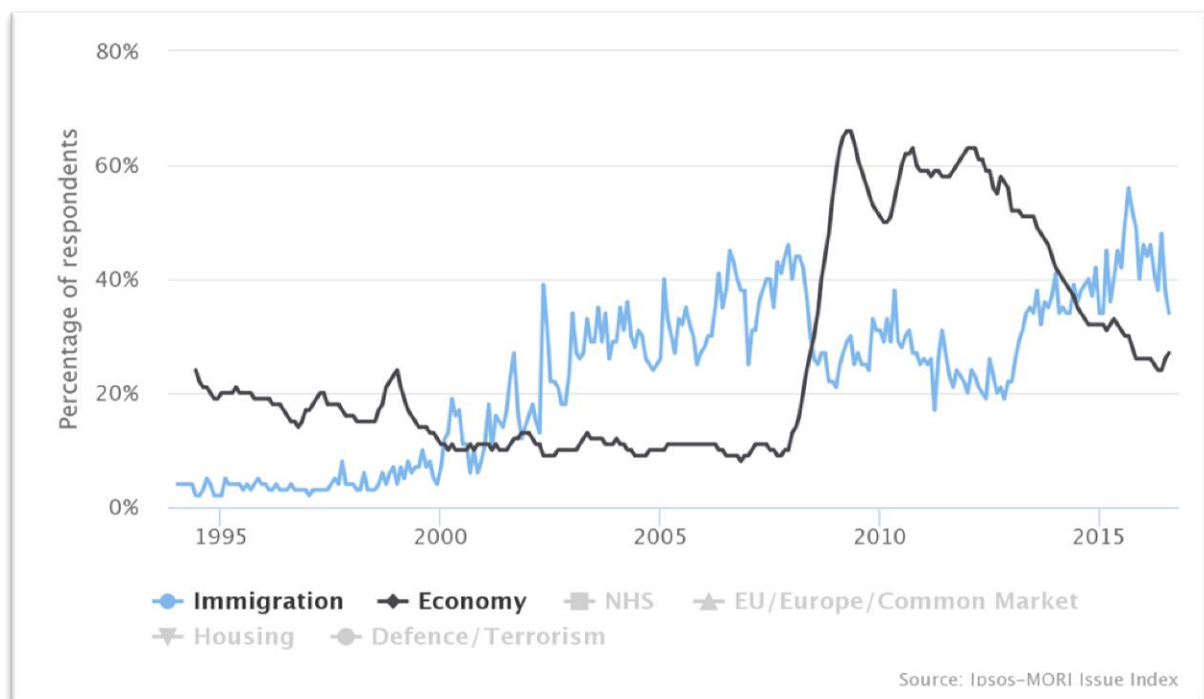


Figure 3: Public saliency of immigration and the economy in the UK (Migration Observatory 2016)

At first sight, the overall accommodative strategy of both the Tories and Labour towards UKIP's immigration agenda in 2010 is at odds with the hypothesis, in that immigration did not significantly rise as a salient issue to the electorate between 2005 and 2010. Rather, since 2008 the issue had started to drop as a high-ranking concern to voters, being overtaken by the economy. Nevertheless, a more thorough observation which considers the various policy dimensions separately seems to back the theoretical propositions. The fact that asylum was played down by both the Conservatives and Labour in 2010, while UKIP maintained its restrictive stance on the same item, may be due to the fact that the higher saliency of the economy induced the parties to focus on the economic side of immigration, while diverting the attention from asylum, whose saliency is generally related to security concerns. Labour indeed adopted a more restrictive position on economic immigration, while the Conservatives maintained their previously restrictive stance but exacerbated their negative mentions of labor immigration. In its 2010 manifesto, Labour stated that it recognized "people's concerns about immigration --about whether it will undermine their wages or job prospects, or put pressure on public services or housing" (Labour 2010: 36). This phrasing reveals a portrayal of immigration within markedly economic frames, driven by voters' concerns as admitted by the party itself. In the same vein, the Tories addressed the

immigration issue from a more economic (rather than security-based) angle in 2010. Thus, they pointed out that Britain did not need “to attract people to do jobs that could be carried out by British citizens”, and “limiting access to who will bring the most value to the British economy” (Conservative Party 2010: 21). A further possible sign of an economic framing of immigration is the new requirement for applying students to show they can sustain themselves in the UK. These remarks show that both Labour and the Conservative Party did not coopt UKIP’s tough platform on a dimension –asylum—which was less salient to the electorate at that time, while they did converge towards UKIP (the Tories in tones rather than policy preferences) on a dimension –economic immigration— which was more salient.

Survey data show that from 2010 to 2014 the issue of asylum/immigration rose as a key concern for the electorate. While in March 2010 only 14 percent indicated asylum and immigration as important in deciding one’s vote, the figure rose to 30 percent in September 2014. Therefore, there was a significant growth in the saliency of the immigration issue in this period. Given that, as revealed, there was no LIBRES increase in either Labour nor the Tories from 2010 to 2015, one would reach the conclusion that the public saliency hypothesis is refuted. However, it should be noted that both parties had already adopted very restrictive platforms in 2010, and that they did not changed them in 2015. The only agenda movement was in Labour, which emphasized its new humanitarian positions on asylum seekers, relying on its long-standing solidarity credentials. Therefore the absence of further convergence on immigration in 2015 is not sufficient to confute the hypothesis on the importance of public saliency for agenda impact.

Q9 And looking ahead to the next General Election, which, if any, issues do you think will be very important to you in helping you decide which party to vote for?*

Base: 1,010 British adults 18+ %

	March 2010	September 2014
Managing the economy	32	31
Asylum and immigration	14	30
Healthcare	26	29
Education	23	23
Benefits	7	13
Foreign policy/foreign affairs	NA	12
Europe/EU	2	11
Unemployment	11	10
Taxation	12	8
Pensions	6	6
Care for older and disabled people	7	6
Defence	3	6
Crime and anti-social behaviour/law and order	8	5
Housing	3	5
Don't Know	15	9

Figure 4: Public saliency of asylum/immigration in 2010 and 2014

4.3.4. Discussion

It can be useful to summarize the key findings related to the systemic agenda change on immigration from 2005 to 2015. As anticipated in the theoretical framework, the impact of the PPR party (UKIP in this case) on other parties' programmes is not determined by a sole factor, such as the electoral threat it represents. A more comprehensive set of theoretical propositions appears better suited to describe the dynamic of indirect impact under examination.

The voting hypothesis stating that a mainstream party will coopt the PPR rival's agenda if it suffered a vote loss that it can attribute to the latter needs to be revised in light of the empirical evidence. Actual party behavior is often much less straightforward than this. For example, in 2010, Labour came from two major electoral setbacks which could hardly be connected to UKIP. Nonetheless, it coopted much of its restrictive agenda, possibly because its declining consensus had prompted it to consider some programmatic adjustments to reverse the trend. It can be also presumed that the party revised its platforms in the attempt to reduce agenda frictions with its voters (confirmed by the widely negatives attitudes to immigration in the country), one of the possible factors behind its electoral drop. Thus, it is clear how a more complete understanding of the studied phenomenon can stem from a

combination of the hypotheses hereby considered. Moving on to 2015, the case study has also shown that it is not sufficient to suffer a loss due to a PRR party to coopt part of its agenda. This was made clear by the Lib Dems' behavior, who showed no signs of programmatic convergence despite UKIP had harmed the former in the 2014 EP election.

The issue ownership hypothesis, in contrast, was corroborated by the observed patterns of programmatic change. When UKIP did not enjoy much credibility on immigration policy, in 2010, all mainstream parties except the Lib Dems shifted towards overall more restrictive platforms. The surprising fact that Labour converged even more than the Tories despite having a way inferior ownership may have depended on underestimation of Labour or the existence of a more urgent incentive to accommodate. Five years later, in a situation in which Conservative ownership of the issue had waned to the advantage of UKIP, the same accommodative strategy did not take place: the Tories maintained their previous restrictive programme on all dimensions except asylum, while Labour shifted to a liberal stance on asylum.

Turning to the opposition/government hypothesis, it was impossible to test for the agenda change by 2010 in that UKIP was not the owner of the immigration issue on that moment, and therefore the risks of "issue trespassing" (Damore 2004, Van de Wardt 2015) and issue cooptation assumed by the theory were not even there. In 2015, the observation lent only partial support to the theoretical expectations, as neither Labour nor the Lib Dems further converged towards UKIP in spite of their opposition status, while Labour did face the risk of boosting salience of immigration despite its ownership disadvantage relative to UKIP.

Finally, there seems to be empirical support for the hypothesis concerning public saliency, implying that an issue which is of greater concern to the electorate is more easily captured by a mainstream party, other things being equal. Accordingly, the more salient a policy issue is, the easier for the party to converge towards the typical PRR agenda on it. The analysis revealed that Tory and Labour's convergence towards UKIP from 2005 to 2010 was not anticipated by a rising public saliency of the immigration issue (which rather had started to drop from 2008). However, a more thorough examination also showed that the observed agenda adjustment of mainstream parties was driven by tighter positions on *economic* immigration and questions such as financial independence of foreign students, while the former tough platforms on asylum largely disappeared. Therefore, while the unvaried aggregate concerns about immigration between 2005 and 2010 did not cause a rightward shift of the aggregate immigration agenda by the Conservatives and Labour, greater concerns about the economic side of immigration were followed by more emphasis and stricter

positions on labor immigration, alongside a decreased emphasis of the asylum dimension. As regards 2015, when asylum and immigration feature as way more important to the public than 2010, there was no further convergence, but this can be explained by the fact that the major parties had already assumed very restrictive positions in 2010, and that none of the parties reversed these in 2015. Then, the hypothesis is not disconfirmed by the trend from 2010 to 2015.

4.4. The EU: explaining PRR indirect impact from 2005 to 2015

4.4.1. Reviewing the parties' agenda on the EU

2005

The position of UKIP with respect to the EU was remarkably clear-cut in the 2005 agenda. The party stated its primary goal was to withdraw Britain from the EU in order to “restore the authority for governing Britain to our elected parliament in Westminster” (UKIP 2005: 1). UKIP also made the point in its manifesto foreword that no other pressing issue for the British society –such as reducing the number of asylum claims—could be effectively addressed without prior exit from the EU (2005: 1). The party laid out the many benefits the country would reap by quitting the Union. These included the end of “ill-conceived intrusive regulation”, a strengthening of trade relations with other non-EU partners, saving 12 billion pounds of yearly contributions to be spent for pensions and, as said, full autonomy on the management of Economic immigration and asylum.

As far as the Conservative Party is concerned, the 2005 agenda addressed the EU issue more marginally than UKIP, but witnessed an overall critical stance. The Tories thus stated in the foreword its intention to settle the relationship with the EU “by bringing powers back from Brussels to Britain” (Conservative Party 2005: 1). The party expressed its opposition to the EU Constitution, endorsed the opt-out from the Social Policy chapter of the EU, and called for an overhaul of the Common Agricultural Policy and full national control over British fisheries (2005: 26). However, significantly, the party did not envisage a possible withdrawal from the Union.

Labour exhibited a generally Europhile agenda compared to the above parties in 2005. This leaning is quite apparent when looking at the election manifesto, where it is stated that “outside the EU, or on its margins, we would unquestionably be weaker and more

vulnerable” (Labour 2005: 83). In the programme, the plentiful advantages for the UK stemming from EU membership were mentioned, and the party campaigned in favor of the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, following a national referendum (2005: 84). Besides stressing the need to reform Europe and ensure better-designed regulation (2005: 22), the party supported increased cooperation at EU level in the field of defense and humanitarian intervention (2005: 84).

In their agenda for 2005, the Lib Dems showed remarkably similar positions on the EU as Labour’s. The party time and again stressed the advantages brought about by EU membership and wished that UK would continue to play a proactive role at the heart of Europe (Liberal Democrats 2005: 17). The party, as much as Labour, supported the ratification of the EU Constitutional Treaty upon national referendum on the grounds that it would help make the Union more democratic and efficient (2005: 27). In sum, negative mentions of the EU were limited to the conventional complaint of the democratic deficit, while the party emphasized its wholehearted support to the EU project and the value of supranational cooperation.

As just observed, UKIP stood as the most critical party towards the EU, and the only one to openly push for Britain’s withdrawal from the Union. The Tories assumed many of UKIP Eurosceptic positions, rejecting the further delegation of national powers to the Brussels, and the Constitutional project. On the contrary, both Labour and the Lib Dems exhibited an overall positive view of the EU, highlighting the profound benefits resulting from its membership and upholding the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty. For these two parties, EU criticism was limited to a vague plea for reform and enhanced democratic accountability.

2010

UKIP’s 2010 agenda concerning the EU did not change much from the previous one, comparable to what Taggart & Sczcerbiak (1998) define “hard” or principled Euroscepticism. In its election manifesto, the party again attempted to show how withdrawal from the EU would entail a whole set of economic, fiscal, immigration and crime-related benefits for the country (UKIP 2010). The party again denounced the “crippling over-regulation” imposed by Brussels (UKIP 2010: 2), and underlined the growth opportunities Britain would unlock by quitting the Union. Withdrawal from the EU was depicted as necessary, decisive step and one backed by the majority of British citizens (2010: 2). The party effectively framed the EU as

an “omnibus issue”, whose resolution would generate considerable benefits at multiple levels. After UK would have freed itself from the “political EU Superstate”, the party envisaged a free trade agreement with the European partners on the Swiss model (2010: 10).

The Conservative 2010 agenda on Europe remained largely unaltered. The party firmly opposed any further attempt to federalize the EU, and rejected the extension of EU’s powers without prior public consultation (Conservative Party 2010: 113). The Tories thus engaged to make sure that any future EU treaty would be subject to popular referendum, in accordance with a “referendum lock” (2010: 113). The party also bluntly ruled out a future UK’s adoption of the Euro (2010: 113). The election manifesto featured signs of an accommodative approach to UKIP’s pronounced Euroscepticism. An example is the proposed “United Kingdom Sovereignty Bill to make it clear that ultimate authority stays in this country, in our Parliament” (2010: 114). Finally, the Conservative Party, besides complaining about the “steady and unaccountable intrusion of the EU into almost every aspect” of the British society, explicitly called for the return of three areas of competences – Charter of Fundamental Rights, criminal justice and social and employment legislation— from Brussels to London (2010: 114).

The UKIP’s and Tory prominent anti-EU rhetoric was again notably absent from the Labour 2010 manifesto. The party stated it was “proud that Britain is once again a leading player in Europe” (Labour 2010: 68). It also repeatedly highlighted the importance of a strong Europe for the UK, as well as the pivotal and leading role the UK would play in steering the EU, also with an outward global perspective (Labour 2010). The only criticism was limited to specific policies of the Union, as exemplified by the proposed reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (2010: 57) and the Common Agricultural Policy (2010: 68). As regards future accession to the Euro zone, the party maintained its open yet lukewarm position, conditioning any final decision on a popular consultation (2010: 68). Another aspect touched upon by the party was the key role EU have played and should continue to play in the fight to climate change and in cooperation for defense and conflict resolution (2010: 68). Finally, the party upheld its endorsement of enlargement with a view to including Turkey and Western Balkan countries (2010: 68).

Again, the Liberal Democrats’ stance towards the EU was definitely resembling Labour favorable attitude –denoting an adversarial behavior vis-à-vis the Tories, and above all UKIP. The party thus depicted continued European cooperation as “the best way for Britain to be strong, safe and influential in the future” (Liberal Democrats 2010: 66). Again in direct confrontation with the Tories, the party committed to keep Britain within the EU

cooperation framework in criminal justice (2010: 66). The party was also the most open towards adoption of the Euro, after UK would achieve the necessary economic preconditions and a positive popular vote would occur (2010: 67). Just like Labour, the Lib Dems reserved their critiques to specific aspects of the EU functioning and use of resources, for example pledging to stop the transfer of MEPs to Strasbourg every month (2010: 66). This kind of qualified criticism is in sharp contrast with the Tory broader disregard for deeper EU integration, or UKIP outright rejection of the EU project.

To recap, UKIP stuck to its hard Euroscepticism by further connecting EU membership to a whole series of addition problems. The Conservatives partly converged towards UKIP agenda on the issue, opposing any further surrender of power to the EU and even calling for the return of some competences to London. In contrast, both Labour and the Lib Dems remained the most convinced supporters of strong relationship between Britain and the EU, endorsing reinforced cooperation in fields such as environmental protection and defense. Both Labour and Lib Dem programmes revealed positional divergence on the EU relative to UKIP, thus denoting an overall adversarial strategy.

2015

UKIP again stood at the far right end of the Europhile-Eurosceptic axis ahead of the 2015 general election. The party continued to pursue its strategic connecting of the EU to pressing issues such as massive immigration, reduced security, declining wages and overburdened welfare (UKIP 2015). UKIP declared itself not anti-Europe *per se*, but rather “opposed to political integration within Europe” (2015: 70). Upon withdrawal from the EU, the party committed to ensure the retention of free-trade terms with the European partners, simultaneously boosting trade relations with the Commonwealth and other English speaking areas. Moreover, the party accentuated the populist tones in which it deliver its criticism to the EU, for example portraying its political system as “an out-of-sight, unaccountable, pan-European bureaucratic elite which has the final say and they do not consider Britain’s best interests” (2015: 70). This language evokes the conventional definition of populism considered in the conceptual framework of the PPR.

The Conservatives radically changed their agenda on the relationship with the EU. Their 2015 manifesto overtly recognized that the British “voice has been ignored on Europe” (Conservative Party 2015: 72). The party effectively coopted the traditional UKIP agenda, by proposing an in-out referendum on membership to be held by the end of 2017, after

negotiations for a revised agreement between Britain and the EU (2015: 30). Tellingly, the party did not clarify how it would campaign in such a referendum, possibly in the attempt to attract anti-EU voters away from UKIP's constituency. While being tacit on the economic benefits stemming from membership in the EU, the party's Eurosceptic platform this time became more sweeping, denouncing the EU democratic deficit, the "constant flow of power to Brussels" and the worrying immigration flows generated by the recent enlargement (2015: 72). In this way, the cited fusion strategy pursued by UKIP was partly legitimized by its mainstream rival. Further, the Tories reiterated their opposition to joining the Euro, as well as their intention not to participate in Eurozone bailouts and ambitious projects such as a European Army (2015: 72). In the document, the party sought to emphasize its programmatic distinctiveness, claiming to be the only feasible choice if electors wanted a say over UK's permanence in the EU (2015: 73).

The 2015 Labour agenda accentuated the economic and security-based case for continued membership, defined "overwhelming" by the party (Labour 2015: 76). The party called for reforming many areas of the EU action such as the Common Agricultural Policy, and improved budgetary efficiency (2015: 76-77). A significant programmatic change was represented by the new position against the adoption of the Euro (2015: 77). The party also committed to reinforce national scrutiny of EU legislation through a "red card mechanism" and to enact a mandatory in/out referendum in case of further power transfers to Brussels (2015: 77). The party overall behavior was to decrease the salience of the EU issue, leaving unaddressed the consequences of EU membership in terms of immigration, regulation and a more general erosion of national sovereignty.

The Lib Dems did not shift much from their traditionally favorable view of the EU. The party stressed its tireless work in government "to keep Britain at the heart of the European Union" and underlined the importance of cooperating at international level –and with Britain's EU partners-- to tackle the major challenges of a more globalized and complex world (Liberal Democrats 2015: 142). The party, similarly to Labour, retained its narrative of the need to push for reform of the EU from within. As a noteworthy innovation, the Lib Dems endorsed an in-out referendum on the EU in case of any new Treaty involving a significant transfer of sovereignty from London to Brussels. However, in contrast with Labour, the party also anticipated it would campaign for the UK to remain if such referendum were to be held (2015: 149). The party also addressed the issue of access to benefits for EU migrants and freedom of movement. On this matter, the Lib Dem position could be regarded as ambiguous, with support for the free movement of workers alongside the proposal to

tighten benefits rules for EU migrants and lengthen transitional controls for new EU member countries (2015: 150).

In summary, by 2015, UKIP held its hard Eurosceptic views, again stressing the far-reaching advantages that would arise from leaving the EU. The party also offered its vision of the future trade-based relationship with Europe, as well as promising a more autonomous and proactive role in global affairs. The governing Tories converged towards UKIP agenda, exacerbating their Eurosceptic rhetoric and seeking to propose a unique platform by calling for an in-out referendum on membership following negotiations over new EU rules for Britain. Labour decided to deemphasize the EU issue, while it reiterated the benefits for the country produced by EU membership and calling for reform from within. At the same time, it firmly opposed further political integration. Finally, the Lib Dems remained closer to Labour on the perceived value of continued membership, although they took more critical positions on issues such as access to benefits and freedom of movement. Moreover, they proposed that an in-out referendum would be triggered by any substantial delegation of powers to Brussels, yet somewhat paradoxically promising to campaign in favor of retained membership.

4.4.2. Gauging the agenda change on the EU

After having provided an overview of the various parties' positioning on the EU issue from 2005 to 2015, I will now measure the degree of programmatic evolution of the mainstream parties on the same issue. As in the section on immigration, each party will be assigned a total score on a EUROSC scale, from a minimum value of -2 indicating the most Europhile agenda up to a maximum value of +2 which instead designates the most Eurosceptic platform. The EU issue is divided into two major dimensions, which are meant to capture the two types of "hard" or principled Euroscepticism, and "soft" or qualified Euroscepticism identified by the literature (Taggart & Szczerbak 2001). The first dimension is "membership", where -1 indicates a positive view of British membership, a 0 indicates either a dismissive approach or an unclear position, and +1 indicates an overall negative view of membership or the possibility of leaving the Union by a in/out referendum. The second dimension is "political integration", whereby -1 denotes a positive stance towards increased supranationalism, an EU constitution, or adoption of the Euro, and +1 indicate negative views on the same questions --for example calls for taking back powers from Brussels or principled refusal of the Euro.

UKIP, in light of its constant campaigning in favor of British withdrawal from the EU throughout the examined period, will not be taken into account in this measurement of agenda change. This is also stems from the fact that gauging opposition to further integration is pointless for a party who is undeniably committed to leave the EU. Differently from the part on immigration, positive changes along a party's EUROSC scale can thus be automatically interpreted as convergence towards UKIP's programme (accommodative strategy), whereas negative changes denote divergence from it (adversarial strategy). Therefore, given that UKIP espouses an ideal typical, radical version of Euroscepticism, a platform becoming more Eurosceptic on aggregate denotes a closer agenda to UKIP.

	Conservatives	Labour	Lib Dems
Membership	0	-1	-1
Political Integration	+1	-1	-1
EUROSC	+1	-2	-2

Table 4: Parties' agendas on the EU, 2005

As shown by Table 4, in 2005 the Tories were the closest party to UKIP platform on the EU, with a total EUROSC score of +1. While they neglected the benefits of British membership, exhibiting a dismissive approach on this dimension, they took an remarkably negative stance on political integration and further steps towards enhanced supranationalism. On its part, Labour featured a markedly pro-EU programme, obtaining the minimum EUROSC score of -2. The party made numerous references to the economic and security-related benefits for the UK stemming from EU membership, thus scoring -1 on Membership. Furthermore, the party campaigned in favor of the EU Constitutional Treaty, which in its view would have facilitated the EU action and clarified the vertical allocation of competences. Labour also opened to the possible adoption of the Euro, conditioned on the fulfilment of the economic prerequisites and a positive vote in a referendum. These positions justify the negative score on the Political Integration dimension as well. The Lib Dems basically exhibited the same agenda as Labour, with a total EUROSC score of -2 resulting from their positive view on membership and further integration. Indeed also the Lib Dems, besides stating that the country was better off inside the EU, endorsed the Constitutional Treaty and were even more in favor of Britain joining the Eurozone.

	Conservatives	Labour	Lib Dems
Membership	0	-1	-1
Political Integration	+1	0	-1
EUROSC	+1	-1	-2
<i>Net change</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>+1</i>	<i>0</i>

Table 5: Parties' agendas on the EU, 2010

From 2005 to 2010, the Tories maintained their 0 EUROSC score. Assessing the party's position on the Membership dimension proved fairly difficult. While the party this time referred to the contribution of the EU to its Member States' ability to confront the most serious global challenges, and the "active and energetic" role the UK would engage to play in the EU, the concrete advantages of membership were not particularly emphasized, and frequent were the mentions of the need to safeguard Britain's national interest. As concerns political integration, the party's stance was instead quite self-evident, consisting of outright opposition to further delegation of powers to Brussels and even the return of some policy competences to London. Adoption of the Euro was again explicitly ruled out. In 2010, Labour rose to a -1 EUROSC score, denoting a slightly more Eurosceptic platform. This change was due to the party's new ambiguous position on the value of further EU integration. Questions related to Treaty change or substantial reform were not addressed, and the party appeared even more lukewarm in its attitude towards a future adoption of the Euro. The Lib Dems left their previous agenda unaltered, decisively stressing the manifold benefits arising from the EU membership, endorsing the adoption of the Euro and a more intensified EU action in multiple areas. Hence, they again obtained a total -2 EUROSC score, revealing a more Europhile agenda than any other party.

	Conservatives	Labour	Lib Dems
Membership	+1	0	-1
Political integration	+1	+1	+1
EUROSC	+2	+1	0
<i>Net change</i>	<i>+1</i>	<i>+2</i>	<i>+2</i>

Table 6: Parties' agendas on the EU, 2015

By 2015, the Tories rose to a total EUROSC score of +2, due to their new momentous proposal of an in/out referendum to be held after negotiating new rules with the EU by the

end of 2017. At the same time, no positive mention EU membership could be now found in the party's manifesto. In addition, the party did not clarify on which side it would stand in the campaign for the said EU referendum. Unsurprisingly, the Conservative Party kept its negative view of political integration, epitomized by the commitment to keep Britain outside the Eurozone and reclaim powers from Brussels. In 2015, Labour gained +2 EUROSC points, rising to a total score of +1. This shift was caused by the party's new ambiguous position on membership, made evident by the fact that the party proposed an in/out referendum in case of substantial transfer of powers to the EU, while omitting to state which side the party would take in such a scenario. A more Eurosceptic position was also expressed on political integration as the party this time committed to keep the country outside the Eurozone and implicitly showed its contempt for a deeper EU through the proposal of the in/out referendum just cited. Finally, the Lib Dems grew to a EUROSC score of 0, still the least Eurosceptic within the group. The party's new positioning resulted from its U turn on political integration, witnessed by the proposal of an in/out referendum in case of a material transfer of sovereignty to the EU, a the call for enhanced UK scrutiny of EU legislation.

Some observations can be drawn from the programmatic constellation of the various parties on the EU issue. All parties converged at some point in time towards the more Eurosceptic UKIP's agenda, although to varying extents. From 2005 to 2010, only Labour shifted towards UKIP, owing to its less Europhile stance on political integration. From 2010 to 2015, instead, the agenda change was more significant and widely distributed. All parties adopted an overall accommodative behavior vis-à-vis UKIP, most notably Labour and the Lib Dems each with a +2 net change on the EUROSC scale. Despite a smaller net change, namely +1, the Conservative Party was the only one of the mainstream parties to allude to the possibility for the UK to leave the EU.

4.4.3. Testing the hypotheses for the EU

Bearing in mind the above remarks, the four hypotheses of this investigation of the systemic impact of a PRR party can be now verified.

Voting hypothesis

The hypothesis was formulated that a mainstream party suffering a past electoral downfall attributable to a niche opponent will have incentives to adopt an accommodative

strategy in response to the niche party. I have already reported the differentials in the parties' electoral performances in the previous section on immigration. In this section, the mainstream parties' results at the European Parliament elections will possibly be more relevant to the explanation, on the assumptions that voters express their views on European integration when voting at European elections. Thus, the assumption is here made that these elections can provide compelling indicators for elites of the degree of agenda friction on the EU issue. Agenda friction refers to a mismatch between the policy preferences of the elites and the electorate (Odmalm & Hepburn 2017). In European elections, often defined as "second order" elections, voters tend to communicate their dislike for the way the mainstream parties have dealt with Europe by voting a PRR alternative like UKIP.

For the period 2005-2010, what is relevant is the marginal electoral performance in the 2005 general election. Among the studied parties, Labour was the only one to face an electoral loss, consisting of a -5.5 percent change in its vote share and 47 seats less in the House of Commons. Nevertheless, this setback, as explained above, could hardly be imputed to UKIP, which fell short of expectations and did not win a single seat. Having said that, Labour was also the only party to adopt a less Europhile platform by downplaying its previously positive views of advancing EU integration. If one has to search for an alternative explanation, it might be argued that the 2005 Labour loss, albeit not directly linked to UKIP on the national stage, induced the party to try to adjust its programmatic profile, and that UKIP's stunning performance at the 2009 European Parliament election (16 percent vote share) on a hard Eurosceptic platform possibly led the party to deemphasize its positive mentions of EU integration. Otherwise, if the results at the 2009 EP election are considered, Labour did suffer a marginal loss before 2010, namely -6.6. of its vote share. Again this loss did not much depend on UKIP, which saw its 2004 score unchanged, and advantaged minor parties (House of Commons 2009). Yet, due to this loss, the party may have detected a decline in the confidence of its voters on the way it managed the EU issue. Indeed, the party's total +1 EUROSC score was not driven by convergence towards UKIP, but rather a reduced emphasis in the party Europhile positions on political integration. The other parties, Conservatives and Lib Dems, did not suffer losses (rather small improvements) in 2009 and kept their agendas on the EU unchanged in 2010. In sum, the hypothesis seems corroborated when one takes into account the parties' performances at European elections, preceding by just one year the moments where programmatic shifts were measured in this study.

Moving on to the 2010-2015 period, again Labour was the only party having experienced an electoral marginal loss in the last national election. In 2010, the party led by

Gordon Brown suffered a -6.2 percent drop in its vote share and a net loss of 97 seats in the House of Commons. Yet again, UKIP had little to do with this downfall, as the PRR party increased its vote share by less than 1 percent and once more failed to win a single constituency. Still, a shift towards a more Eurosceptic agenda could be observed in Labour, as well as the Tories and the Lib Dems. In trying to explain Labour's behavior, the same conjectures as above can be made. Perhaps, Labour felt a growing pressure to revise its positions on the EU adopting a more accommodative tactic towards UKIP and the already more Eurosceptic Conservatives. These reasoning seems to suggest that a party suffering a past electoral loss, even if this is not directly related to a PRR rival party (especially in a closed political system such as the UK's), may still attempt to adjust its positioning in order to prevent a further decline in its future performance. As a source of guidance for this strategic adjustments, it is safe to assume that a party may look at external events, which might have been UKIP's breakthrough at the 2014 European election in the present case.

Directly focusing on the European level, the 2014 election was negative for both Tories, with a net loss of -3.8 percent, and the Lib Dems, declining by -6.7 compared to 2009. At the same time, UKIP increased its consensus by 10.6 percent, becoming the most voted party with 26.6 percent of the votes. Therefore, by looking at the 2014 EP election, it is easier to account for the accommodative behavior adopted by both the Tories and the Lib Dems, which instead had not suffered electoral setbacks at the 2010 elections. As concerns the EU issue, therefore, the voting hypothesis seems to better capture the observed agenda movements, provided that one takes into account the mainstream parties' performances in an election which can inform them about the degree of agenda matching between them and their voters on the EU issue.

Issue ownership hypothesis

The second hypothesis implied that the more an issue is owned by a PRR niche party, the less likely its mainstream contenders are to adopt an accommodative behavior on that issue, as addressing it inevitably raises its saliency. In order to test this hypothesis, one has to determine whether UKIP could be seen as owning the EU issue relative to its opponents, first in 2010 and later in 2015. It results quite difficult to evaluate UKIP's relative degree of ownership in 2010. There are not pertinent data from public surveys, explicitly asking the perceived competence of the party on the EU before the 2010 election. What can be said is that both the Tories and Labour were clearly more internally divided than UKIP on the issue,

and this is a factor which potentially impairs the party's ability to claim ownership (Gabel & Scheve 2007, Van de Wardt *et al.* 2014, Meijers 2017). Having said that, in March 2012, "other" was indicated by 11 of the electorate as the most competent party on the EU issue (YouGov 2015). It is safe to argue that most respondents had UKIP in mind when picking this choice, also considered that Lib Dem was among the available answers in the poll. In the same period, the Conservatives lead with 24 percent on the issue, above Labour with 21 percent and the Lib Dems with 8 percent (YouGov 2015).

Consequently, it can be inferred that by the 2010 general election UKIP's relative degree of ownership of the EU issue was quite low compared to its mainstream rivals, apart from the Liberal Democrats. Notwithstanding this, it was showed above that none of the studied parties converged towards UKIP's agenda on the EU in 2010. The only change characterized Labour, which came to deemphasize its previously positive attitude towards enhanced integration. This result, running counter the hypothesis as hereby formulated, entails that other factors explained the parties' decision not to coopt UKIP's agenda.

Moving on to 2015, survey data reveal that UKIP had significantly increased its relative ownership of the issue. In April 2015, "other" was held by 21 percent of the respondents as the best party on Europe, compared to a share of 22 percent choosing Conservatives, 22 percent Labour, and 8 percent the Lib Dems (YouGov 2015). Other data further confirm UKIP's increased relative ownership on this issue. According to a different poll, 24 percent of the population believed that UKIP had the best policies on the EU. Labour came second with 21 percent of the responses, followed by the Conservative Party with 20 percent and the Lib Dems with 11 percent (Ipsos MORI 2014).

Europe							
	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Other	None	Don't know	Lab lead
2015	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
April 26-27	21	22	9	21	9	18	1

Figure 5: Ownership of the EU issue ahead of the 2015 general election (YouGov 2015)

And which party do you think has the best policies on Europe; the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP or some other party?

Base: 1,010 British adults 18+

	Sept 2013 %	Sept 2014 %
Conservatives	23	20
Labour	21	21
Liberal Democrats	9	11
UK Independence Party (UKIP)	18	24
Other	4	6
None	5	4
Don't know	21	15

Figure 6: Ownership of the EU issue in September 2014 (Ipsos MORI 2014)

It is difficult to isolate the impact of ownership on party behavior in 2015, since not a single party enjoyed a large lead over the others on the EU issue. For sure, UKIP had improved its reputation for competence on this policy dimension compared to 2010. Moreover, the PRR party could claim higher programmatic consistency over time, and was certainly less internally divided than the other parties on the issue. However, this higher degree of ownership enjoyed by UKIP did not deterred the other parties from adopting an accommodative strategy in 2015, as emerged from the case study.

However, this gradual rise in UKIP's ownership of the issue did not come much at the expenses of the Conservatives and Labour (YouGov 2015). It is safe to argue that increased UKIP's ownership, with less far less people indicating "none" as the best party on the EU (YouGov 2015), implied a growing public significance of the EU in the eyes of the voters, thus passingly signaling agenda frictions between the public attitudes towards the EU and the main parties' preferences on it. In turn, this development may have led the major parties to absorb the UKIP's Eurosceptic agenda in 2015.

This finding is in line with the above theorization of party competition, and specifically with the notion that a party will tend to deemphasize an issue on which it fares worse than its niche contender (Green & Hobolt 2008, Odum & Bale 2015). Also the Lib Dems retained their markedly Europhile agenda from 2005 to 2010.

Opposition/government hypothesis

The third hypothesis states that an mainstream opposition party is more prone to engage in an accommodative behavior towards a PPR niche contender than a mainstream government party. In 2010, as underlined above, the only party to alter its agenda on the EU was Labour, which adopted a dismissive approach on the dimension of EU political integration. This outcome indeed runs counter the theoretical proposition, in that the Conservatives, from their opposition status, did not actually converge towards UKIP positions on the EU. The same can be said for the Lib Dems, at that time in opposition. However, as it was the case with regard to immigration, in 2010 the core assumption of this hypothesis, namely the PRR party's ownership of the issue at stake, did not apply. Therefore, it is difficult to either uphold or disprove the opposition/government hypothesis as regards the 2005-2010 period.

Moving on to 2015, the entire party system's agenda changed towards the most anti-EU platform characterizing UKIP. This time, the PRR party could be said to enjoy ownership of the issue. Hence, the risks entailed by direct confrontation and emphasizing the EU issues were arguably more concrete now. Labour was the only opposition party at that time, and in accordance with the hypothesis it shifted towards UKIP's agenda in both positional and salience terms: it became critical of further integration and alluded to the possibility of an in/out referendum yet without clarifying its stance in such an eventuality. However, both the governing Conservatives and their coalition partners did not try to defuse the EU issue despite their government status. Therefore, it is plausible that they were moved by other incentives offsetting their cautious attitude to directly confronting UKIP.

Public saliency hypothesis

I will now test the hypothesis that a party's decision to express address an issue, thereby increasing its saliency on the policy agenda, is shaped by the extent to which that issue is seen as important by the voters. One would thus expect to observe an accommodative behavior on the EU issue by the mainstream parties when the issue is especially prominent to the public. To validate these proposition, one should consider the evolution of the EU issue as a key concern to UK voters. Right after the 2010 general election, British relationship with the EU was deemed one the three most important issue facing the country by a very small share of Britons, namely 4 percent (YouGov 2015). As for 2015, ahead of the general election in the same year, 16 percent mentioned the EU as an important issue facing the country, witnessing a dramatic increase in the public relevance of the issue.

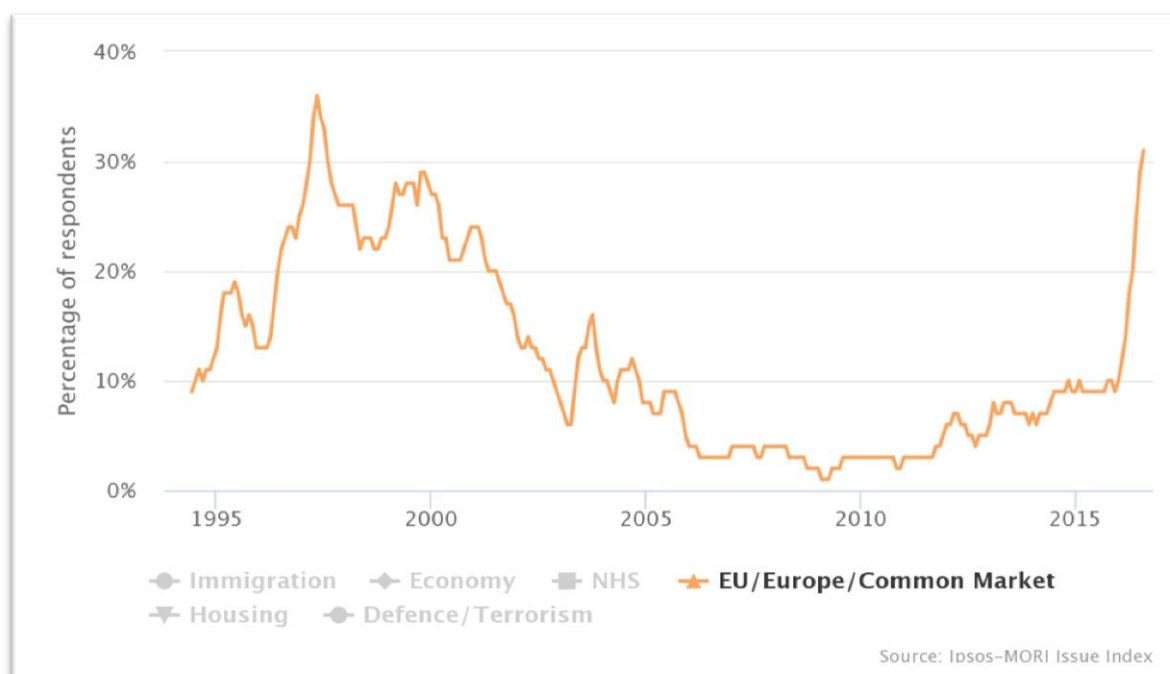


Figure 7: Public saliency of the EU issue over time (Migration Observatory 2016)

Other estimates (figure 7) show that 3 percent of the public held the EU one of the most important issues in 2010, while in 2015 the same share had risen to 9, still a low number yet three times the previous value (Ipsos MORI 2016). It is beyond the remit of this study to delve into the reasons behind such a sharp surge in the public prominence of the EU. It here suffices to say that UKIP might have contributed to this development by successfully linking the traditionally less salient issue of the EU to a country's typically prominent issue such as immigration (Ford & Goodwin 2014). This effort in fact lies at the heart of the aforesaid "fusion strategy" put in place by UKIP during its process of ideological consolidation (Lynch *et al.* 2011, Copsey & Haughton 2014). The fact that immigration concerns were intertwined with public attitudes towards the EU is also supported by a 2013 British Social Attitudes poll, which shows that a significant majority of those saying that the UK should leave the EU also thought that immigration had a bad impact on both the economy and culture (Curtice & Evans 2014). Another poll shows that a combined 58 percent of the public believe that membership of the EU harms the UK in terms of immigration and freedom of movement, while 26 percent consider membership as beneficial in this respect (Survation 2013). In this context, the cited process of issue politicization (Carmines & Stimson 1986) seems quite illustrative. In order for an issue to become effectively politicized, it was said above that a clear positional difference between the issue entrepreneur and the mainstream parties must

exist, and that the issue must be arouse some emotional response among the public. Accordingly, EU politicization occurred once UKIP managed to link the EU, an issue on which it already had a clear positional difference relative to other parties (calling for immediate British withdrawal), with one which was also traditionally cared about by the electorate, like immigration.

The findings of the above examination seem to validate the public saliency hypothesis, in that the most significant systemic shift towards UKIP's typical agenda could be observed between 2010 and 2015. In 2010, Europe featured as a notably low-ranking issue in the mind of voters, and this may explain why none of the major parties absorbed part of UKIP's platform on the EU. The only programmatic movement in 2010 was exhibited by Labour, which now deemphasized its previously pro-integration stance. On the contrary, five years later the EU had turned into an important issue to the public opinion, possibly pushing the mainstream parties towards a more Eurosceptic profile in response to this saliency shift.

4.4.4. Discussion

The previous subsection has evaluated the main theoretical propositions on the agenda impact of UKIP as regards the EU issue. Some reflections on the findings can be new set forth. First, the voting hypothesis alone did not adequately account for the observed patterns. Indeed, the relationship between a past electoral setback and a convergence towards the niche party is not at all automatic. In 2010, Labour not only refrained from moving towards UKIP, but also deemphasized some of its formerly Europhile positions. In 2015, the party adopted a markedly accommodative strategy on Europe, although its previous electoral failure had little to do with UKIP. Based on the above remarks, a revised version of the voting hypothesis would posit that a party suffering a previous loss will consider a programmatic realignment to stave off a further loss in the future, and will draw on external information, like the outcome of European Parliament elections in this case, as heuristic cues during such process. This shows the importance of bringing the agency of parties into the picture when analyzing patterns of agenda impact and inter-party competition (Norris 2005, Meguid 2008).

Turning to the issue ownership hypothesis, it was not entirely backed up by the analysis either. As UKIP gradually boosted its reputation on the EU issue up to 2015, the other parties did not refrain from coopting its agenda ahead of the election in the same year. This surprising outcome can be attributed to the fact that the EU was too important an issue by that time to neglect (Budge & Farlie 1983, Sides 2007), or that the mainstream parties'

effort to resolve agenda friction on the EU with their voting bases prevailed over concerns about raising an issue on which UKIP had accumulated a small relative advantage.

The opposition status hypothesis was disproven by the empirical observation. In 2015, the Labour party in opposition emphasized its positions on the EU, on which UKIP could claim ownership. However, an accommodative behavior characterized also the other parties which were then in government, namely the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

Finally, there seems to be empirical support for the hypothesis concerning the public saliency of the EU issue. As demonstrated, no tangible mainstream convergence occurred in 2010, when the EU had very limited resonance with the electorate, while all major parties coopted part of UKIP's agenda in 2015, when Europe had visibly emerged as an important issue. Moreover, this increase in saliency can be attributed to the agency of UKIP itself, and its successful endeavor to bind together the traditionally low-ranking EU with an issue more likely to mobilize the voters, such as immigration.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has contributed to the literature on the populist radical right (PRR) party family on two main levels. First, it has attempted to provide a more far-reaching theorization of a political phenomenon which is increasingly finding room in both media and academic debate. Second, it has drawn the attention to a largely unexplored dimension of this phenomenon, namely the political consequences of this party family in contemporary Western European democracies. In the first part, I have thus reviewed the major scholarly contributions to this field of research, also emphasizing some of the methodological weaknesses characterizing many of the available accounts. Drawing on the seminal work by Cas Mudde (2004, 2007), an exhaustive definition of these parties' core ideological profile was formulated. It was demonstrated that what lies at the heart of these parties' rhetoric and political vision is a dynamic combination of nativism, authoritarianism and populism. It was also made the point that these parties are more concerned with the politics of "who we are" than with that of "who gets what". In other words, PRR parties tend to operate along identitarian and value-related lines of political conflicts, while neglecting the traditional distributional/socioeconomic cleavage.

A primary contribution of this work, having laid down this definitional framework, was to demonstrate that parties generally included in the said family do actually present the major features making up the said definition. It was a core objective of this study to show that

there is indeed a congruency between theory and reality when these types of parties are scrutinized. To this end, I provided an overview of the major PRR representatives in all medium-large West European democracies, analyzing their distinctive programmatic and rhetoric characteristics. This descriptive effort has indeed shown that the employed theorization of the party family does have a sound empirical base. At the same time, the analysis has revealed that parties are not crystalized entities, and their ideological evolution over time can considerably thwart the search for definitive categorizations. Many of the observed parties, therefore, started with single-issue or economic-centered profiles, and only later came to assume the typical message and agenda of this party family. Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Northern League (LN), as well the Danish People's Party (DF) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) are relevant examples in this regard. In light of this, while internal differences and nuances certainly exist, there is indeed a case for speaking of a distinct party family, with a set of recognizable shared characteristics.

As suggested, the second chief objective of this study was to shed light on an area which has thus far received scant academic attention, namely the political impact of PRR parties. While there are some notable exceptions (Schain 1997, 2006, Minkenberg 1998, Williams 2006), in fact, most research on the PRR has focused on the possible causes of its recent success at electoral level. This contribution has instead reversed the conventional research design, by treating the PRR family as an independent variable rather than a dependent variable. Thus, a theory of political impact and inter-party competition was outlined, based on some of the most compelling scholarly contributions on the subject. It was underlined that the two aspects of impact and competition are closely interrelated, as political influence of a PRR challenger party unfolds according the mechanisms of parties' strategic interactions. When it comes to inter-party competition, attention was devoted to its two facets of positional versus salience competition, which also correspond to two chief literature camps. These two aspects or logics of interaction imply that parties challenge each other by taking opposing positions on certain policy issues (positional competition), as well as by placing more or less emphasis on the issues they want to see dominate the conflict (salience competition). The present study has treated these two logics as complementary rather than mutually exclusive, following the approach used by some researchers (Meguid 2005, Green-Pedersen 2007, Abou-Chadi 2014). In addition, I illustrated some key concepts deemed relevant to understand the patterns of political influence here investigated, such as issue ownership (Petrocik 1996) and issue politicization (Carmines and Stimson 1986). These are

fundamental conceptual tools if one has to more fully grasp the dynamic interaction between parties in the electoral market.

Finally, I developed a case study to empirically investigate a phenomenon which relates to a central aspect of political impact, namely programmatic contagion. This dynamic, also known as issue cooptation, relates to the way in which new entrants in the party system, like most PRR are, urge their mainstream opponent to assume some of their rhetoric themes and policy preferences. The case of UK was considered, in that this country features a PRR challenger party with a limited issue appeal, largely focused on opposition to immigration and the EU. Given the peculiar contextual characteristics of the country which tend to bar access to direct decision-making power for new entrants, the case enabled to delve into the mechanisms of indirect policy impact of the PRR, meaning the agenda-setting effects on the whole party system over two questions with clear international implications such as immigration and the EU.

The empirical investigation revealed that some of the most used hypotheses concerning these dynamics are partly ill-suited. Broadly speaking, it emerged from the case study that party behavior is much less deterministic than often regarded. For example, a mainstream party's partial adoption of the PRR platform does not require that the PRR has caused a visible electoral harm to the former. In 2010, Labour converged towards UKIP's preferences on immigration policy despite the PRR party had little to do with the former's electoral decline in that period. Thus, added to evaluations of past voting performances, parties may also be driven by strategic adjustments to decrease any significant agenda mismatch with their voters and try to prevent future electoral losses. Furthermore, after the Lib Dems were actually damaged by UKIP at the 2014 EP election, they did not absorb UKIP's agenda on immigration, possibly due to ideological constraints or the fear to alienate even more voters than those which it could recoup by means of an accommodative strategy. More support was found for the issue ownership hypothesis. In the case of immigration, a greater agenda cooptation was observed in 2010, when UKIP could not claim much ownership of the issue relative to its opponents. Yet, the analysis also showed how ownership is not at all a static entity, as parties can effectively improve it over time, like UKIP did with the immigration issue. Another factor which was confirmed to matter was the public importance or saliency of the issue at stake. The way in which parties revise their programmes by framing an issue in different ways was found to be related to this variable of public saliency. It was showed that as immigration was going down as a top concern for voters by 2010, taken over by economy, both the Conservatives and Labour converged

towards UKIP's stance specifically by addressing the immigration issue according to economic frames, while basically neglecting the asylum and security dimension of immigration. As regards the EU issue, it was demonstrated that mainstream parties were more responsive to UKIP at programmatic level when the EU issue was more relevant to the electorate, in 2015. Importantly, this rise in the public significance of the EU could well be related to UKIP's agency, and its efforts to mobilize the issue in the electoral contest. Therefore, PRR parties can build their own fortunes, and are not inexorably barred from political influence by institutional or structural constraints.

Having said that, the present study is affected by some limitations. The method I employed for the empirical part, namely content analysis of party platforms, does not guarantee internal validity, insofar as the analysis can be plagued by value or judgment biases of the observer. Moreover, the choice of a single case study, which was driven by feasibility considerations and the peculiar context characterizing the British polity, can result in impaired external validity. Indeed, the causal inferences drawn by the present investigation, while they can possibly enrich the understanding of dynamics of PRR party impact and strategic interaction between parties, inevitably have limited generalizability.

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Summary

This thesis addressed a political phenomenon which has been attracting a great deal of both public and academic attention over the last decades: the populist radical right (PRR) in Western European countries. Most studies on the extreme right and the radical right so far have focused on either the programmatic and rhetoric features of these parties or the most plausible causes of their recent electoral upsurge. Yet in this research area, few studies have effectively undertaken an empirical testing of the main ideological features commonly associated with this party family. Moreover, while the possible root causes of the PRR electoral breakthrough have been investigated extensively, scant attention has been devoted to the political consequences –or impact—of these parties in the political arena. This work can be seen as an attempt to fill these gaps in the research on the contemporary populist radical right.

The thesis had two paramount research goals. First, to conceptualize and empirically assess the common ideological fabric of these parties. Second, to achieve a deeper understanding of these parties' repercussions on the whole political system. As regards the latter goal, dynamics of impact at agenda-setting level were studied as concerns policy issues of particular international relevance, such as immigration and the EU integration. The implications of successful populist radical right parties for international relations is in fact another notably understudied topic, although one which is increasingly talked about in media and public debate.

Following an introduction, in Section 2, I tried to single out those criteria which should be taken into account in order for a party to be considered as member of the populist radical right. It was clarified that the categorization attempt was driven by the ideological features as visible in parties' programmes and electoral manifestoes, rather than some socioeconomic or attitude-based variables of their constituents. This ideology-based approach was deemed more appropriate for the nature of contemporary party politics, characterized by growing electoral volatility and declining class-based voting. Therefore, this thesis was more concerned with the supply-side of the electoral market (Norris 2005), namely the key issues that parties submit to the electoral "audience" (Schattschneider 1960) and the positions they assume on those issues, rather than the demand-side which pertains to the attitudes and policy preferences of the electorate.

Before proceeding to define the prototypical PRR party, I also clarified the definitional boundary between the “extreme right” and the “radical right”, two terms which are often mixed up. The former concept generally refers to those parties which might challenge the democratic constitutional order and espouse violent means to obtain power (including parties such as the Greek Golden Dawn), whereas radical right parties are found to adhere to the basic rules of liberal democracy and constitutionalism. The scope of the present study was limited to the radical right party family.

In Section 2.2, I discussed some of the most relevant classification issues plaguing the study of the populist radical right. These parties, for example, tend to show very different ideological pedigrees and have often undergone significant ideological and programmatic adjustments through their history. Further, as denounced by Cas Mudde, one can observe a sort of “definitional chaos” as far as this party family is concerned. A colorful plethora of different names and labels -such as fascist, neopopulist, xenophobic etc.- have been often used by scholars indistinctively or with no prior theoretical justification. In light of this, this thesis tried to offer a concise and compelling definition of this political phenomenon, backed by an extensive conceptual clarification.

Section 2.3 presented the major scholarly contributions belonging to this area of research. Most of these studies have identified some key features which would distinguish radical right parties from other parties. Some examples include an anti-system or anti-everything positioning, a protest-party feature enabling these parties to capitalize on voters’ dissatisfaction and societal grievances, strong leadership, law and order mentality, the ability to boost their support by exploiting niches in the electoral space created by the ideological convergence of mainstream parties, and so on. While these accounts have enormously enriched the study of this topic and provided some powerful analytical tools, some of them do not really engage in validating their propositions empirically, or adopt a garbage-can-model where a large number of different features are summed up to create the average PPR profile – although these features can hardly be observed all together in anyone of these parties.

With these lines of criticism in mind, Section 2.4 set forth the ideological fabric of PRR parties, by drawing on the seminal work of Cas Mudde on the subject. The important preliminary remark was made that these parties are better understood as operating along the sociocultural ideological axis rather than the traditional socioeconomic axis. They largely mobilize issues with a strong value-based and cultural valence, while mainly neglecting distributional and economic issues. Thus, the typical PRR message is more an answer to

“who we are” than to “who gets what”. With this in mind, the category of the populist radical right was theorized by means of both a minimal and a maximal definition.

The minimal definition was presented in Section 2.4.1. Its core notion is nativism, which stands for the absolute congruence between the political unit and the cultural-ethnic unit. Nativism holds “that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state”, quoting Mudde’s (2007) words. Nativism can be also seen as an extreme form of nationalism blended with xenophobic ideas. Furthermore, nativism is closely related to ethnopluralism, a key doctrine of the 1960s European “New Right”, which essentially posits that all races are “equal but different” and should be kept separated. Besides this, a corollary argument of ethnopluralism is that enmeshing different ethnicities or national identities will lead to social chaos and cultural extinction.

Nativism can thus be considered as the smallest common denominator of the political vision of PRR parties, and translates into opposition to immigration and multiculturalism in terms of policy agenda. The maximal definition of the populist radical right was described in Section 2.4.2. It includes two additional ideological features: authoritarianism and populism. The mindset which underlies authoritarianism places much emphasis on aspects related to law and order, and holds that violations of authority demand concrete punishment. Drawing on these insights, Mudde (2007) then defines authoritarianism as “the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely”. In their platforms, PRR parties indeed emphasize themes such as more effective law enforcement and “zero tolerance” against violators, which are often framed in connection with the migration issues.

The final element making up the ideological fabric of PRR parties was said to be populism. In my thesis, this concept was treated as a soft or thin-centered ideology which can be combined with other more structured ideologies. Thus, the present theorization of populism distanced itself from those approaches considering populism merely as a communicative style, similar to demagoguery or political opportunism. Conceptualized as an ideological element rather than a rhetoric trait, populism is grounded on the Manichean contraposition between the elite and the people. The nature of this contrast is framed as moral and thus leaves little or no room for compromise or reconciliation. Populism can hence be regarded as an ideology splitting the society in two homogenous and antagonistic groups: the “pure people” and the “corrupt elites”. On top of that, populism includes the aspiration that political outcomes reflect the uniform will of the people, which should not be intermediated

or reshaped in any way through the decision-making process. As a result of the centrality of the people and calls for more direct democracy, populism may clash with representative democracy insofar as it views representative institutions as undue obstacles to the full empowerment of the people.

It was repeatedly highlighted in this descriptive part of the thesis that populism is not systematically in conflict with democracy *per se* –especially given populists’ recurrent calls for a more direct connection between people’s will and policy outcomes- but rather with the liberal side of contemporary liberal democracies. The wellbeing of the collective (and constructed) people, which in PPR parties coincides with the native group, is generally deemed more important than individual interests and aspirations within the populist narrative.

Therefore, the shared ideological profile of parties like the French FN, the Italian NL, the Austrian FPÖ, and the Dutch PVV was identified in a combination of (1) nativism, implying the primacy of the national over the alien and the separation between the two; (2) authoritarianism, which professes obedience to the authorities and calls for more severe punishments against perpetrators; (3) and populism, which aims to implement the unified will of the honest people oppressed by the corrupt elite. It was also shown how most other aspects of their policy programmes are generally linked to these three core ideological dimensions.

Section 2.5 offered an empirical assessment of the provided conceptualization of the PRR party family. I drew the attention to the most electorally significant PRR parties in all medium-large West European democracies. The following parties were included in the examination: The Sweden Democrats (SD) in Sweden, the Danish People’s Party (DF) in Denmark, the Finns Party (Ps) in Finland, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the United Kingdom, the National Front (FN) in France, Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany, the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, the Flemish Interest (VB) in Belgium, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in Austria, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP-UDC, here SVP for simplicity) in Switzerland, the Northern League (LN) in Italy, the Independent Greeks (ANEL) in Greece. Borderline cases such as the Greek Golden Dawn (LS-CA) and the Norwegian Progress Party (FrP) were excluded from the analysis. Golden Dawn is better understood as belonging to the extreme right family, which generally seek to subvert or destroy the democratic constitutional order. As for the Progress Party there is still much scholarly disagreement, yet its more nativist internal current was gradually marginalized by the party leadership.

In order to test the viability of the definition of the populist radical right, I carried out a qualitative content analysis of each party’s electoral manifestoes, as well as public

statements of party officials or information retrieved on the party's official website. The inquiry indeed showed that the adopted theorization of the party family is by and large matched by empirical reality. At the same time, the analysis revealed that parties are not crystalized entities, and their ideological evolution over time can considerably thwart the search for definitive categorizations. Many of the observed parties, therefore, started with single-issue or economic-centered profiles, and only later came to assume the typical message and agenda of this party family. Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Northern League (LN), as well the Danish People's Party (DF) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) are relevant examples in this regard. In light of this, while internal differences and nuances certainly exist, there is indeed a case for speaking of a distinct party family, with a set of recognizable shared characteristics.

Section 3 laid the theoretical groundwork for the second basic research question of my thesis, namely how and under which circumstances can PRR parties shape the systemic policy agenda, by inducing other parties to address their key issues and even assume some of their positions on them. Is there such a thing as a contagion effect caused by successful PRR parties in Europe? Are mainstream parties systematically prone to coopt some traditional PRR policy solutions for reasons of electoral expediency? What are the most compelling variables accounting for these phenomenon? The second part of my thesis was thus more analytical as it sought to answer these and related questions concerning the political impact of PPR parties, with specific attention to issue of international relevance such immigration and EU integration. These questions seem of the utmost importance today, as it is common to hear about the implications of growing far right parties in Europe and the possible dangers they would pose to the resilience of liberal democracy and the future path of European integration.

In Section 3.1 I provided an overview of the most influential models of electoral competition. In the framework, parties were construed as dynamic agents who are bound by a set of structural constraints and driven by positive and negative incentives in the selection of their strategy. Two major theoretical paradigms of party strategy were described: (1) the positional or spatial theory of party competition, and (2) the issue or salience theory of party competition. The classic theory of spatial competition was inspired by the groundbreaking 1957 book *An Economic Theory of Democracy* by Anthony Downs. A core assumption of this model is that parties as well as voters are rational actors trying to maximize their utility. Parties, who are vote-seeking organizations, update and adapt their policy platforms in response to the attitudes and preferences of the electorate and position themselves where the

largest distribution of voters stands. In the Downsian view, the political space is also assumed as fixed and monodimensional, basically consisting of the socioeconomic or distributional ideological axis.

A revised version of the classic spatial model was also summarized in Section 3.1.2, as it introduced some crucial concepts which were then employed in my explanatory section. A fundamental proposition of this revised spatial theory is that parties do not just propose their preferences on a predetermined set of issues, but also crucially try to push their preferred issues and shift the political debate towards their own terrain. Moreover, the distinction was marked between positional issues, on which there can be different preferences and thus parties' positions matter a lot, and valence issues, which are generally associated with a positive or negative state of affairs (e.g. economic growth, employment rate, environmental protection) and for which party competence and past records are more important.

The issue or salience theory of party competition was then outlined in Section 3.1.3. Overcoming some of the Downsian model's drawbacks, salience competition focuses on the importance which parties and voters assign to different issues. Rather than position, namely a policy stance, what really counts in this theoretical approach is the relative salience or emphasis which is given on an issue vis-à-vis others. Related to this logic of party interaction, is the ability of parties to alter the domain in which electoral competition takes place. Given that the second research goal of my thesis was to study the capacity of PPR parties to shape the political debate to their advantage and raise the saliency of their preferred issues at systemic level, these dynamics were deemed to deserve special consideration.

Issue competition was said to be relevant for the analysis also insofar as parties can politicize or activate a previously silent or unimportant issue (Carmines and Stimson 1986). This line of research pointed to the fact that behavior at elite level is crucial to transform certain issues into matters of political contention, and that what varies in the political conflict is not just the position of each party over a pre-determined issue dimension, but also crucially the contours of the conflict itself.

Within the framework of salience or issue competition, the key concept of issue ownership, as popularized by Petrocick (1996) was also illustrated. In short, a party is said to "own" a given issue if it is widely viewed as the most competent one to handle and devise solutions for that issue. The theory of issue ownership resulted in the prediction that vote-maximizing parties will limit the focus of their campaign on the issues they own –namely

those on which they enjoy a reputation for trustworthiness and competence— while downplaying the issues owned by rival parties.

In the discussion of issue competition, it was pointed out that while direct confrontation is rare, as parties tend to focus on their preferred issues or the ones they “own” while shying away from those in which other parties already have the lead, issue overlap is still a fact in contemporary politics. Parties are sometimes compelled to present their preferences on certain issues regardless of their will, especially if these are deemed important by the public or stir a considerable emotional response in the electorate. On top of that, it was argued that ownership of an issue is not a zero-sum game, and can also be transferred from one party to another. As said, parties do have a crucial role to play in the transformation of issues into electorally relevant or salient ones. In a way, hence, parties have agency and their success in terms of other parties having to address their messages is also shaped by their strategic choices.

In Section 3.2. I clarified the concept of party impact, which was the object of the second, explanatory part of my thesis. Impact was interpreted as an indirect channel of political influence by rising PRR parties, who have only rarely managed to win office and wield direct decision-making power. The basic argument was that PRR parties, as they emerge and make inroads at electoral level, can induce their mainstream contenders to converge towards their issue appeals and their policy preferences on them. If PRR parties are perceived as a significant threat, they can prompt their mainstream rivals to alter their programmes and hence profoundly affect the whole policy agenda. In this way, political impact would not occur through the more straightforward mechanism of policy formulation and implementation by the party in office, but more subtly through the channel of systemic impact on the agendas of other parties, and possibly also the ones holding government positions. It is exactly these patterns of indirect impact that were the object of the present analysis. The importance of this more subtle channel of influence was a cornerstone of the present examination, based on Schattschneider’s (1960) contention that the “scope of conflict” -namely the set of issues defining the electoral competition- is the “ultimate instrument of power”.

Section 3.3 was devoted to the specification of the main variables and hypotheses used in the empirical section of my study. In Section 3.3.1, I clarified the dependent variable of the investigation. As anticipated, the *explanandum* of this study was the extent of convergence –or the absence thereof- of mainstream parties towards the issue profiles and positions typically exhibited by their PRR contenders. In observing patterns of convergence

and policy cooptation, both aspects of positional and salience competition were taken into account, on the assumption that parties' programmatic shifts can take place in two different ways: (a) by altering the positions or policy preferences over a given issue, and (b) by increasing or decreasing the relative salience of an issue within the party's programme. To operationalize the possible directions of the dependent variables, a typology of party strategy was devised, including accommodative strategy or "convergence", and an adversarial strategy or "divergence". The option was also included of a dismissive strategy, whereby mainstream parties seek to defuse or neglect the agenda put forth by PRR parties.

Section 3.3.2 dealt with the independent variables and the main hypotheses of the research design. The choice of the independent variable was guided by the presumption that changes in the agenda on immigration and EU integration are not exclusively determined by external shocks, for example in terms of greater numbers of immigrants or growing vote shares of the PRR. Systemic variables surely have explanatory weight, but agency of parties deserves attention as well. Consequently, the *explanans* of the investigation was manifold, based on the assumption that positional and salience shifts of mainstream parties may be attributed to a wide array of factors, both external and internal to the parties.

By developing a case study of electoral competition between UKIP and its mainstream rivals in the UK, I tested a number of theoretical propositions which relate to the mechanism of agenda impact of niche (PRR) parties on the whole party system. On the basis of the reviewed literature, four hypotheses, each of them centered on a possible independent variable and backed by a theoretical argumentation, were thus elaborated: (1) a *voting hypothesis* stating that mainstream parties who have suffered a relative electoral loss due to the PRR party are more likely to coopt the PRR agenda; (2) an *issue ownership hypothesis* positing that the more an issue is owned by the PRR party vis-à-vis its mainstream contender, the lower the incentives of the latter to coopt this issue and articulate its positions on it; (3) an *opposition/government hypothesis* stating that mainstream opposition parties are more likely to converge towards the PRR programme than mainstream government parties; and (4) a *public saliency hypothesis* stating that the more an issue is salient to the public, the more likely the mainstream parties will address this issue and formulate positions on them as a response to the rising PRR party.

In Section 4, the above theoretical expectations were assessed empirically in a case study of electoral competition on the issues of EU integration and immigration in the UK from 2005 to 2016. Section 4.1 illustrated the method chosen for my case study, also specifying the operationalization of the variables and the case selection. With a view to

mapping the parties' programmatic positioning, I engaged in a qualitative content analysis of their election manifestoes, as they constitute authoritative, parsimonious and reliable statements of the policy preferences of a party. In parallel, I relied on process tracing in order to draw causal inferences on the cited dynamics of political influence of a PRR actor. From 2005 to 2016, I evaluated agenda change in the whole party system, representing the indirect policy impact of the PPR, along two key issues: immigration and the EU. These are central themes in the political discourse of UKIP, and hence represented good proxies to assess the degree and the nature of programmatic shifts towards and away from UKIP's agenda.

In order to gauge systemic agenda changes over these two issues, I employed a LIBRES scale aggregating parties' preferences over several dimensions of immigration, as well as a EUROSC scale measuring parties' positions on membership as well as political integration. Then, I interpreted reduced LIBRES and EUROSC distances of mainstream parties relative to UKIP over time as evidence of convergence or of an accommodative strategy. The differences in the parties' scores over these two issues were calculated from two consecutive election moments, in order to properly observe the diachronic movement of the variables of interest.

I started my analysis from 2005 because it was the first general election after UKIP's first electoral breakthrough, that is a 15.6 percent (third place) at the 2004 European Parliament election. The UK was selected on the ground that its political system allows to better study the political influence of a party which has little chance of reaching office, and hence of exerting direct policy impact. This constraint clearly depends on the institutional nature of the British polity, with its uninominal, plurality, first-past-the-post voting system. Beyond the well-known insight that majoritarian systems negatively affect smaller, emerging parties, the British institutional setting may also entail psychological effects of "wasted vote" in voters.

The empirical investigation revealed that some of the most frequent hypotheses concerning these dynamics of indirect impact are partly ill-suited. Broadly speaking, it emerged from the case study that party behavior is much less deterministic than often regarded. For example, a mainstream party's partial adoption of the PRR platform does not require that the PRR has caused a visible electoral harm to the former. In 2010, Labour converged towards UKIP's preferences on immigration policy despite the PRR party had little to do with the former's electoral decline in that period. Thus, added to evaluations of past voting performances, parties may also be driven by strategic adjustments to decrease any significant agenda mismatch with their voters and try to prevent future electoral losses.

Furthermore, after the Lib Dems were actually damaged by UKIP at the 2014 EP election, they did not absorb UKIP's agenda on immigration, possibly due to ideological constraints or the fear to alienate even more voters than those which it could recoup by means of an accommodative strategy. More support was found for the issue ownership hypothesis. In the case of immigration, a greater agenda cooptation was observed in 2010, when UKIP could not claim much ownership of the issue relative to its opponents. Yet, the analysis also showed how ownership is not at all a static entity, as parties can effectively improve it over time, like UKIP did with the immigration issue. Another factor which was confirmed to matter was the public importance or saliency of the issue at stake. The way in which parties revise their programmes by framing an issue in different ways was found to be related to this variable of public saliency. It was showed that as immigration was going down as a top concern for voters by 2010, taken over by economy, both the Conservatives and Labour converged towards UKIP's stance specifically by addressing the immigration issue according to economic frames, while basically neglecting the asylum and security dimension of immigration. As regards the EU issue, it was demonstrated that mainstream parties were more responsive to UKIP at programmatic level when the EU issue was more relevant to the electorate, in 2015. Importantly, this rise in the public significance of the EU could well be related to UKIP's agency, and its efforts to mobilize the issue in the electoral contest. Therefore, PRR parties can build their own fortunes, and are not inexorably barred from political influence by institutional or structural constraints.

Having said that, it should be noted that the present study is affected by some notable limitations. The method I employed for the empirical part, namely content analysis of party platforms, does not guarantee internal validity, insofar as the analysis can be plagued by value or judgment biases of the observer. Moreover, the choice of a single case study, which was driven by feasibility considerations and the peculiar context characterizing the British polity, can result in impaired external validity. Indeed, the causal inferences drawn by the present investigation, while they can possibly enrich the understanding of dynamics of PRR party impact and strategic interaction between parties, inevitably have limited generalizability.