

Disintegration and Party Competition: Evidence from Parliamentary Speeches on Brexit

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Abstract

Disintegration episodes such as Brexit represent a major exogenous shock for the process of European integration. Do they lead parties to alter their strategies when competing on the EU issue? This article argues that pro-European mainstream parties and Eurosceptic challenger parties reverse their usual strategies after Brexit, as the UK's negative experience reveals new information about the desirability of EU membership. I use a combination of automated and hand-coded methods to identify and analyse 2,223 Brexit statements in the parliaments of five member states between 2013 and 2018. I show how in the aftermath of the Brexit vote the strategies of issue entrepreneurship and issue avoidance usually employed by challenger and mainstream parties are indeed reversed. Challenger parties avoid Brexit and significantly moderate their Euroscepticism; by contrast, mainstream parties emphasise Brexit and significantly increase their pro-Europeanism. Results show that party conflict on European integration is not static but a dynamic competition that responds to outside circumstances and events. They also show that the advantage of issue ownership can be quickly and dramatically reversed when exogenous shocks lead to large changes in public opinion.

Keywords: Brexit, party competition, European Union, avoidance, issue entrepreneurs, Euroscepticism

Authors: Tom Hunter (University of Zurich)

1 Introduction

Disintegration episodes such as Brexit represent a major exogenous shock for the process of European integration. Scholars have shown how Brexit has restructured party competition in the UK (Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley 2020; Glyn and Menon 2017), had a significant impact on public opinion (De Vries 2017, 2018), and strengthened the cohesiveness of the remaining EU27 member states (Chopin and Lequesne 2020). Others have highlighted the risks of contagion (Walter 2021). In this article, I consider whether and how Brexit affected the strategies of mainstream pro-European and Eurosceptic challenger parties in other member states: did this major disintegration episode lead them to alter their strategies when competing on the EU issue?

This article argues that Brexit had a major effect and that pro-European mainstream parties and Eurosceptic challenger parties reversed their usual strategies after Brexit, as the UK's negative experience reveals new information about the desirability of EU membership. I argue that challenger parties reverse their usual strategy of *entrepreneurship* (see Hobolt and De Vries 2015) to one of *avoidance* and *obfuscation* (see Rovny 2012; Hobolt and De Vries 2020) after the referendum. Likewise, mainstream parties reverse their usual strategy of avoidance to one of entrepreneurship, increasing their use of clear pro-EU position taking and criticising populists.

These hypotheses are tested with an original dataset of 2,223 statements on Brexit in five national parliaments: the Austrian Nationalrat, the German Bundestag, the Danish Folketing, the Dutch Tweede Kamer, and the Swedish Riksdag¹. The time period ranges from the 23rd January 2013, when David Cameron first announced his intention to renegotiate the UK's membership terms and put these to voters in a referendum, to the 31st December 2018. I first use automated dictionary methods to identify Brexit statements². I then use hand coding to capture parties' stated Brexit strategy, and the EU tone of their communication. I show that in the aftermath of the Brexit vote challenger parties avoid Brexit, significantly moderate their Euroscepticism, and obfuscate their stance on following in the UK's footsteps. By contrast, mainstream parties emphasise Brexit and send clearer, supportive cues on European integration.

However, I also consider whether these changes are likely to be a temporary or permanent reversal in party strategies. I argue that the former is more likely, for two reasons. First, Brexit is unlikely to remain as salient in other member states, and I provide evidence from Google searches that the salience of Brexit in other member states relative to the UK

¹As parliaments with strong formal powers, hosting both mainstream pro-European and Eurosceptic challenger parties, these provide good venues of party competition to test hypotheses about strategy reversal.

²This method is validated with human hand coders.

has significantly declined over time. Second, I also argue that the monumental economic impact of COVID-19 and the 'slow puncture' nature of Brexit, combined with the bounded rationality of voters, is likely to obfuscate the negative economic impact of Brexit for voters both in the UK and the rest of the EU.

Despite the likely temporary nature of these reversals in party strategy, findings have a number of important implications. First, they add to the body of evidence showing how Brexit has strengthened the sociological legitimacy of the EU in other member states³. Not only has it made public opinion more supportive of integration and expanded the cohesiveness of the EU27 governments, it has also led mainstream parties - the traditional defenders of EU integration in national party competition - to clarify their pro-Europeanism and go on the offensive against Eurosceptic populists. Second, these findings show that party strategies on the EU issue are not stable but *dynamic*: they respond to circumstances and events outside their own country. Third, it shows that the advantage issue ownership (see Petrocik 1996) can be quickly and dramatically reversed when exogenous shocks lead to large short term changes in public opinion. I conclude that events and exogenous shocks in one member state can have a large effect abroad and 'turn the tables' on party competition in other member states.

Established Strategies in EU party competition

Having long been characterised by a 'permissive consensus', EU integration has since been politicized and is now an important feature of political contestation in Europe. (see Lindberg 1970; Hooghe and Marks 2009, 2019; Hobolt and De Vries 2020; Zürn 2014; Rauh 2018). The EU is now salient in domestic political debates, divides public opinion, and has been mobilized at both national and European elections. However, the structure of contestation over European integration differs from the dominant dimension of political conflict in Western Europe as it cannot easily be aligned with the dominant left-right dimension (Hobolt and De Vries 2020). Parties on the right tend to favour economic integration in Europe but oppose the transfer of authority to supranational actors. For parties on the left, economic integration in Europe is often seen to jeopardise national socialist achievements by facilitating international free trade, but further political integration offers an opportunity to regulate labour markets and advance social equality. EU integration is therefore considered a cross cutting wedge issue (see van de Wardt et al 2014) which risks intra party divisions for both mainstream parties of the left and right. The lack of fit has resulted in unusual patterns of party competition where parties on both the left right extremes advocate an

³By sociological (rather than normative) legitimacy, I refer to the *belief* that an exercise of authority is appropriate (e.g. Weber 1922/1978; Tallberg and Zürn 2019).

anti-Europe positions, while centrist parties are predominantly pro-European. The main structure of competition on the issue of EU integration is therefore not between parties of the left and parties of the right, but between mainstream and challenger parties who employ different strategies when competing on the issue.

The main strategy employed by mainstream parties on the issue of EU integration has been characterised as one of *avoidance* and *obfuscation* (Rovny 2012, De Vries and Hobolt 2020). Mainstream parties prefer to redirect onto issues that fit onto the left right dimension of conflict where they are dominant, and because voters are generally more sceptical about European integration than mainstream party elites, these parties generally aim to downplay the issue's importance and/or obfuscate their position on it. They can do so by ignoring the issue but also by depoliticising it, for example by using complex, technocratic language when discussing the EU (Rauh et al 2018; Hunter 2021 cf Chapter 4).

By contrast, the main strategy employed by challenger parties on the issue of EU integration is one of issue *entrepreneurship* (De Vries and Hobot 2020). Theories of issue evolution and issue manipulation (Rikker et al 1996) argue that challenger parties are highly incentivized to mobilize issues that can disturb the political equilibrium. Because they are newcomers to the system or hold marginal positions, any potential vote gain will constitute an improvement of their current electoral position, and by mobilizing high appropriability issues which are not easily subsumed into the dominant dimension, challengers can drive a wedge within mainstream parties and change the basis on which voters make political choices. Challenger parties execute their entrepreneurship strategy by emphasising European integration it in their communication and using clear, uncomplicated communication and cues that usually combine opposition to EU integration with nationalist messages (Bischof and Wagner 2019).

The structure of party competition on Europe therefore differs from the dominant structure of party competition in Western Europe. It is not between left and right wing parties but between mainstream parties who aim to avoid and obfuscate the issue, and challenger parties who aim to mobilize it through issue entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the series of crises that have hit the EU in the twenty first century have cemented this latent dimension, with challenger parties both on the extreme left and extreme right successfully mobilizing the issue at elections in the aftermath of the Eurozone and migration crises (Hernandez and Kriesi 2016). In the following section, I argue that one particular form of exogenous shock - disintegration episodes - can in fact lead parties to alter their strategies when competing on the EU issue

2 Disintegration and its Impact on Party Strategies

2.1 European Disintegration

The study of the EU has historically been the study of European *integration*. From the 1950s to the 2010s, the theoretical literature, both in international relations and comparative politics, focused on the process of convergence between the policies, politics and polities of the EU's member states (Bulmer and Lequesne 2013; Chopin and Lequesne 2020). However, recent contributions have recognised the limitations of a narrow focus on convergence and aimed to rectify the 'pro-integration bias' in EU studies (Borzel 2018). Central to this rethink about have been the disintegration episodes that have hit the EU, defined here as 'selective reductions of a state's level and scope of integration' (Schimmelfenig 2018).

While scholars have been careful to distinguish between a slowdown of integration and actual disintegration (see e.g. Borzel 2018), there have nonetheless been clear cases of European disintegration in the past decade. The most high profile of these disintegration episodes is undeniably Brexit. The British decision to leave the EU following a referendum shocked the political establishment in London, Brussels and beyond (De Vries 2017). Yet Brexit is not the only example of European disintegration. Greenland, having achieved self-rule from Denmark, also left the EC after a referendum in 1982. Disintegration is also not limited to exiting the EU, but also applies to states that remain in the EU but exit from specific policies. For example, the EU's refugee crisis is seen as having led to a form of renationalization and disintegration in security policy (Tassinari 2016; Morsut and Kruke 2018). And whilst European disintegration has only been *realised* in a handful of cases, it has been considered and discussed in the domestic politics of EU member states. Serious suggestions that Greece could leave the euro in the wake of the Eurozone crisis were made by both academics and policymakers (Krugman 2012). And as we have seen in the previous section, Eurosceptic parties have frequently called for exit from certain EU policies, and in certain cases for withdrawal from the EU altogether (Vasilopolou 2018; Heinisch et al. 2020; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008). Borzel concludes that whilst *actual* cases of disintegration are limited, nationalist discourses and practices of non-compliance have reinforced each other in creating heightened *potential* for significant disintegration (2018). Given this heightened risk, it is therefore pertinent to ask whether and how actual disintegration episodes may affect party competition on the EU in other member states.

2.2 Impact on Party Strategies

Do disintegration episodes lead parties in other member states to alter their strategies when competing on the EU issue? In this theoretical section, I draw on the literatures of

policy diffusion, public opinion formation, and party competition to argue that European disintegration in one member state can indeed lead to changes in the strategies employed by parties.

First, disintegration episodes provide *new information* to publics and parties in other countries about the costs and benefits associated with European disintegration. The policy diffusion literature shows how governments and parties in one country learn from the experiences in others, particularly from countries who are early adopter of policies (Shipan and Volden 2004). Early pieces of new evidence thus provide the greatest information value, which is why the initial examples of European disintegration are likely to be particularly influential in providing new information about the desirability of such policies (Walter and Martini 2020).

Second, this new information affects *public opinion* towards European integration. Whilst theories of public opinion formation have ranged from utilitarian to identitarian explanations (see Anderson 1998; Hooghe and Marks 2009), scholars have since settled on a benchmark theory of public opinion towards the EU (De Vries 2017). According to this theory, support for the EU essentially boils down to a comparison between the benefits of the current status quo of membership and those of an alternative state, namely one's country being outside the EU. Under this theory, disintegration episodes are central to public opinion on the EU because they provide more information about the economic and political costs and benefits associated with the alternative state. If the disintegration experience seems difficult and painful, this will increase support for the EU. By contrast, if the disintegration experience seems positive, the public is likely to find the status quo less desirable, and support for the EU decreases.

Finally, this new information and its impact on public opinion are likely to change *party strategies* on the issue of EU integration. This because parties are sensitive and responsive to changes in public opinion (Page 1994). This is true both of mainstream parties, who as 'catch all' parties have to be responsive to public opinion on a wide range of issues (Mair 2013; Katz and Mair, 1995; Kirchheimer 1966) but also of challenger parties as who as 'issue owners' on the issue of European integration (see de Wardt 2014; Green-Pedersen 2007) will be particularly sensitive to how public opinion evolves on the issue of the EU. In particular, increased public support for the EU is likely to be problematic for challenger parties, who usually benefit electorally from mobilising widespread discontent towards the EU.

Beyond simply responding to these shifts in opinion, parties are also likely to rethink their strategies after disintegration episodes as the departing state's experience of disintegration provides parties in the rest of Europe with a form of *transnational learning*. As this learning tends to be particularly strong among ideologically similar governments (e.g.,

Grossback et al. 2004), Eurosceptic challengers in one country are likely to be particularly receptive to information generated by the experience of disintegration elsewhere, particularly as this is a policy they have historically called for themselves (Gilardi 2010; van Kessel et al. 2020). Additionally, given the well documented feedback loop between party cues and public opinion (see Hooghe and Marks 2005), these mechanisms are likely to have a compounding effect: as parties and the public and both update their priors about the desirability of EU membership, and in turn respond to one another’s views/cues, the changes in both public opinion and party strategies on the issue of European integration is likely to be substantial.

In sum, disintegration episodes provide new information to parties and voters on the desirability of the status quo and affect parties’ calculus when deciding to emphasise or deemphasise their positions on Europe. In the following section, I consider how the case of Brexit, the most high profile disintegration episode to date, affected the strategies of challenger and mainstream parties in other member states.

3 The Case of Brexit

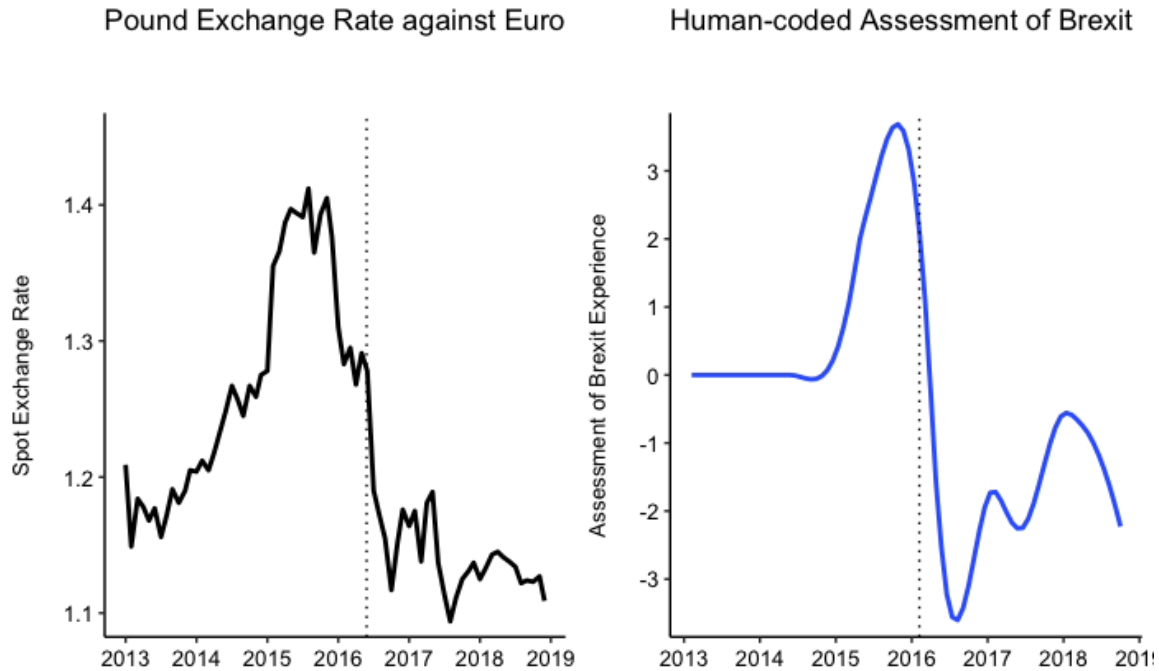
3.1 The UK’s Negative Brexit Experience

Brexit is undoubtedly the most substantial and high profile form of European disintegration to date. The British decision to leave the EU following a referendum shocked the political establishment in London, Brussels and beyond and reverberated in the public spheres of other member states (De Vries 2017). The immediate Brexit experience for the UK was undoubtedly negative, and perceived as such by citizens in other member states (see Hobolt et al. 2021; Malet and Walter 2020). Although some of the more pessimistic predictions were not realised, the pound fell sharply as uncertainty among investors about Britain’s economic future started to grow. Politically, the situation was also difficult. The UK’s Prime Minister David Cameron resigned and the referendum result unmasked deep divisions between different regions and amongst the constituent components of the UK, as well as within the two major political forces in Westminster. Finally, Brexit has also put into peril the territorial sovereignty of the United Kingdom, by raising the Irish border question and reinvigorating the Scottish independence movement (Walter and Martini 2020).

Figure 5.1 summarises the Brexit experience using two measures. The first is an objective measure based on the daily spot exchange rate of the British Pound against the Euro. The second is a subjective measure, a human-coded assessment of Brexit events from Walter and Martini (2020)⁴. These measures are highly correlated and show how in the aftermath

⁴This measure codes individual events in the Brexit negotiations over time by assigning values on a

Figure 1: The UK's negative Brexit experience post referendum



of the referendum vote in 2016 both markets and informed observers concluded that the Brexit experience had been painful and difficult for the UK.

Unsurprisingly, the difficulties experienced by the UK in the aftermath of the Brexit vote significantly increased support for the EU in the remaining 27 member states (De Vries 2018). As the economic and political uncertainty of withdrawal was made clear, publics in other member states updated their priors about the desirability of the status quo of EU membership and the alternative state outside of the EU. Opinion polls conducted after the British referendum showed that public opinion had become more favourable to EU membership in all EU member states including the UK (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016; Pew Research Center 2017). Other survey data (European Parliament 2018; Eurobarometer 2018; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2018) show in the same way that support for EU membership increased significantly after the Brexit referendum.

De Vries (2018) concludes that the UK's Brexit experience to date has set a negative precedent for exiting the EU (see also Hobolt et al 2021; Walter and Martini 2020). Whilst

seven point scales from -3 for very negative to +3 for very positive events. Positive events are defined as developments that – from a perspective of the UK government – align with or are helpful for achieving stated sovereignty-related policy goals (e.g., EU reform under Cameron, Brexit under May and Johnson). Negative events are developments that hinder or contradict such goals.

it is important to note that this may not last indefinitely⁵, it is clear that the immediate effects of Brexit were significant, largely negative, and destabilised the UK. I argue that this led to considerable changes to the usual strategies employed by challenger and mainstream parties in other member states.

3.2 Challenger Party Strategies After Brexit

The UK's negative Brexit experience places Eurosceptic challenger parties in a difficult position when competing on Europe. Whilst these parties usually benefit from mobilising the issue and calling for a renegotiation in membership terms (see Taggart 1998; Hobolt and De Vries 2020), Brexit shows the difficulties inherent in such a policy. Furthermore, as the public update their priors about the desirability of the alternative state outside of the EU, their opinion towards integration becomes more supportive. Mobilizing discontent towards the EU becomes difficult for challengers, as the in their usual position - a renegotiation of terms and/or a referendum - becomes untenable. Mobilising discontent towards the EU is also significantly less effective when there are simply less discontented voters.

Existing accounts corroborate the view that challenger parties moderated their Euro-scepticisms after Brexit. Whilst these are usually based on individual case studies, they do confirm the view that the electoral calculus of individual challenger parties was affected. After her failure at the 2017 presidential election, le Rassemblement National's leader Marine Le Pen no longer defended the project of leaving the EU and the Eurozone, and refocused her criticisms about the EU on the issue of immigration (Perrineau 2017). Similarly, Alternative für Deutschland, created in 2013 as a response to the Eurozone crisis, abandoned the project that Germany should leave the Eurozone and return to the Deutsche Mark (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017; Paterson 2018).

My first hypothesis is that challenger parties reverse their usual EU strategy of issue entrepreneurship after the referendum. Emphasising the issue is undesirable as Brexit highlights the potential risks of their hard Eurosceptic positions. Instead, I argue that challenger parties will largely seek to avoid Brexit in their communication. To be clear, I am not saying that these challenger parties will suddenly become pro-European. Instead, they are likely to abandon 'hard' calls for exiting the EU, and focus instead on 'softer' forms of criticism, such as demanding reforms or slowing down the process of integration. My first hypotheses about the effect of Brexit on party competition in other member states therefore read as follows:

⁵Institutions like the IMF and the Bank of England have already upgrade their outlook on Britain's economic future.

H1: Challenger parties reverse their EU strategy from one of entrepreneurship to one of avoidance after the Brexit referendum.

To be more precise, I argue that this reversal takes the following form:

H1a: Challenger parties moderate their Euroscepticism after the referendum.

H1b: The salience of Brexit relative to mainstream parties decreases after the referendum.

3.3 Mainstream Party Strategies After Brexit

By contrast, the UK's negative Brexit experience strengthens mainstream pro-European parties' hand when competing on Europe. These parties traditionally aim to avoid competing on the issue, as EU integration is a wedge issue that can divide their voters. Furthermore, EU integration is considered an issue 'owned' by challengers and mainstream parties usually suffer when competing on these (Meguid 2005). However, the large shift in public opinion makes emphasising their pro-Europeanism advantageous: it allows them to demonstrate congruence with an electorate which is suddenly made aware of the benefits of EU membership and the costs of the alternative state.

Brexit also gives mainstream parties an opportunity to go on the offensive and attack Eurosceptic challengers. As an illustration of the costs of a policy challengers have long campaigned for, it allows mainstream parties to make a wider point about the risks these parties pose to stable, competent government. Indeed, Eurosceptic challengers such as le Rassemblement National, the Swedish Democrats, the Danish People's Party and the Dutch Party for Freedom had all called for following the UK and holding their own referendum when David Cameron first announced the UK government's plans at his Bloomberg Speech (Chopin and Lequesne 2020). As these parties also build their electoral appeal through an anti-establishment rhetoric that 'tells it like it is' and 'has firm convictions', Brexit provides an opportunity to criticise challenger parties if and when they moderate their stance.

Finally, Brexit also provides opportunities for more federalist pro-EU parties to push for further integration. The UK's obstructionism for integration in the field of security and defence and fiscal capacity in Europe is well documented (see for example Buller 1995; Daly, 2019). Their departure therefore emboldens federalists to put these issues on the agenda once more. My second hypotheses about the effect of Brexit on party competition on the EU issue in other member states therefore read as follows:

H2: Mainstream parties reverse their EU strategy from one of avoidance to one of

entrepreneurship after the Brexit referendum.

To be more precise, I argue that this reversal takes the following form:

H2a: Mainstream parties increase their pro-Europeanism after the referendum

H2b: The salience of Brexit relative to challenger parties increases after the referendum

4 Research Design

4.1 Original Data

To test the hypothesis about the reversal of party strategies after salient disintegration episodes, I draw on an original dataset of Brexit statements in national parliaments. As mentioned in the previous section, Brexit is the most high profile, substantial disintegration episode to date, one that reverberated in public spheres across the EU. It is therefore a highly pertinent case to test the impact of disintegration episodes in other member states. The dataset covers parliaments in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, and Denmark. Each of these parliaments included both mainstream pro-EU and Eurosceptic challenger parties during the investigation period.

To identify Brexit statements I draw on the EUParlspeech dataset which captures EU references in national legislatures (see Chapter 3). I identify Brexit statements through a series of search strings from Walter and Martini (2020) and classify EU as Brexit statements if they include any of these strings. These strings include mentions of ‘Brexit’ or the presence of strings like the ‘UK’, ‘leave’ and ‘EU’ within five tokens of one another. The Appendix contains the full list of search strings used to identify Brexit statements. I apply this methodology to EU references made between 23 January 2013, when David Cameron first announced in his Bloomberg speech the intention to renegotiate the UK’s membership terms and put these to voters in a referendum; and the 31st December 2018, which is the latest date in EUParlspeech dataset. I drop any Brexit statement made by non-Eurosceptic challenger parties, as these parties historically do not mobilize on the EU issue as their position is similar to that of mainstream parties⁶. Altogether the dataset contains a total of 2,223 Brexit statements by pro-European mainstream parties (1,637 Brexit statements) and Eurosceptic challenger parties (586 Brexit statements). I validate this methodology with human hand coders, who were given a sample of 200 statements to code. This sample included 80 randomly selected statements that the automated method classified as Brexit

⁶I identify parties’ EU position with the Capel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). I consider a party Eurosceptic if they receive less than 3.5 on the ‘EU position’ variable (see Rauh et al 2018). The Appendix also contains a list of the parties classified as mainstream and those classified as Eurosceptic challengers

statements, and 120 randomly selected EU references that the automated method did not classify as Brexit statements. Handcoders are asked to code whether the statement made reference to the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. The results demonstrates high levels of accuracy (0.98), precision (0.938) and recall (1.000) (see Benoit 2014)⁷, confirming that my automated, search string based classifier can identify Brexit statements with high levels of accuracy.

4.2 Hand coding Brexit Statements

To classify these Brexit statements, I then use human hand coding, which is considered the ‘gold standard’ of content analysis and is particularly desirable for nuanced coding categories (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). Hand coders are asked to code Brexit statements into two classification categories which together give a sense of the positions mainstream and challenger parties are taking on Brexit and on European integration more widely. The first category is the speaker’s *Brexit Strategy*, which captures the overall strategy pursued by the speaker in light of the disintegration episode. The coding categories are developed in an inductive manner, following methods emphasising rigour in thematic analysis (Fereday et al 2006). Altogether, 15 different Brexit strategies are identified. The second category is speaker’s *EU tone*, which captures the tone towards the EU specifically. This tone can be negative, neutral, or positive.

Table 5.1 outlines the codes for the Brexit Strategy category⁸. For the purpose of testing the article’s hypotheses, the explicitly pro-European and Eurosceptic Brexit strategies in the first and third columns are of particular interest. As we are interested in a moderation of Euroscepticism (for challenger parties) and increase in pro-Europeanism (for mainstream parties), I highlight the Brexit strategies that fall explicitly into these categories. Note that to test H1, Eurosceptic Brexit strategies include harder or ‘exit’ forms of scepticism such as *following the UK* (code 1). They also include ‘softer’ forms of Euroscepticism (Taggart 2006) such as *slowing integration* (code 2), *criticising the EU* (code 3), *emphasising harm to the EU* (code 4) and *accommodating the UK in negotiations* (code 5) . I expect challenger parties to move from harder forms of Euroscepticism (code 1) to softer forms of Euroscepticism (codes 2, 3, 4, 5) after the Brexit referendum.

To test Hypothesis H2, the third column in Table 5.1 highlights the Brexit strategies that are explicitly pro-European. I expect these to increase amongst mainstream parties after the Brexit referendum. Finally, with regards to EU tone I expect challenger parties to use less

⁷Accuracy is the ratio of correctly predicted observation to the total observations. Precision is the number of true positives over the true positives plus the false positives. Recall is the number of true positives over the true positives and the false negatives.

⁸Note that the table excludes the ‘Other’ category (code 15).

Table 1: Codes for *Brexit Strategy* category

Eurosceptic Strategies	Non-positional Strategies	Pro-EU strategies
Strategies that are supportive of the UK's disintegration bid and critical of the EU.	Strategies that avoid position taking on Brexit.	Strategies that are critical of the UK's disintegration bid and/or defensive of the EU.
1. Follow UK: Follow UK with unilateral renegotiations and/or referendum	6. Orderly Brexit: Prioritise a non disruptive UK withdrawal	10. Harms UK Emphasise Brexit's harm to the UK.
2. Slow Integration: Demand reform in way that slows down integration (e.g. shrink budget)	7. UK Remain: Express desire for UK to remain (e.g. no cherrypicking)	11. Defend EU: Defend EU achievements and unity of member states.
3. Criticise EU: Use Brexit as example of distant ineffective EU	8. Brexit Regret: Express sadness at the UK leaving	12. Criticise Populists: Use Brexit as illustration of dangers of populism.
4. Harms EU: Emphasize Brexit's harm to the EU	9. New Beginning: Use Brexit as a new beginning Different from code 2 and 13 as no explicit call for more or less integration.	13. Further Integration: Use Brexit as opportunity to further integration.
5. Accommodation: Accommodate the UK's disintegration bid		14. Non-Accommodation: Refuse to make concessions to the UK (e.g. no cherrypicking)

Table 2: Challenger Parties - Handcoded Brexit Statements

Speaker	Brexit Statement	Brexit Strategy	EU Tone
H.Linde Left Party Sweden	It is still our conviction that it would have benefited our country if Sweden had voted no in that referendum and not joined the EU. But as long as we are members of the EU, we work constructively in the Riksdag and the European Parliament to develop the EU in a more democratic direction. We therefore believe that Sweden should follow the example of the UK and initiate a process to renegotiate our EU membership.	Follow the UK	Negative
D.H. Bisschop SGP Netherlands	Brexit is also a direct result of too far-reaching integration, too far-reaching claims and too far-reaching European arrogance. This lack of awareness is the greatest threat to the survival of the EU itself.	Criticise the EU	Negative
P.Boehringer AfD Germany	Regarding Brexit: we call on the government to finally stop the constant increase in EU contributions. The EU is seriously planning to increase German contributions from 30 to 31 billion euros in 2018 to 45 billion euros per year in the seven year plan.	Slow Integration	Negative
J.Nissinen SD Sweden	On the other hand, Minister of Finance Magdalena Andersson emphasised yesterday that it is important that we oppose protectionism. The United Kingdom has as I said in my speech, presented an action plan to leave the EU in a reciprocal manner. Then my question to the Social Democrats is this: is the government prepared to accommodate Britain in order not to create protectionism and not to harm European trade?	Accommodation	Neutral

Table 3: Mainstream Parties - Handcoded Brexit Statements

Speaker	Brexit Statement	Brexit Strategy	EU Tone
D.Schlegel SPD Germany	Much of it has already been mentioned: Brexit, the aftermath of the financial crisis, the high number of refugees and the rise of nationalists and right wing populitsts. Nevertheless: Europe is a success story and the European project is alive Young people between Vienna, Warsaw, Budapest, Lisbon, and also London appreciate peace and freedom.	Defend EU	Positive
Van H. Buma CDA Netherlands	But the world around us has changed. And Mr Wilders is now talking about becoming independent and that we have to leave the European Union. I wonder if he is aware of the fact that Britain has been working on that since 2016, and that has turned into one big drama.	Criticise Populists	Neutral
D.Verhoeven D66 Netherlands	It is fine that Cameron is proposing a reform of the European Union, but Europe should not let itself be blackmailed by Britons who want to get the most out of it. Membership of the EU is not a menu for us either. Of course it is better if Great Britain remains a member, but not at all costs.	Non Accomodation	Neutral
P. Niemi S Sweden	I also strongly believe that the EU's common foreign and security policy will become clearer, stronger, and more aggressive with Brexit and the accession of the Trump administration.	Further Integration	Neutral

negative tone, and mainstream parties to use more positive language when discussing the EU after the Brexit referendum. Tables 5.2 and 5.3 provide examples of these handcoded Brexit statements, with Table 5.2 showing Brexit statements by challenger parties and table 5.3 showing Brexit statements by mainstream parties. These examples highlight the quality of the automated translation.

4.3 Testing Hypotheses

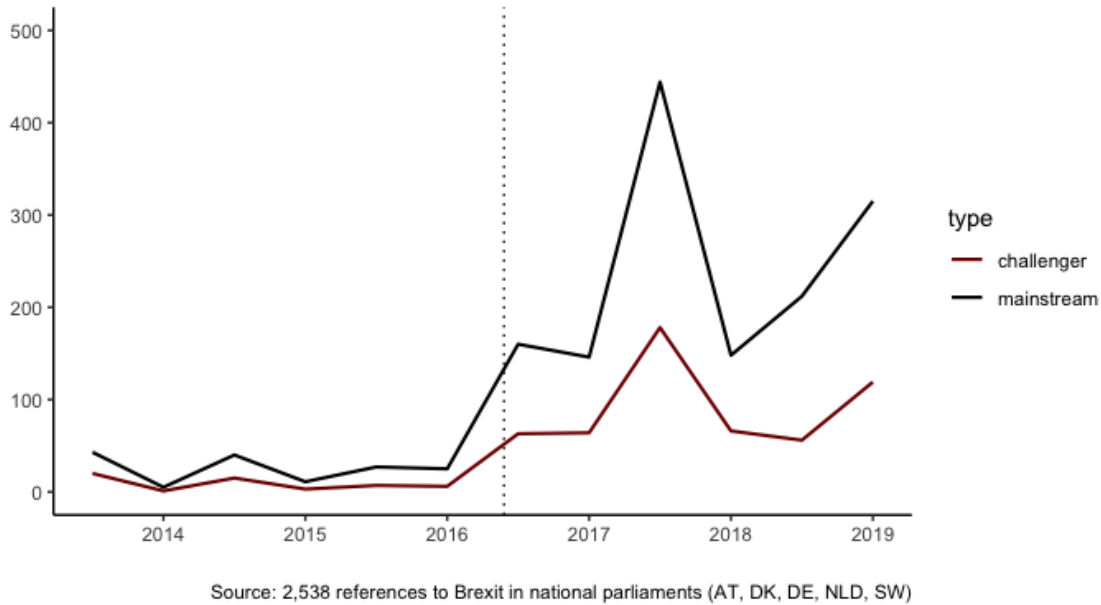
Given the nature of the data, where statements are nested within speakers, which are nested within parties, which are nested within countries, I use multilevel logistic regressions to test the hypotheses statistically. Individual Brexit statements are my unit of observation and a binary independent variable captures whether the statement is made before the referendum date of 23 June 2016 ('pre-referendum') or after that date ('post referendum'). As Figure 5.1 has already shown, the UK's Brexit experience was considered positive before the vote, as Cameron successfully renegotiated the UK's membership and with the UK remaining in the EU seeming the most likely outcome. However, it turned immediately negative after the vote, with the pound exchange rate against the Euro dropping steeply after the referendum and remaining low in subsequent years.

To test the hypotheses about the relative salience of Brexit amongst mainstream and challenger parties I capture and plot the number of Brexit statements made by each party per semester, as well as the number of MPs who make at least one reference to Brexit. I use semester rather than month or quarter, as parliaments are in recess during certain months, and the lack of statements during these months can significantly skew the plotting of longitudinal data. This allows me to create semester-panel data for each party with the number of Brexit statements and number of Brexit speakers as the variable of interest.

5 Analysis and Results

To analyse the salience dedicated to Brexit by mainstream and challenger parties, I first plot the number of Brexit statements made by both party types. Figure 5.2 shows how the salience of Brexit amongst both mainstream and challenger parties is relatively low in the years preceding the referendum, with little difference between party types. However, in the aftermath of the vote the salience of Brexit unsurprisingly increases amongst both groups, but particularly amongst mainstream parties. To test the hypothesis statistically, I run an OLS model with FEs for countries and parties on two measures of Brexit salience: the number of Brexit statements and the number of speakers who make at least one reference to Brexit (Table 5.4). The results shows clearly how, unsurprisingly, parties speak more

Figure 2: Number of Brexit Statements in National Parliaments



of Brexit after the referendum. What is more interesting are the effect sizes, which show how the increase in salience is more substantial amongst mainstream parties than amongst challengers. On average, and all else being equal, mainstream parties make an additional 42 statements per semester after the vote, compared to just 16 additional statements for challengers. Similarly, an extra 11 speakers make a Brexit statement per semester after the vote for mainstream parties, compared to an additional 4 speakers for challengers.

To demonstrate the differences in Brexit strategies before and after the referendum, I plot in Figure 5.3 the share of statements that fall into the different categories for challenger parties⁹. The legend colours reflect the Eurosceptic (purple) and pro-EU (blue) strategies mentioned in the previous section. Figure 5.3 shows how challenger parties adopt less explicitly Eurosceptic Brexit strategies after the referendum. Most noticeable is the large drop in the share of statements in which Eurosceptic parties call for following the UK, either by leaving the EU or a holding a membership referendum of their own. Whilst 45 per cent of Brexit statements before the referendum results called for following the UK, only 4 per cent of Brexit statements after the referendum result did the same.

⁹Note that for these histograms I drop the ‘Other’ coding category (code 16) which largely refers to procedural descriptions of the negotiations.

Table 5.4: OLS Regression Results - Mainstream and Challenger Parties

	<i>Mainstream</i>		<i>Challenger</i>	
	Brexit Statements	Brexit Speakers	Brexit Statements	Brexit Speakers
Post Referendum	41.714*** (6.128)	11.354*** (1.402)	16.034*** (2.711)	4.046*** (0.538)
Constant	45.417*** (7.642)	13.040*** (1.749)	14.853*** (3.381)	4.693*** (0.671)
Observations	60	60	60	60
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Instead, the focus of challenger parties after the referendum is to emphasise softer Eurosceptic Brexit strategies such as slowing integration (28 per cent of statements), criticising the EU (26 per cent) and pushing for accommodation of the UK in negotiations (22 per cent). This transition from demanding a referendum to focusing on reform and accommodation is perhaps best illustrated by Kristian Thulesen Dahl, leader of the Danish People’s Party who in the run up to the referendum made multiple statements asking to follow the UK (see statements 27, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35 and 97 in the dataset of Brexit statements). After the vote however, he makes not a single reference to following the UK and focuses instead on ensuring the UK is not ‘punished’ for its decision, stating for example in a speech to the Folketing in December 2016 that “the Danish People’s Party has not proposed a Danish withdrawal from the EU. Instead, the Danish People’s Party has proposed that it will work actively to ensure that the United Kingdom, which has decided to withdraw from the EU, gets a sensible agreement.”

Figure 5.4 plots the same histogram for mainstream parties. It shows that whilst the level of soft Eurosceptic positions remains similar before and after the referendum, mainstream parties significantly increase the share of their statements which can be characterised as pro-EU. The proportion of statements defending the EU and achievements of European integration doubles from 8 to 16 per cent, and whilst very few call for further integration before the referendum (2 per cent of statements), this increases significantly after the referendum (8 per cent of statements).

Mainstream parties are particularly likely to use the referendum to attack populists both

Figure 3: Challenger Parties - Handcoded Categories

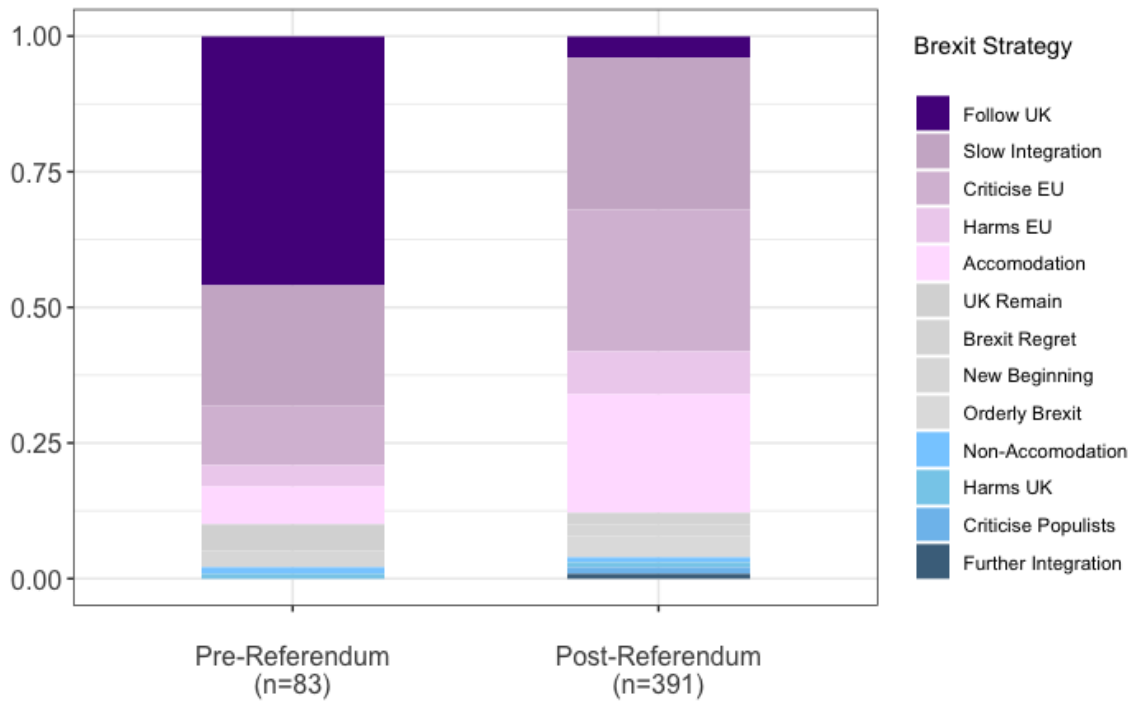
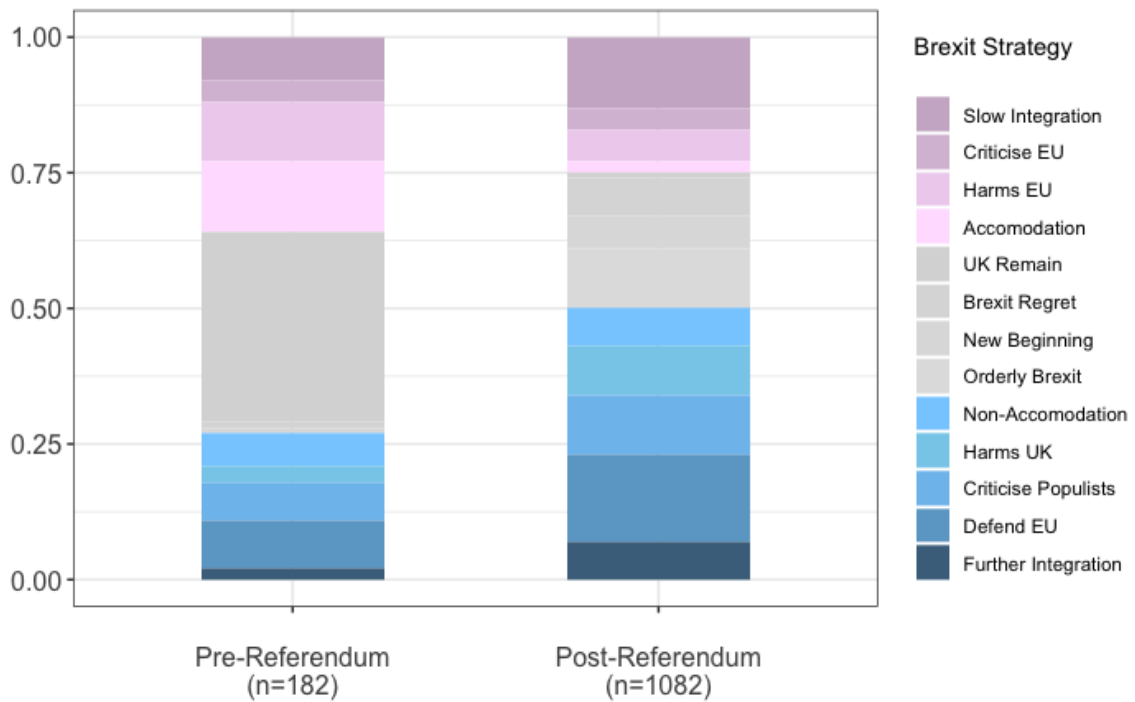


Figure 4: Mainstream Parties - Handcoded Categories



at home and abroad. They are quick to criticise populists in the UK, whose “lies and smear campaign have taken hold in the motherland of political debates, where judges are labeled enemies of the people” (C.Muttonen, SPÖ, April 2017). They also use Brexit as a way to attack populists in their own member state and ask them to clarify their position on the EU. Emil Kallstrom from the Swedish Centre Party, for example criticised Ulla Anderson from the Eurosceptic Left Party for her obfuscating stance on EU membership stating that “the Left Party at least know not too speak loudly about the fact that they want to leave the EU” (June 2018). More generally, mainstream parties use the UK’s negative Brexit experience to make a wider point about the lies and incompetence of Eurosceptics in their own country, as evidenced by Matthias Strolz, leader of the Austrian Liberal Party NEOS: “When we voted in Austria in the nineties to be part of the EU, the right-wing nationalist forces in Austria said that we shouldn’t do so because we would all have scale insects in our yogurt and blood in our chocolate! Now I ask you: which of you has eaten blood chocolate in the past few years and who has scale insects in their yogurt? Nobody!” (July 2016).

Multilevel logistic regression results in tables 5.5 (challenger) and 5.6 (mainstream) confirm the hypothesis that Eurosceptic and mainstream parties respectively moderate their Euroscepticism and increase their pro-Europeanism after the referendum. Challenger parties are significantly less likely to call for leaving the EU after the referendum and instead are more likely to criticise its functioning. They are also significantly less likely to use a negative tone about the EU after the referendum. Mainstream parties are significantly more likely to call for further integration, to defend the EU, and to criticise populists after the vote. Finally, the results show how mainstream and challenger parties call for completely different negotiation strategies with respect to the the UK. Mainstream parties are significantly more likely to call for non-accommodation, whereas challenger parties are significantly more likely to call for accommodation, which is likely to minimise economic harm to the UK and thus make exit from the EU seem more desirable in the long term (Walter and Martini 2020).

Altogether these results corroborate the article’s central hypothesis. The exogenous shock of Brexit significantly impacted on the strategies employed by mainstream and challenger parties on the EU issue. Challenger parties significantly moderated their Euroscepticism and stopped demanding to follow the UK with a referendum of their own (their dominant Brexit strategy before the referendum). Mainstream parties significantly increased their use of pro-EU strategies such as defending the EU and demanding further integration, and went on the offensive, criticising Eurosceptic populists at home and abroad. In the following discussion I contemplate the generalisability of the results and whether the trends observed are likely to be a temporary or permanent fixture of party competition on European integration.

Table 4: Challenger Parties - Mixed Effect Logistic Regression Results

	<i>Brexit Strategy</i>				<i>EU Tone</i>
	Follow UK	Slow Integration	Criticise EU	Accommodation in Negotiations	Negative Tone
Post Referendum	-3.477*** (0.578)	0.084 (0.335)	1.160*** (0.440)	1.750*** (0.497)	-0.703** (0.273)
Constant	-4.833*** (1.734)	-1.611*** (0.343)	-2.557*** (0.447)	-4.442*** (0.661)	0.217 (0.318)
Observations	586	586	586	586	586
Country RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Speaker RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5: Mainstream Parties - Mixed Effect Logistic Regression Results

	<i>Brexit Strategy</i>				<i>EU Tone</i>
	Further Integration	Defend EU	Criticise Populists	Non-Accommodation in Negotiations	Positive Tone
Post Referendum	1.771** (0.781)	1.108*** (0.364)	0.854** (0.433)	0.853*** (0.001)	-0.043 (0.287)
Constant	-5.810*** (0.911)	-3.535*** (0.440)	-5.182*** (0.993)	-5.021*** (0.001)	-2.558*** (0.316)
Observations	1,637	1,637	1,637	1,637	1,637
Country RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Speaker RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

6 A Permanent Reversal?

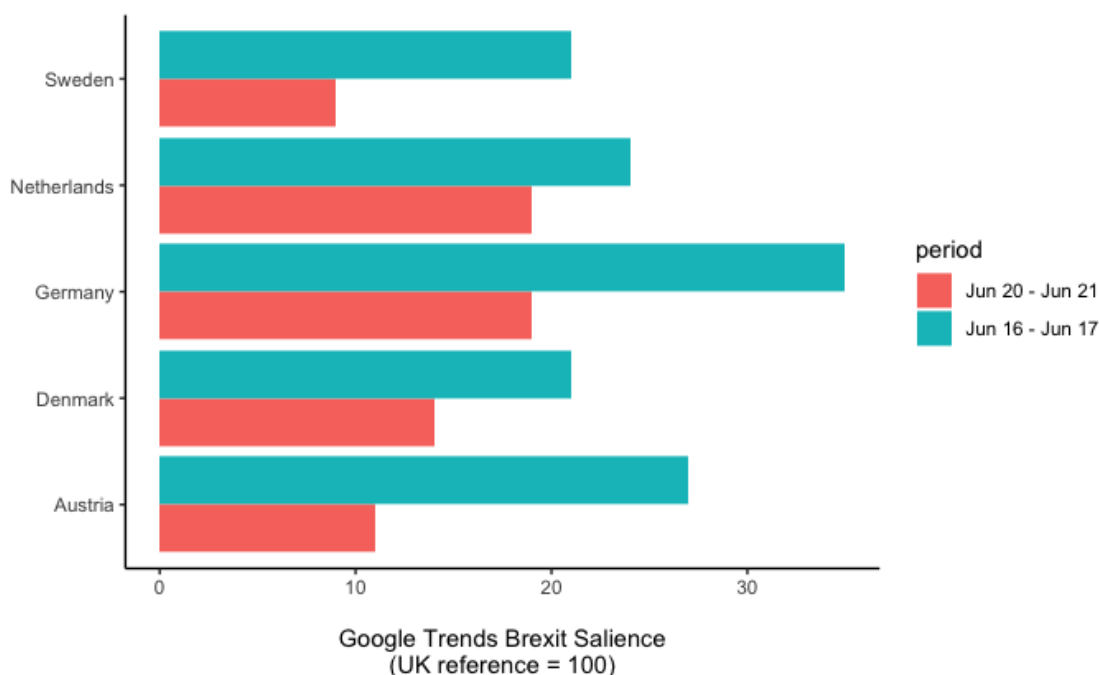
The results above provide evidence that Brexit led to a reversal in EU party strategies amongst mainstream and challenger parties in the years immediately following the referendum. Mainstream parties reversed their strategy from one of avoidance to one of entrepreneurship, and challenger parties reversed their usual strategy of entrepreneurship to one of avoidance and obfuscation. Yet given the evolving nature of Brexit it is worth considering whether the changes described are temporary or a more permanent reversal of party strategy. In this discussion section, I argue that it is more likely to be the former for two reasons.

First, the permanent reversal of party strategies depends on Brexit remaining salient in public spheres outside of the UK. Scholars have shown that party and government responsiveness to public opinion is largely conditional on the issue being salient (see Wlezien 1995, 2004; Franklin and Wlezien 1997) and without remaining salient, Brexit fails to provide new information to publics and parties on the desirability of the status quo. To explore the evolution of Brexit salience outside of the UK, I use Google Trends data. This data are particularly appealing to capture salience, as they aggregate daily billions of instances in which a particular term is searched on Google. Consequently, these searches can be considered good proxies for the public's interests and concerns (Pahontu 2020; Choi and Varian 2012). Google does not reveal absolute levels of searches, rather it normalises search data to facilitate comparisons between terms or regions. Figure 5.5 plots the Google Trends data for the search term 'brexit' relative to the UK, which is unsurprisingly the country with the highest number of searches (ref = 100). The figure shows results for the year immediately after the vote (June 2016 - June 2017) and the latest equivalent corresponding year (June 2020 - June 2021).

Figure 5.5 shows clearly how the salience of Brexit relative to the UK has dropped over time. For example whilst the number of 'brexit' Google searches in Germany was approximately a third of the number of 'brexit' searches in the UK for the period 2016-2017, that figure had dropped to less than a fifth for the period 2020-2021. This shows that whilst Brexit is likely to remain a pivotal issue for the UK for many years to come, it is already receding as a priority in other member states, as other issues such as climate change and the post-COVID economic recovery begin to dominate the EU agenda. As the disintegration episode becomes less salient, it is therefore less likely to alter the strategies employed by parties in other member states.

Second, I argue that a combination of the momentous economic hit of COVID-19, the 'slow puncture' nature of Brexit, and the bounded rationality of voters will make it harder for them to estimate the impact of Brexit on the UK, and therefore the desirability (or not)

Figure 5: Salience of Google searches for ‘Brexit’ relative to the UK



of their country’s alternative state outside of the EU. Indeed, whilst economists agree that Brexit has already caused the UK significant economic harm¹⁰, this effect has been dwarfed by the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, whose lost economic output escalates into trillions of dollars worldwide (McKibbin and Fernando 2020). COVID-19, which has affected all economies in the EU in similarly major ways, is likely to play an obfuscating stance when it comes to evaluating the UK’s Brexit experience over the long run. Indeed, academics have commented that disentangling the economic effects of Brexit from those of Covid-19 is ‘almost impossible’ and have suggested that Brexit will be a ‘slow puncture’ that harms the UK’s economy gradually over the long term rather than the ‘cliff edge’ Brexit many commentators had predicted (Menon 2021; Grey 2021).

These confounding effects are particularly important to consider when combined with the bounded rationality of voters (see Simon 1990). Bounded rationality asserts that decision makers want to make rational decisions, but cannot always do so because they suffer from a number of biases that make it difficult to identify causal relationships. A range of experiments have shown that people can make blatant errors when judging causal relations (Alloy and Abramson, 1979; Allan and Jenkins, 1983; Lagnado and Sloman, 2015; Msetfi

¹⁰For example, studies published in 2018 estimated that the economic costs of the Brexit vote were 2.1 per cent of GDP (CEPR 2018)

et al., 2007; Blanco et al., 2015). This is particularly the case when faced with multiple confounders or if the effect of the policy is felt over the long run rather than shortly after implementation. Whilst the short term effects of Brexit were clear, immediate, and negative; the longer term effects of Brexit are harder to discern, even when the evidence suggests they might be just as harmful. This is likely to re-embolden challenger parties, who can point to leaving the UK as something other than a complete disaster; and deter mainstream parties, who can less obviously point to Brexit as a clear source of harm for the UK.

The results presented in this article have shown how party strategies on the issue of EU integration are far from fixed and highly responsive to exogenous shocks. Nonetheless, on balance, I expect that the patterns described are likely to be temporary state of affairs and that a return to the more traditional patterns of EU party competition, where challengers mobilise the issue and mainstream parties aim to obfuscate their stance, is more likely in the medium term.

7 Conclusion

In the wake of the most significant EU disintegration episode to date, this article has considered whether Brexit led mainstream and challenger parties in other member states to change their strategies when competing on the EU issue. My central argument is that the UK's negative experience revealed new information about the desirability of EU membership, which made parties revise their calculus about the costs and benefits of mobilising the issue. This led parties to reverse their usual strategies: challenger parties reversed their usual strategy of entrepreneurship to one of avoidance, and mainstream parties reverse their usual strategy of avoidance to one of entrepreneurship. However, I also argued that this shift is likely to be temporary rather than permanent as Brexit declines in salience, and as the monumental economic impact of COVID-19 combined with the bounded rationality of voters obfuscates the negative economic impact of Brexit.

The article makes three contributions to the literature on party competition. First, it adds to the body of evidence showing how Brexit strengthened the legitimacy of the EU in the short term. Not only did it significantly public support for the EU (De Vries 2017) and increase the cohesiveness of EU27 governments (Chopin and Lequesne 2020), it also led mainstream pro-EU parties to clarify their stance on integration and go on the offensive against populists. Second, the article has shown that party strategies on the EU issue are not stable but dynamic and respond to events and circumstances outside of domestic public spheres. Third, it shows that the advantage of issue ownership can quickly be reversed when exogenous shocks lead to large changes in public opinion: in this case it suddenly

led challenger parties' strong Eurosceptic positions from being an electoral advantage to an electoral liability.

Future research could explore these contagion effects in greater detail. The experience of the British government in the aftermath of the referendum was shambolic and failed to live up to the promises of Brexiteers. Yet more recently, as the EU muddled its vaccination procurement, the UK delivered the fastest vaccination rates in Europe, a success that Brexiteers - somewhat disingenuously- put down to their new status outside of the EU. This situation is a fascinating case study to test benchmarking theories of elite cueing and public opinion formation towards European integration. As an illustration of the benefits of EU withdrawal, has it emboldened nationalist populists to (re)advocate withdrawal from the EU? How do pro-European elites balance criticism of the EU's response to COVID-19 with the need to deter national populists from reigniting Eurosceptic public opinion? More generally, the article invites scholars to consider how Brexit's status as a 'model' for EU withdrawal affects public opinion and party strategies on the EU in other member states.

Appendix A4

This Appendix provides supporting information for Chapter 5 (Disintegration and Party Competition: Evidence from Parliamentary Speeches on Brexit).

A4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table A4.1: Brexit Statements - Descriptive Statistics

Country	Mainstream Parties (MP)	MP Brexit Statements	Challenger Parties (CP)	CP Brexit Statements	Total Brexit Statements
Austria	NEOS, OVP, SPO	243	BZO, FPO, STRONACH	63	306
Denmark	KF, LA RV, S, V	228	DF, EL	157	385
Germany	CDU, FDP SPD	408	AfD, LINKE	88	496
Netherlands	CDA, CU, D66 DENK, PvdA, PvdD, VVD	360	50PLUS, FvD PVV, SGP, SP	171	531
Sweden	C, FP, KD, L, M	398	SD, V	107	505
Total	23 mainstream parties	1,637	14 challenger parties	586	2,223

A4.2 Codebook

Thank you for helping to code this dataset of statements on Brexit by parliamentarians in five European legislatures (AT, DE, DK, SW, NL). This codebook explains how to code these statements.

Please code directly into the EXCEL file. A ‘Brexit statement’ refers to a three sentence reference to Brexit within a speech. Occasionally, due to the way in which speeches were collected, you may encounter clear formatting errors, for example a sentence that suddenly cuts off halfway through a statement. In these rare cases please correct and re-format the statement by merging it with the relevant cell and mentioning this in column J (dedicated to notes). Generally speaking, please leave the statements in the format in which MPs have presented them. The EXCEL file contains nine columns. Your role is to code *Brexit Strategy* in column H and *EU tone* in column I after reading the full statement in column G.

A4.2.1 Coding Brexit Strategy (Column H)

In Column H, we would like you to code the statement’s *Brexit Strategy*, which captures the overall strategy pursued by the speaker in light of the disintegration episode. Altogether, 14 different Brexit strategies are identified. There are further details on each of these categories, with examples, later on in the codebook:

When coding statements, please take into account the following:

- When coding statements, please base your evaluation on what speakers are communicating at face value, rather than on any subtext based on your knowledge of the country.
- Classification categories are mutually exclusive. Occasionally, there will be statements that you feel contain more than one of the strategies identified below. In this case, use your personal judgement to decide what seems to be the dominant strategy presented in the statement.
- Generally, when defining codes, let your decisions be guided by parsimony and reliability. The rest of this section provides more detailed descriptions of the categories for classification, and examples of statements for each.

1) **Follow the UK:** Follow example of the UK by unilaterally negotiating membership terms with the EU and/or putting these terms to voters in a legally binding referendum.

e.g.: “But as long as we are members of the EU, we work constructively in the Riksdag and the European Parliament to develop the EU in a more democratic direction. We therefore believe that Sweden should follow the example of the United Kingdom and initiate a process to renegotiate our EU membership.” (H.Linde, Left Party, SE)

2) Slow Integration: Use Brexit to demand reform within the EU in a way that slows down the process of integration, for example by shrinking the size of the EU budget.

e.g.: “The Finance Committee is today delivering harsh EU criticism of the Commission regarding EU finances. Sweden has for a long time criticized the EU budget for being outdated. In the light of Brexit, this would be an excellent opportunity to reform the EU budget.” (H.Svenneling, Left Party, SE)

3) Criticise EU: Use Brexit as an illustration of the consequences of an ineffective, distant EU. This differs from the previous coding category by not explicitly calling for any EU reforms in the wake of Brexit. Also includes criticism of the EU not explicitly linked to Brexit.

e.g.: “There is no credible response to the widely felt Euroscepticism here. I do hear another call for more Europe, while a member state is leaving the EU for the first time in some 60 years. Brexit is partly a direct result of too far-reaching integration, too far-reaching claims and too far-reaching European arrogance.” (De heer Bisschop, SGP, NL)

4) Emphasise harm to the EU: Emphasise the fact that the UK’s exit of the EU will/has caused harm to the EU and/or more harm to the EU and/or the speaker’s member state than to the UK. Also includes mentions that the damage to the UK was overstated / any mentions of ‘Project Fear.

e.g.: “The worst that could happen to the EU has become reality: Brexit. The second economic force of the European Union, the EU’s first military force, has decided with a majority of 52 per cent to leave the EU. This has led the EU to the edge of the abyss and that will not improve in the future.” - (De heer Beertema, PVV, NLD)

5) Accommodation in negotiations: Accommodate the UK’s disintegration-bid. This includes, but is not limited to, granting the exceptions demanded and ensuring the UK isn’t ‘punished’ for its vote. Includes both accommodation of David Cameron’s demands pre-referendum and accommodation of the UK’s demands post-referendum

e.g.: “Now people in Brussels, Paris and Berlin are afraid that the example could set a precedent, that other states in Europe will regain their sovereignty. That is also the reason

why the EU Commission is planning to arbitrarily restrict British access to the internal market during the transition phase if necessary; You have to imagine this. By supporting these plans for the exclusion of Germany's most important foreign trade partner in the EU - you all support these exclusion plans - you are making free trade and competition within Europe hostage to a failed EU ideology - a foolish mistake, a mistake with grave consequences European cohesion; for the historical good economic relations between Great Britain and the rest of the continent must be preserved; otherwise Europe will fall behind in the global economy.” (Alice Weidel, AfD, DE)

6) Non-accommodation in negotiations: Refuse to make concessions or grant exceptions to the UK. This includes, but is not limited to, tying the benefits of cooperation to the existing agreement and references to no ‘cherry picking’ of membership terms. Includes both non-accommodation of David Cameron’s demands pre-referendum and non-accommodation of the UK’s demands post-referendum

e.g: “The primary goal, dear colleagues, for the Brexit negotiations is to preserve the unity of the European Union. Germany has a special responsibility for European integration and has benefited from it in its own way: historically, politically, economically. For Great Britain there must be no cherry-picking in the negotiations.” (Norbert Spinrath, SPD, DE)

7) Orderly Brexit: Prioritise a non-disruptive UK withdrawal, for example one that avoids a ‘no deal’ Brexit and maintains links with the UK in key policy areas. No clear mention of accommodation or non-accommodation

e.g: “In any case, we have the greatest interest in ensuring that the relationship between the European Union and Great Britain remains as close as possible in the future. Not only in terms of economic policy - Great Britain is a large and important market, but vice versa, the European Union is also a large and important market for Great Britain - but also in terms of security policy, the British are of course very, very important, especially when it comes to neighborhood policy.” (G. Blumel, OVP, AT)

8) UK remain: Express desire for the UK to remain a member state both in the run up to the vote, and in its aftermath.

e.g: “Again, I would like to say: we want Britain to remain part of the European Union. It is in our interest that Britain is part of the European Union. We have many, many different views in common and a strong and unbreakable friendship with Britain.” (H. Thorning-Schmidt, S, DK)

9) Brexit regret: Express sadness and regret at the UK leaving the European Union.

Includes descriptions of Brexit as a ‘lose-lose’ situation

e.g.: “We would probably all have wished for a nicer present for the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, a nicer present than March 29, the day Brexit was officially announced. We too, many of us, regretted it very much, and as a European I personally regret this decision very much, because it also takes away a piece of my identity - this is my feeling.” (C.Muttonen, SPO, AT)

10) New beginning: Use Brexit as a new beginning and/or a wakeup call for the EU. Differentiates itself from categories 2 (Slow Integration) and 13 (Further Integration) in that it does not explicitly say whether this new beginning means a smaller or larger role for the EU and its institutions.

e.g.: “There are discussions about both Brexit and other countries where people become more skeptical of the EU. I think it’s like this because people think that the EU may be doing something wrong. That is why I think it will be even more important that we sharpen the EU and do it much better.” (C.Barenfeld, M, SW)

11) Emphasise harm to the UK: Emphasise the fact that the UK’s exit of the EU will cause harm to the UK and/or more harm to the UK than to the EU

e.g.: “No matter how wrong Britain’s exit from the EU is, no matter how much it will, I believe, in the end do more harm to the United Kingdom than to us.” (S.Gabriel, SPD, DE)

12) Defend EU/ EU unity: Defend achievements of European integration and emphasise the unity and coherence of remaining member states.

e.g.: “If you had asked me at the beginning of the year how things would go with the EU in 2017, I would not have been so sure of the answer. But then came Trump, Erdogan and Putin, and it was discovered that the idea of a common Europe might not be so bad after all.” (C.Korber, CDU, DE)

13) Criticise Populists: Use Brexit as an illustration of the dangers and false promises of populists. This includes both populists in the UK (e.g. lies in the referendum campaign) and populists in the speaker’s member state.

e.g.: “But the world around us has changed. And Mr Wilders is now talking about becoming independent and that we have to leave the European Union. I wonder if he is aware of the fact that Britain has been working on that since 2016, and that has turned into

one big drama” (Van H.Burma, CDA, NL)

14) Further Integration: Use Brexit as an opportunity to further European integration. Includes, but is not limited to, increases in the EU budget, or further integration in the area of security and defence.

e.g: “Asymmetrical shocks - which are currently being talked about again and again with a view to Brexit - are a danger that we really shouldn’t underestimate, especially in politically uncertain times. From our point of view, the euro zone should therefore be given its own fiscal capacity - if possible integrated in the EU budget - in order to be able to effectively cushion risks. In my opinion, a European digital tax could serve as a single source of funding.” (Johannes Schrap, SPD, DE)

15) Other: Statements that do not correspond to any of the thirteen Brexit strategies above. For example, simple descriptions of the negotiation points to go through in upcoming/previous summits.

e.g: “Mr President, first of all I would like to approve the committee’s proposal and rejection of all reservations. Mr President, the four freedoms of the European Union have been put under scrutiny by the United Kingdom’s Brexit decision. We all know that they include the free movement of goods, services, people and capital.” (P.Niemi, S, SE)

A4.2.2 Coding EU Tone (Column I)

In Column I, we would like you to code the statement according to its *EU tone*: the tone the speaker adopts with respect to the EU, its institutions, and/or European integration more widely.

1) Positive EU Tone: Speaker adopts a warm/positive tone when referencing the EU, its institutions, and/or European integration more widely.

e.g: “With the decision on Brexit, I am firmly convinced that Great Britain has taken the wrong path. If you had asked me at the beginning of the year how things would go with the EU in 2017, I would not have been so sure of the answer. But then came Trump, Erdogan and Putin, and it was discovered that the idea of a common Europe might not be so bad after all.” (C.Korber, CDU, DE)

2) Neutral EU Tone: Speaker adopts a neutral tone when referencing the EU, its institutions, and/or European integration more widely.

e.g: “Mr President, first of all I would like to approve the committee’s proposal and rejection of all reservations. Mr President, the four freedoms of the European Union have been put under scrutiny by the United Kingdom’s Brexit decision. We all know that they include the free movement of goods, services, people and capital.” (P.Niemi, S, SE)

3) Negative EU Tone: Speaker adopts a cold/negative tone when referencing the EU, its institutions, and/or European integration more widely.

e.g: “There is no credible response to the widely felt Euroscepticism here. I do hear another call for more Europe, while a member state is leaving the EU for the first time in some 60 years. Brexit is partly a direct result of too far-reaching integration, too far-reaching claims and too far-reaching European arrogance. ” (De heer Bisschop, SGP, NL)

A4.2.3 Notes (Column J)

Column J is reserved for notes. Feel free to use this column for anything you would like to bring to the attention of the researcher, for example if you are hesitating between two coding categories.

A4.3 Identifying Brexit Statements

To identify Brexit statements I draw on the EUParlspeech dataset which captures EU references in national legislatures (Hunter 2021). I identify Brexit statements through a series of search strings from Walter and Martini (2020) and classify EU as Brexit statements if they include any of these strings:

Identifying Brexit statements from EUParlspeech: Text-Corpus Search terms

```
(Brexit OR (UK OR United Kingdom OR Britain) w/5 (EU OR European Union)
w/5 (withdraw* OR leav* OR ((remain* OR continu*) w/5 member*)) OR (UK
OR United Kingdom OR Britain) w/5 ((referendum OR renegotiat*) w/5 mem-
ber* w/5 (EU OR European Union)) OR (UK OR United Kingdom OR Britain)
w/5 (relations OR relationship w/1 (with OR to)) w/5 (EU OR European Union
OR Europe) )
```

I validate this methodology with human hand coders, who were given a sample of 200 statements to code. This sample included 80 randomly selected statements that the automated method classified as Brexit statements, and 120 randomly selected EU references that the automated method did not classify as Brexit statements. Handcoders are asked to code whether the statement made reference to the UK's withdrawal from the EU. The results demonstrates high levels of accuracy (0.98), precision (0.938) and recall (1.000) (see Benoit 2014), confirming that my automated, search string based classifier can identify Brexit statements with high levels of accuracy. The dataset with full hand coding used to validate the automated method of identifying Brexit statements available upon request

A4.4 Interrater Reliability Tests

Interrater reliability tests were conducted over two rounds, with two handcoders coding the same random sample of 220 Brexit statements. This represents approximately 10 per cent of the total sample of 2,223 statements. The codebook was tweaked after each round following discussion with the hand coders. The table below presents the results of Krippendorf's alpha and Cohen's kappa. These results correspond to 'substantial' agreement amongst coders (Landis and Koch 1977).

<i>Number of statements</i>	<i>Krippendorf's α for Brexit Strategy</i>	<i>Krippendorf's α for EU tone</i>	<i>Cohen's k for Brexit Strategy</i>	<i>Cohen's k for EU tone</i>
220	0.75	0.82	0.71	0.77

A4.5 Robustness Tests - Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

Table A4.3: Mainstream Parties - Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

	<i>Brexit Strategy</i>				<i>EU Tone</i>
	Further Integration	Defend EU	Criticise Populists	Non-Accommodation in Negotiations	Positive Tone
Post Referendum	1.370* (0.751)	0.885** (0.378)	0.833** (0.415)	0.462 (0.512)	0.016 (0.254)
Constant	-4.098 (7.256)	-1.595 (8.043)	-1.216 (4.352)	-4.346 (17.185)	-2.454*** (0.290)
Observations	1,637	1,637	1,637	1,637	1,637
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A4.4: Challenger Parties - Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

	<i>Brexit Strategy</i>				<i>EU Tone</i>
	Follow UK	Slow Integration	Criticise EU	Accommodation in Negotiations	Negative Tone
Post Referendum	-1.880*** (0.435)	0.228 (0.388)	0.898* (0.461)	1.249** (0.530)	-0.617** (0.244)
Constant	-6.060*** (0.398)	0.124 (0.351)	-0.534 (0.409)	-9.225*** (0.495)	0.231 (0.225)
Observations	586	586	586	586	586
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01