Analysing Long-Term Trends and Changes in the Party System at UK General Elections

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Abstract

The United Kingdom's (UK) party system, at Westminster elections, had undergone substantial change between 1945 and the most recent election in 2019. This thesis proposes a detailed mapping out of this evolution, utilising volatility in the Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENPP) at General Elections to indicate moments when changes took place. Doing so, the thesis rejects notions of linear, gradual changes within British politics. Instead, it finds that party system change in the UK can take place relatively rapidly and at-pace.. To demonstrate the contrasts between elections where the ENPP fluctuated greatly from the preceding election and those where it remained relatively static, six case studies are featured where these three of the most volatile data-points (2005, February 1974, 1997) and three of the least volatile data-points (2015, 1951, October 1974) are studied in-depth and contextualised to help us better understand key trends and changes in the national party system. The case-studies highlight three recurring variables which are discussed throughout the thesis: the pace of party system change, electoral and parliamentary disproportionality, and political realignments/dealignments between parties and voters, all three affecting volatility in the party system at Westminster to differing degrees.

Chapters

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Thesis & Numerical Criterions

Introduction

The primary objective of this thesis is to research and propose key findings from a detailed study of volatility in party system change within the United Kingdom's (UK) party system at the national level (e.g., At Westminster Elections) from 1945, until the most-recent available data point in 2019. This will be achieved through a number of stages; first, I recap and review selected key works on party systems and the importance of political parties to political studies, raising some of the keynote themes and research questions the thesis explores; second, I will set out my methodological approach to the thesis, employing a mixed-methods approach which incorporates case-studies of significant data-points in UK election history to offer a comparative lens to the evolving/volatile picture; and finally, reach a conclusive chapter which will offer my summary thoughts and academic contribution to the established literature, whilst offering further lines of inquiry for future consideration. My research focus is not necessarily concerned with analysing individual vote and seat transfers between parties at the constituency level, but instead examines the distribution of votes and seats at the national level, utilising the measurable variable of volatility to understand the scale and pace of change within the party system. This chapter is unique in being divided into four parts, as this introductory chapter sets out the overall picture of the thesis, reviews established literature, and discusses the methodological approach employed in the research with reference to some key elections (previewing the case-studies).

The decision to analyse volatility and changes in the party system at General Elections (GEs) was drawn from the acknowledgement that the UK's party arena is host to complementary, and at times contradictory, tenets: these being the unique fluidity of the party system, operating within the constraints of a rigid electoral system. Any party system is "a particular pattern of competitive and cooperative interactions displayed by a given set of political parties" (Bale & Webb, 2021, 1), and are an integral keystone of any democracy were it to function. Keeping with much of the existing literature, the decision to analyse the UK exclusively at the national level whilst the UK hosts multiple electoral and party arenas is because of just that: the UK does have multiple political arenas at more than just the Westminster level, such as regional, local, and until Brexit – supranational, political spaces in which political parties compete. To include all of these would be too great and expansive for

a thesis of this nature; but a task nonetheless which I am confident merits just as much attention in further studies. To suggest that the UK, despite all these overlaps in political jurisdictions and complex party settlements in all four corners of the union, is a 'two-party system' is a crude simplification of a very multi-faceted entity. And yet, *two-party* is precisely the label applied to the UK's party system among text-books, news websites and indeed in mundane topical discussion (McKibbin, 2019; Oaten and Kerr, 2019). However, this is perhaps a consequence of the types of numerical criterions individuals employ when classifying any party system which leads them to such oversimplification. For example, if one sought to classify the UK's party system by the number of major parties in terms of parliamentary representation since 1945, we can understand how such a criterion may lead one to think of it as two-party. Vice-versa, however, if one were to classify the UK's party system by measuring each party's share of the national vote in General Elections since 1945 to determine the number of relevant parties, the picture would become increasingly nuanced due to several electoral factors which are not so clear in parliamentary representation, due to the rigid and distortive nature of the UK's voting system: the Single-Member Plurality (SMP) mode of voting. The disparity between votes cast and seats won (per party) is one such reason a criterion of legislative representation alone is not illustrative of the party system, for the plurality of votes cast is not translated into a visible representation. The thesis avoids conflating electoral results with seat outcomes, and the disparity between them is highlighted where discussions take place about the disproportionality bias which results from First-Past-The-Post (FPTP). An example of this is the vote-seat disproportionality of the UKIP vote in the 2015 GE, where despite a 12% share of the vote at that election, the party only secured one parliamentary seat. Likewise, an analysis of votes cast per party is not satisfactory on its own if parties must meet certain criteria to be considered important. It is these inherent tensions already identified this thesis explores further, and will set out how this can be accomplished in later sections. This does not mean, however, that the research will therefore be of limited scope by narrowing the analysis to the national arena. Rather, by only including General Elections (GEs) as proxies for key turning-points, or critical junctures, I am committing myself to fleshing these implications out to a greater degree than I could if I were to consider all electoral events/results over the 1945-present day time period. This also begs the question of how do we identify such instances of critical turning points? Explanations and rationale for my selected GEs will be forthcoming further into this introductory chapter.

So, to introduce and review some of the most acclaimed works on political parties and party systems, I choose to first discuss the two 'purist' models of democracy and their importance to this study: *Majoritarian* and *Consensus* (Lijphart, 1984) models – ideal types to demonstrate the dichotomy amongst democratic states. The former holds a 'winner takes all' principle which tends to concentrate governmental power in the hands of one party alone, and a *fusion of powers* dynamic between executive and the legislature. A so-called *Tyranny of the Majority* ensues (Mill, 1859) because of the SMP voting system such as FPTP, with a scepticism or outright objection to the use of direct democracy. Per contra, *Consensus* democracies are typically the antithesis to majoritarianism; government office is shared between parties in coalitions which are the product of proportionally representative voting systems; decentralised political arenas at regional/federal levels to compensate for the *separation of powers* which prevents one party dominating the legislature, along with codified protection for minorities and an enthusiasm for direct democracy in their political spheres (Lijphart, 1984). Whilst these are a gross simplification of their respective features, it is worth noting there is not one example where either has existed anywhere in the democratised world in their purest form (Webb and Bale, 2000), instead we see democracies such as the UK which incorporate features from both ideal types put forth by Lijphart. To show, the UK has for all bar five of the seventy-four years covered in this study been governed by single-party government, rotationally elected on a SMP basis, since 1945; yet has decentralised political arenas such as the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh and Northern Irish assemblies which are elected using proportional systems of voting which themselves manifested from successive referendums (a form of direct democracy).

Accepting there will be a degree of fluidity and contradictions between competing criterions for the UK's party system, the thesis explores how opposing poles of criterion can recourse together to supply a depth of analysis only possible by accepting overlaps. As such, the numerical indicators both scholars and non-academics choose to use as detailed in the following paragraphs, and the inherent tensions between such indicators can be compensated for by utilising the strongest elements of each and meet somewhere in the middle; providing a mean account of measurable change in the UK's party system at the national level since 1945.

One of the earliest contributions to this field of study was Duverger's (1954) *Political Parties*; famous and relevant for its central hypothesis that "the simple majority single-ballot system favors the two-party system." (Duverger, 1954, 217). This proposition has become known to be something akin to, if not in and of itself, a *law* in the social sciences (Groffman

et al., 2009b; Gaines and Taagepera, 2013). Elevated to this status by Duverger himself; “Of all the hypotheses ... in this book, this approaches most nearly perhaps to a true sociological law" (Duverger 1963, p. 217), he essentially generalised those electoral systems such as FPTP support and perpetuate a strong two-party system, whereas his related proposal, not known as a *law*, suggests that "the simple-majority system with second ballot and proportional representation favors multi-partism*”* (Duverger 1963, p. 239). This can be linked to traditional understandings of the UK’s party system, where post-war two-partism consisting of the Conservatives and Labour was underpinned by one primary social cleavage: class. To aid this argument, we can see a clear contrast between the UK’s Westminster party system and the party systems of some mainland European democracies (such as Germany/Italy), where coalitions are commonplace and a greater plurality of parties compete and win representation at both the legislative and executive level.

It was Duverger’s belief that Western-like party systems align to one of two patterns; the two-party and multi-party; underpinned by the inference that party pluralism can be marked with a dichotomous model founded on paired alternatives (Duverger, North and North, 1954; Sartori, 1966). These alternatives being left-right, movement-status quo, majority-opposition etc. In doing so, Duverger assumed a 'natural law' in party politics - dualism being natural. The two propositions by Duverger are differentiated among three electoral systems: plurality voting*;* run-off majority voting; and proportional representation. I acknowledge that these three voting systems stand for a fraction of the actual number of voting systems utilised around the world, but these were the commonplace-utilised systems for voting during the time Duverger was writing in democratic areas where data was ascertainable. Even though systems in practice may not strictly adhere to Duverger’s understanding, these classifications are a useful means to organise different systems nonetheless. It therefore follows that due to the accessibility of data, there was scope for Duverger to note observations of the relationship between the electoral systems and the volume of political parties. The focal arena of his observations and following hypothesis were Western-democratic party systems, and so it is important to note that in the context of Sartori’s writing that there were still non-democratic states in Europe during the post-war period (e.g., Spain). Nevertheless, his literature is especially useful for this thesis due to its analysis, propositions and status in the academic study of political parties and party systems, and the postulation that all over the world, one can find examples of a dualism of tendencies (1954).

Sartori later challenged Duverger's assumptions of dualistic tendencies. First taking issue with Duverger's limited 'two-party' - 'multi-party' distinction, Sartori posited that the West in fact had three types of party systems: simple *two-party pluralism, moderate pluralism*, and *extreme pluralism* (Sartori, 1966). In doing so, he stressed that the most significant distinction was between the second and third type of party system. "We usually misplace the essential border and that it is wrong to deal with multipartism as a single category" (Sartori, 1966, 137); suggesting a notable contrast between the "bipolar [trends] of moderate pluralism", and the "multipolar features of extreme pluralism" (1966, 137). Duverger's Law cannot explain for the case of *extreme pluralism*, for interpretations of a dualistic approach do not compute with examples Sartori drew from, such as the French Fourth Republic, the Weimar Republic and 1960s Italy.

Numerical Criterions

Today, most studies of party systems are more or less synonymous with Sartori's analysis (Kitschelt, 2011). In developing his *Framework for Analysis* (1975), a qualitative numerical criterion to distinguish between different party systems, Sartori (1975) offered two primary dimensions. Firstly, the *number of parties*, called 'fragmentation'. The higher the plurality of parties operating, the more fragmented the system (Sartori here takes number as well as size into account). Secondly, the *ideological distance* between parties, called 'polarisation'. The wider the ideological distance between parties, the more polarised the system.

He argued that parties be thought of as 'relevant' only if they hold either 'coalition potential', which is the potential of holding government office (or king-maker status of government formation) through what he calls *'blackmail'* potential (Sartori, 1966), which is the degree to which a party can competitively challenge an incumbent party. With this in mind, Sartori (1975) marked *Two-partism* to be characterised by little ideological distance on the left-right political spectrum, rotation of party in government, and centripetal competition. A system which is akin to two-partism, operating also in a centripetal manner with minimalist ideological polarisation is *Moderate Pluralism*, which involves three to five parties competing for a part of a governing coalition. The extreme end of pluralistic party systems is aptly titled *Extreme Pluralism* - multi-polarity being a keystone of such a system; characterised by high polarisation, and the presence of anti-system parties at both ends of the political spectrum. The centrifugal pressures, pulling outwards to the ideological extremes,

that such a configuration brings result in radical and bilateral opposition to the centre-placed operations of party politics.

Yet, a weakness of Sartori's criterion is how can we scholars, with conviction, believe parties '*relevant'* or have confidence in their ability to hold either '*blackmail' or 'coalition potential'*? These answers are not put forth in Sartori's book, but encourage us to consider alternative means of assessing party systems. A quantitative approach, which respects the framework and classifications of Sartori's *Parties and Party Systems,* offers a significant degree of aid: Laakso and Taagepera's *Effective Number of Parties* (ENP) formulae (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979).

The formulae put forward by Laakso and Taagepera (1979) measures the number of parties in the respective system and their relative strength. The ENP, as described by Laakso and Taagepera, "is the number of hypothetical *equal*-size parties that would have the same total effect on *fractionalisation* of the system as have the actual parties of *unequal* size" (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979). It can either be used to take account of the share of the popular vote achieved by a party to find its relative strength, or on the basis of seat share in a legislature. The former is known as the 'effective number of electoral parties' (ENEP), and the latter the 'effective number of parliamentary parties' (ENPP).

The ENP calculations are produced following the formula below:

$$N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} P_i^2}$$

Here, *N* represents the number of political parties with at least one vote or seat (depending upon which arena is being measured), with P_i^2 the squared number of each party's distribution of all votes or seats. Laakso and Taagepera postulate that these algebraic arithmatics require normalisation, so that percentages can be simplified. In doing so, 20 percent becomes 0.2, and 1 percent becomes 0.01 (1979).

Both electoral and parliamentary inputs have their uses and when measured can portray an understandable, intuitive and helpful datasheet to aid my research. In short, it is a conceptually simple solution to a methodologically complex problem, and is in my view the strongest quantitative tool to use in conjunction with the more qualitative aspects already discussed. By applying a mixed-method approach to this study, there will inevitably be a

blurring of categories; for example, the data-driven, mathematical tools of the ENP calculations are going to be used in contrast with the qualitative aspects of Sartori's numerical criterion, but they ultimately complement each other to give us a rich and nuanced understanding.

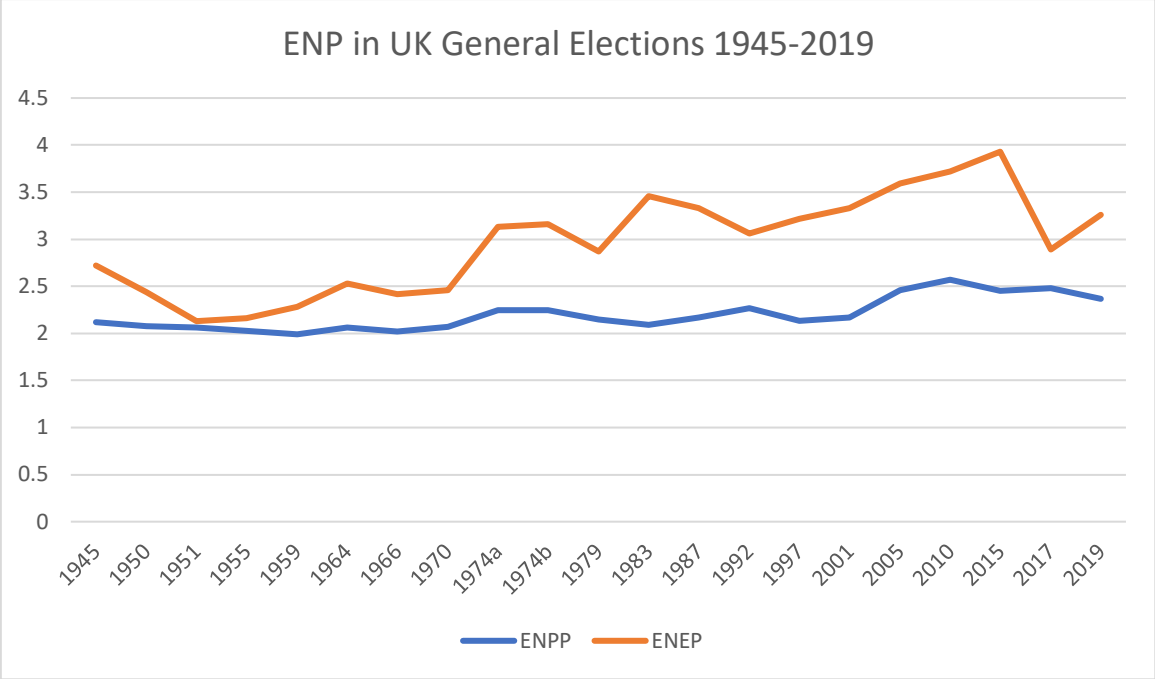
Table 1.1 displays UK General Election results since 1945, with turnout figures (%), votes (%) and seats won per party, and the ENPP/ENEP per General Election. The table represents an already-disaggregated dataset from *The Modern British Party System* (Webb and Bale, 2021, p.11) , with the 'Other' column aggregating all other parties (in addition to the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties individually listed), for presentative purposes (for listing all parties individually would be unmanageable). Figure 1.1 also displays a graphic which shows the long-term trends in the ENPP/ENEP over the same period.

Table 1.1: General Election Results 1945-2019 + ENPP/ENEP

GE		*Conservative*		*Labour*		*Liberal**		*Others*			
	Turnout %	**Vote (%)**	**Seats**	**Vote (%)**	**Seats**	**Vote (%)**	**Seats**	**Vote (%)**	**Seats**	**ENPP**	**ENEP**
1945	72.8	39.8	213	48.3	393	9.1	12	2.7	22	2.12	2.72
1950	83.9	43.5	299	46.1	315	9.1	9	1.3	2	2.08	2.44
1951	82.6	48	321	48.8	295	2.5	6	0.7	3	2.06	2.13
1955	76.8	49.7	345	46.4	277	2.7	6	1.1	2	2.03	2.16
1959	78.7	49.4	365	43.8	258	5.9	6	0.9	1	1.99	2.28
1964	77.1	43.4	304	44.1	317	11.2	9	1.3	0	2.06	2.53
1966	75.8	41.9	253	47.9	363	8.5	12	1.7	2	2.02	2.42
1970	72	46.4	330	43	287	7.5	6	3.1	7	2.07	2.46
1974 Feb	78.8	35.8	297	37.1	301	19.3	13	5.8	23	2.25	3.13
1974 Oct	72.8	37.8	277	39.2	319	18.3	11	6.7	26	2.25	3.16
1979	76	43.9	339	37	269	13.8	23	5.3	16	2.15	2.87
1983	72.7	42.4	397	27.6	209	25.4	13	4.6	21	2.09	3.46
1987	75.3	42.3	376	30.8	229	22.6	22	4.4	23	2.17	3.33
1992	77.7	41.9	336	34.4	271	17.8	20	5.8	24	2.27	3.06
1997	71.5	30.7	165	43.3	419	16.8	46	9.3	29	2.13	3.22
2001	59.5	31.7	166	40.7	413	18.3	52	9.3	28	2.17	3.33
2005	60.9	32.3	197	35.2	355	22	62	10.5	32	2.46	3.59
2010	65.1	36.1	307	29	258	23	57	11.9	28	2.57	3.72
2015	66.1	36.9	331	30.4	232	7.9	8	24.8	79	2.54	3.93
2017	68.8	42.3	317	40	262	7.4	12	10.3	59	2.48	2.89
2019	67.3	43.6	365	32.1	202	11.6	11	12.7	72	2.37	3.26

ENPP = Effective No. of Parliamentary Parties | ENEP = Effective No. of Electoral Parties *Refers to Liberal Party, Lib-SDP Alliance, and post-merge Liberal Democrats |Adapted from Webb, P. and Bale, T., 2021, p.11

Figure 1.1: ENP in UK General Elections 1945-2019



(Webb and Bale, 2021)

Noticeably, there appears to be a disparity between the ENPP/ENEP, which only becomes more pronounced post-1970, where the ENEP begins to increase quite substantially. Possible reasons for this which are discussed in the case-studies include the rise of smaller parties in regional blocs of the UK, such as Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish parties fighting for parliamentary representation which can garner a higher-concentrated degree of support due to strong regional appeal. The calculations depict an average ENPP from 1945-1970 of 2.05, which then rises to an average of 2.30 between February 1974 and 2019. Correspondingly, the ENEP average between 1945-1970 of 2.39 greatly increases to 3.30 during the period Feb 1974-2019. The reasoning for this sizeable difference between the ENPP and ENEP at UK General Elections concerns the UK's SMP voting system, which as Duverger argued, serves to distort the party system in favour a two-party duopoly.

The numbers offer some interesting outcomes; first, that according to the ENPP, the UK falls into a classic two-party classification; second, that according to the ENEP, the UK's party system is more nuanced than simple two-partism and instead displays tendencies akin to multi-partism. Electorally, the UK may indeed have a multi-party arena but this is not represented in the legislative arena. To compensate for these differences, I will analyse and

expand on the basic understandings of the pre-1970 two-party system. Blondel (1968) considers two conditions which must be met for a system to be two-party; first, a high proportion of votes between the two major parties; and second, a high degree of electoral balance between these two major parties. In the UK, analysis of pre-1970 GE data shows the mean joint-vote share between the Conservatives and Labour to be 90.3% over the 25-year period, and the mean difference between the two parties (% of national vote share achieved) was 3.9%. The extortionate joint-vote share, and relative exclusion of third-parties from breaking through, cements the UK pre-1970 as a classic two-party system, according to Blondel (1968). This will be evidenced in Chapter 6, with Chapters 2 and 7 discussing immediate post-1970 changes even further and highlighting the contrasting implications.

Likewise, Sartori also offers some conditions to be met which are especially connected to the executive and legislative spheres. One condition is that of 'centripetal' competition (briefly mentioned previously), insofar as that the major parties from both ideological dimensions of society's political axis converge on the centre-ground to win over the *median voter,* to maximise their electoral gains (Sartori, 1976). This usually means adopting agendas and policies deemed moderate, suggesting there is a high degree of shared ground between the parties, and hypothesises that parties which stray too far from the centre in any direction will ultimately meet their electoral downfall. This is reminiscent of two periods of time where parties have found themselves diverging from the centre-ground towards ideological polarisation, before being forced to eventually return to the centre-ground after long spells of opposition before resuming office from their rival; Blair's New Labour project returning Labour to government in 1997 after 18 years in Opposition, and Cameron's modernisation programme returning the Conservatives to government in 2010 after 13 years. The former is discussed in-depth in Chapter 4 as the case-study considers the political realigning of the Labour Party and its' voter base which was demonstrated in 1997, and all chapters discuss themes of party competition and the changing electorate over time.

Sartori's condition of the ability for a party to solely govern without the need for cross-party support at the executive and legislative level is another one which must be met for a party system to be classically two-party. Zero-sum games are therefore hallmarks of a two-party system for the two major parties competing for government due to the 'winner takes all' principle in Lipjhart's characterisation of a majoritarian democracy. Whilst there have been five instances of no single party having an overall majority in the House of Commons during

a parliamentary term since 1945 (Feb 1974-Oct 1974, Nov 1976-Mar 1979, Dec 1996-May 1997, May 2010- May 2015, and Jun 2017-Dec 2019), Webb and Bale note that the most common response to a hung parliament is for the largest party to attempt a stint as a minority government over a coalition (Webb and Bale, 2021). Yet, the viability of effectively governing as a minority party depends upon the size of one's parliamentary minority; for instance, after the February 1974 election, Labour were three seats short of a having a majority, enabling them to govern (albeit for a short time before the calling of the October 1974 GE) on their own. To contrast, the Conservatives were short of 20 seats to form a majority in 2010, therefore requiring the onset of coalition with the Liberal Democrats to form a government. To prevent government collapse, the Coalition passed the Fixed-Terms Parliament Act 2011, indicative of the precarious nature no-overall majorities for a single party can be. Before 1974, there had been no hung-parliament in the post-WWII era and a consistent reinforcement of majority governments resulted from GEs.

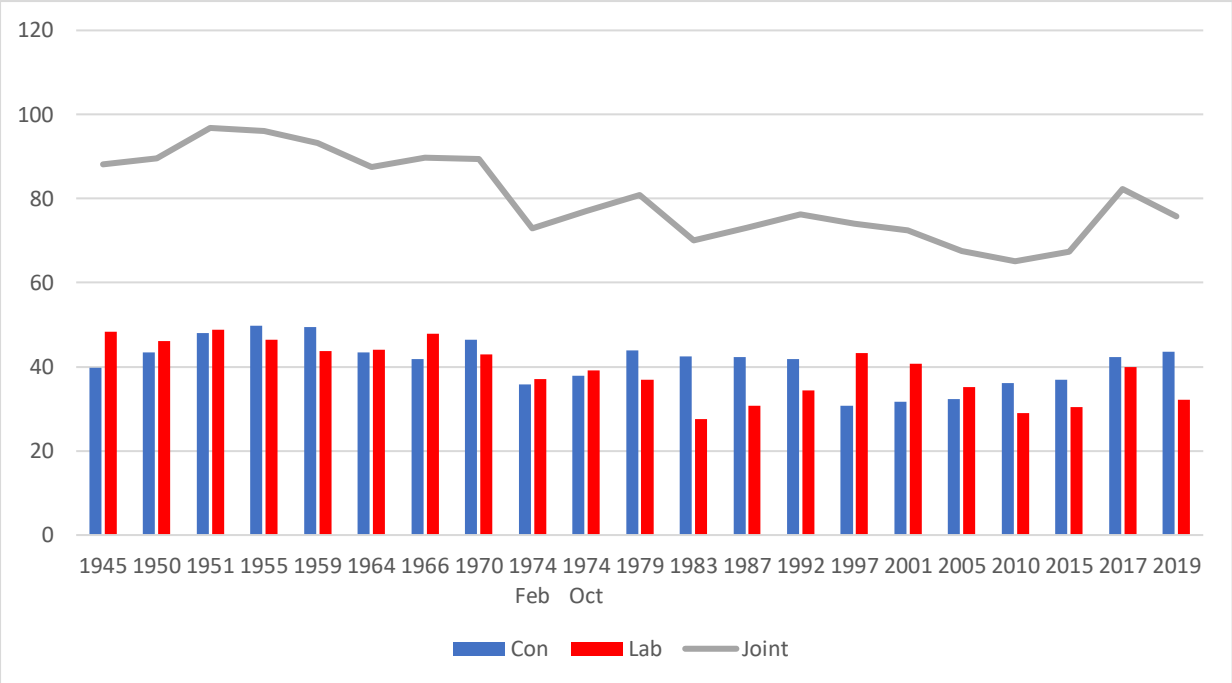
A healthy turnover and rotation of power between parties is the third condition of Sartori's. The majority principle can lead to the worrying exclusion of minorities for long periods of time, and such instances could potentially spell instability in the long-run for the legitimacy and trust of the political regime (Kiss, 2018; Laslier, 2002). The major opposition party should therefore be able to expect their own stint in executive office to be imminent. Here, it is especially important to differentiate between a genuine two-party system such as the UK and a one-party or one-party dominant system, such as the Liberal Party in Japan between 1945 and 1995. Power being shared *consecutively* and not *concurrently*, therefore, is not just observable in the UK's 1945-70 political arena, but also bridges the contradictions between the UK as *majoritarianist* whilst holding some characteristics of a *consensus* model of democracy.

The Post-1970 Party System

Post-1970, and exemplified in the 1974 February GE, the UK's party system underwent a period of significant change; the aforementioned February 1974 election proving to be the materialisation of a new party system order at General Elections which is more democratised, insofar as that other parties such as the Liberals and regional parties started to gain substantial electoral support. The central concern in the post-1970s party system, however, is that as multi-partism grew at the electoral level and the first post-war hung parliament materialised in 1974, the purist form of *majoritarianism* suggested by Lipjhart was being diluted in the

UK. The ENP, as shown in the dataset, began to rise post-1974, with the UK no longer being so clear-cut a two-party system at the electoral level, with the two-party status-quo at the parliamentary level becoming marginally more precarious in the later years of the period analysed. From the February 1974 election and in subsequent contests, the Ulster Unionist Party had also ceased to take up the Conservative whip, further contributing to the rise in the ENP figures. Returning to Blondel for a moment to remind ourselves of his conditional criteria, the UK could be labelled 'two-party' because of the comparatively greater vote-shares achieved by the two major parties relative to the other competing parties. Figure 1.2, a graphic which charts the Conservative and Labour vote shares (%) since 1945, shows that the two-party 90.3% mean vote-share between the Conservatives and Labour between 1945-1970 decreased to 73.4% in the period that followed to 2019; reaching the lowest level in 2010 of only 65% (though this is still very-close to two-thirds of all votes-cast that year).

Figure 1.2: Two-Party Vote Share (%) for the Conservative and Labour Parties, 1945-2019



The data also shows that we can analyse the deterioration of electoral balance between the Conservatives and Labour since 1970; as aforementioned, the mean difference in their level of electoral support was 3.4% during the 1945-70 period, but has since risen to 8.5%. Incorporating this quantitative data, it can be assumed that the UK's party system does no longer fall under the two-party criteria of Blondel. And yet, due to the distortive SMP voting

system, it still appears to fall under Sartori's criteria summarised above. Despite the relative decline of the major parties since 1970 and the breakthrough of third-parties in British politics at the electoral and parliamentary level, such as the Liberal Democrats' 2005 peak of 62 Westminster seats, the Scottish National Party's monopolising of 56 out of 59 Scottish seats in 2015, or UKIP's 12.6% galvanising of the national vote share the same year, the UK could still not be classed definitively 'multi-party'.

Key (1955) suggested watershed moments, such as these outlined above, come from so-called 'Critical Elections'. His theory characterises the sporadic, landmark election, "held during or in the immediate aftermath of some cataclysmic national event, in which turnout rises sharply and the distribution of party support in the electorate undergoes permanent alteration" (Crewe et al., 1977, 134; Key Jr, 1955, 198-210). In the UK, for example, Crewe, Sarlvik and Alt (1977) argue that the General Election of February 1974 is a turning point in the history of the UK's party system. Applying Critical Election Theory to the Feb 1974 General Election, the authors note that "[the] permanent alteration Key [Jr.] had in mind was a realignment of support *between* the major parties, whereas February 1974 in Britain was the occasion of a realignment of support from both major parties". They speculated that although they could not confirm the 'permanent alteration' Key listed as a key feature of what makes a 'Critical Election' due to writing only three years after the February 1974 GE, we can with hindsight identify it as a critical juncture in the history of UK elections: it was "contested in the wake of, if not a catastrophe such as war or economic depression, a conjuncture of inflation, short-time working, industrial unrest and constitutional stalemate which might be fairly described as a national crisis" (Crewe, Sarlvik and Alt, 1977, 134). There was indeed a substantial rise in turnout for the first time in 23 years, and there is further reason as to why this General Election proved so critical to the wider picture of the UK's party system. By February 1974, observers and analysists of electoral trends in the UK had recorded that the decline in support for the two main parties (The Conservative Party, and The Labour Party) was partnered with a seemingly decline in the traditional party-class tie (See Chapter 3).

Butler and Stokes (1971) attempted to explain the complex situation of the dramatic weakening in the class-party axis since the early 1960s, with a noticeable acceleration of this trend from 1966. To generalise their key explanations as to why class-politics suffered a withering decline, and why the mobilisation of hitherto politicised social groups into regular voting were less likely than their predecessors to "see much difference between the parties or to perceive politics in terms of class interests" (Crewe, Sarlvik and Alt, 1977, 134), two

notable post-war phenomena have been credited with facilitating this: *Affluence,* and *Convergence* (Butler and Stokes, 1971).

On the former, Butler and Stokes (1971) found from their studies of voting behaviour that the differences between the classes in terms of living standards had actually receded from the high level witnessed during the inter-war period. The lines therefore blurred between class distinctions and so did too the feelings of identity to any particular class or political party amongst voters. The new generation of voters could not be relied upon by political parties for they would struggle to remember 'hard times' and have less a stake in any one party (1971). This links to Inglehart's (1977) theories and notions of post-materialism, which essentially argued that once basic material needs have been met, political parties compete on other issues and factors which allows a volume of other issues and actors to take prominence; for example, the rise of environmental parties (such as the Green Party) came about concurrently with climate change increasingly appearing on the issue-agenda.

For the latter, the distinctions between parties became just as blurred as the distinctions between classes as both main parties sought to converge on the centre-ground of the political axis, with both the Conservative and Labour parties becoming less clear-cut and forthright on class appeal. Committing to a mixed-economy with a role for private-sector involvement, Labour had come to broadly agree with some fundamental ideas with the Conservative Party whilst representatives came from less working-class backgrounds (Denver, 2012). Vice versa, the Conservative Party, now appearing less aristocratic in image, came to reconcile the paired pillars of a Keynesian economic model of welfare and public spending to fund a managed post-war economy (Butler and Stokes, 1971; Crewe, Sarlvik and Alt, 1977). This post-war consensus which had dominated party ideology and competition was seen to break down in the 1970s, with Callaghan's speech to Labour's conference in 1976 a key juncture, as was the election of Thatcher's Conservatives in 1979. The social cleavages which were argued to have decided previous election results were being redrawn, if not becoming increasingly irrelevant altogether as argued by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). Labour's willingness to accept the economic paradigm engendered by Thatcher under Blair also cemented that the challenge to the post-war consensus was quickly accepted the norm, also emphasising how the median-voter had moved on to accept the post-1979 realities.

Critiquing Butler and Stokes' analysis, Crewe later argued that in their attempt to explain the changes in the party system, the authors make too narrow a focus on an assumption of

"electoral change which is singularly restrictive and [...] has been noticeably absent in post-war Britain compared with other Western democracies" (Crewe, 1974, 47). Crewe suggests that Butler and Stokes' also fail due to the model they use to conduct their study; the Michigan Model (Campbell et al., 1960), being unable to take account of three particular voter trends which are ignored in their work. These three kinds of electoral change are (a) a consistent fall in the joint-vote share enjoyed by major parties amongst the electorate since 1945; (b) increased volatility of support between the Conservatives and Labour; and (c) a stable decline in voter turnout (Crewe, 1974).

The Michigan Model is, however, a key tool in the history of scholarly examination of our party system. Most Famous for its utilisation in *The American Voter* (1960) by Campbell, the model combined both the social influences on party choice and the effects of socialisation in producing a psychological attachment to a party among voters: a party identification (Denver et al., 2012, 54). The model is also known for demonstrating that British voters show that they have sweepingly generalised images of political parties, and without necessarily even having witnessed evidence of policy content. The socialisation of voters into the political processes of the UK is credited with being a critical factor in determining which way voters vote. Or, at least, this was the case until the aforementioned breakdown of class and party alignment which will be sketched out in detail throughout the case-studies. Notions of socialisation therefore lead to the use of sociologically-charged discourse entering the study of political parties and party systems.

To complicate matters, the concurrent breakdown of the traditional social cleavage (class) and the onset of greater multi-partism means the UK also experienced a much more pluralistic issue agenda after 1979. This has led to a proliferation of parties which stand candidates at GEs, e.g., the Green Party championing environmentalism; the SNP pushing for Scotland’s withdrawal from the United Kingdom. There is also the religious element of political party competition in Northern Ireland which is exclusive to that region in General Elections, with main UK parties not typically contesting seats in Northern Ireland. These are contributories to the increase in the ENEP we can observe in the dataset. In effect, the growing pluralism in British politics can be seen as a further weakening of the UK as a majoritarian democracy; the country becoming one of the sorts which no socio-economic dividing lines play a role at all and a culturally plural society set the scene for the bringing of a consensus model to Britain.

Rather, whilst class/background have indeed taken a backseat since the 1970s, social cleavages and social identification have merely been redrawn, and are now products of ethnicity, geography, generation, education, employment sectors, gender, sexual orientation etc. (Fieldhouse et al., 2019). Attitudal cohesion within political parties is therefore threatened by the competing priorities and various demands from differing sections of society. The case studies explore some of these complexities and problems created for political parties, and how parties themselves have adapted their behaviours in the evolution of the party system at the electoral and parliamentary level, with the aim of retaining relevance and power. Sartori's numerical criterion of 'relevance' and 'coalition/blackmail potential' are reprised during these discussions; for instance, it can be argued that due to the SNP's capitalising on popular sentiments after the 2014 independence referendum in Scotland ahead of the 2015 GE, they gained considerable coalition-potential and were therefore credible options for power-sharing in executive office.

However, the SMP voting system has only allowed the fragmentation of the issue agenda to fragment the party system so much. Lipjhart noted the link between a greater amount of issue dimensions and an increase in the ENP per system (Lipjhart, 1984, 148), yet the artificial suppression of the ENEP due to FPTP means smaller parties have a huge challenge in gaining representation at the parliamentary level; a variable which is recurrent through all of the case-studies but holds particular status during the elections discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 5.

Selecting the Case-Studies

This next section will outline the case-study approach which allows the thesis to illustrate an in-depth appreciation of the General Elections in the real-world context, beyond just the quantitative measurements employed. I have elected to use case-studies of selected General Elections to explain, describe and explore party system volatility in UK Westminster elections. The *explain*, *describe*, and *explore* functions of case studies were provided by Yin (2009), who suggested that these can assist us in understanding causal links and directions resulting from certain developments. Offering contextualised analysis, the case-studies offer explanations of what was happening at these critical juncture points, beyond what the quantitative data was showing alone. For instance, the 2015 General Election sees relatively little difference in the ENPP (the key variable underpinning the selection of case-studies). However, the case-study for 2015 (Chapter Five) contextualises this data-point and finds that the static ENPP from 2010 was principally the result of the FPTP voting system replacing

one large third-party (the Liberal Democrats) with another (the SNP), despite a great disproportionality relative to the ENEP. The thesis looks at the UK's party system over a prolonged period (1945-2019), and to best encapsulate and map out the evolution of the party system over this period, selected General Elections can offer critical juncture points which can then be analysed and evaluated. By offering contextualised analysis within the case studies, I can compare the data points with an even more prudent understanding of the changing tides; highlighting recurrent variables that appear (such as SMP voting system distorting parliamentary representation; non-linear change; political de/re-alignments) and draw even greater correlations between the real-world events, and what the quantitative research shows as a result.

Consequentially, observational evidence is an important part of the research, rather than experimental evidence. By employing a mixed-method approach there is be a recoursing of categories; for example, the data-driven, mathematical tools of the ENP calculations are going to be used in conjunction with the qualitative aspects of the wider literature. The reasoning for using case-studies is that statistical evidence lacks explanatory power (Crasnow, 2012) for my particular field of research. The argument is that the concept of process tracing, meaning "tracing the process by which various initial conditions are translated into outcomes" (George and McKeown, 1985, 35), enriches most studies of political science (Mahoney, 2010; Crasnow, 2012). By adopting an approach of process-tracing through my case-studies, I have explored the chain of events (i.e., General Elections) throughout the 1945-2019 period of the UK's party system by which initial case conditions (e.g., pre-election contexts) are then translated into observable case outcomes (using the form of the ENPP). Van Evera (1997) notes that following a methodological route akin to mine will demonstrate the cause-effect linkage between independent variables and outcomes to be unwrapped and divided into small steps, allowing me to look for observable evidence in each step. This has allowed me opportunities to critically analyse the trends and changes to the UK's party system, and categorise it within the contrasting frameworks offered by established scholars.

Table 1.2 is a reworked list of General Elections from 1950 to 2019, and shows the volatility of elections vis-à-vis the ENPP from the previous election, in order from highest-volatility to lowest-volatility. 1950 is the first data-point on the list as the election of 1945 would require data from the previous election, which was held a decade before that and therefore predates

the time period I am interested in here. 1945 is also considered a watershed year in UK politics following many retirees from Parliament and the end of WWII. Volatility is “the net change within the electoral party system resulting from individual vote transfers" (Ascher and Tarrow, 1975, 80), and here such volatility represents the extent to which the ENPP fluctuated since 1950. To determine the scale of change between each election, I used the ENPP figures calculated by Webb and Bale (2021) and then ordered the differences from largest to smallest.

Table 1.2: Hi-Lo Volatility in the ENPP 1950-2019

		Con		Lab		Lib		Oth			
GE	Turnout %	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	ENPP	Volatility
2005	60.9	32.3	197	35.2	355	22	62	10.5	32	2.46	-0.29
Feb 1974	78.8	35.8	297	37.1	301	19.3	14	5.8	23	2.25	-0.18
1997	71.5	30.7	165	43.3	419	16.8	46	9.3	29	2.13	0.14
2019	67.3	43.6	365	32.1	202	11.6	11	12.7	72	2.37	0.11
2010	65.1	36.1	307	29	258	23	57	11.9	28	2.57	-0.11
1992	77.7	41.9	336	34.4	271	17.8	20	5.8	24	2.27	-0.1
1979	76	43.9	339	37	269	13.8	11	5.3	16	2.15	0.1
1987	75.3	42.3	376	30.8	229	22.6	22	4.4	23	2.17	-0.08
1964	77.1	43.4	304	44.1	317	11.2	9	1.3	0	2.06	-0.07
1983	72.7	42.4	397	27.6	209	25.4	23	4.6	21	2.09	0.06
2017	68.8	42.3	317	40	262	7.4	12	10.3	59	2.48	0.06
1970	72	46.4	330	43	287	7.5	6	3.1	7	2.07	-0.05
2001	59.5	31.7	166	40.7	413	18.3	52	9.3	28	2.17	-0.04
1966	75.8	41.9	253	47.9	363	8.5	12	1.7	2	2.02	0.04
1950	83.9	43.5	299	46.1	315	9.1	9	1.3	2	2.08	0.04
1959	78.7	49.4	365	43.8	258	5.9	6	0.9	1	1.99	0.04
1955	76.8	49.7	345	46.4	277	2.7	6	1.1	2	2.03	0.03
2015	66.1	36.9	331	30.4	232	7.9	8	24.8	79	2.54	0.03
1951	82.6	48	321	48.8	295	2.5	6	0.7	3	2.06	0.02
Oct 1974	72.8	37.8	277	39.2	319	18.3	13	6.7	26	2.25	0

ENPP figures sourced from Webb and Bale (2021)

It is “agreed amongst scholars that volatility in political party systems matters for democracy, and they use [calculations] as an indicator of a wide variety of phenomena" (Bertoa et al., 2017, 3). Here, measurements of volatility and movements in the ENPP per subsequent GE offer us representations of the state of the party system at a given time; for example, where there is little fluctuation in the ENPP from the previous GE, we can assume the party landscape (in terms of parliamentary seat-share) is stable, evidenced perhaps in the minimal movement in the ENPP between the 2010 and 2015 GEs. To simplify, volatility is used to measure the scale of the changes in the ENPP. The volatility encompasses both the increases and decreases in the ENPP, the result of squaring the change to overcome disparities between positive and negative values. However, although this measurement *could* suggest a stable party system, it masks a fundamental change in the makeup of parliament and further observations from the electoral arena; e.g., the replacement of the Liberal Democrats as the third-largest Westminster party by the SNP in 2015, despite the former holding a 3.2% lead over the latter in terms of national vote-share. Also, the 2015 figure of volatility was finalised once the calculations incorporated more decimal places, as in the table above its value was equal to that of 1955. The table also demonstrates substantial party system change occurring at rapid intervals, sometimes after close-proximity to a previous election. This is another reason why I believe in the need for case-studies; to analyse such instances in-depth beyond some headline figures which tell only a limited amount. The selection of the case-studies was determined by measurements of volatility. Six GEs were then picked from the dataset: the top three most-volatile, and the three least-volatile elections. The case-studies will not appear in chronological order, but instead be split across two overarching sections; Chapters 2-4 will cover the three most volatile GE’s (2005, Feb 1974, 1997); Chapters 5-7 examining the least-volatile (2015, 1951 and Oct 1974). This allows a level of consistency to run throughout the work, and enables a richer assessment in the concluding chapter which will then contrast the elections and state the key findings from this study of party system change.

Chapter Two: The General Election of 2005

The 2005 General Election (GE) was won by the Labour Party, securing a third-term in government but with a much-reduced majority from the 161 achieved in 2001, to 66. Table 2.1 shows the headline results from this election; Labour, at this time in to their eighth year in government and being led by an increasingly distrustful Prime Minister in Tony Blair (Geddes & Tonge; Evans & Anderson, 2005), won a total of 355 seats, to the Conservatives' 198. The Liberal Democrats enjoyed their best result in a GE far with 62 seats, gaining 10 from 2001, profiteering from popular protest against the Iraq War (Quinn, 2006). This landmark GE forms the first case-study of the overall six, and the first of the three which contextualise and critically analyse the three most-volatile elections vis-a-vis the ENPP. 2005 demonstrated the highest volatility; a positive change of 0.29 to 2.46 from 2.17 in 2001. This chapter will focus on how and why this came to be, exploring the continued rise of the Liberal Democrats as a third-party to their best showing at a Westminster election in 2005, and the relative decline of Labour as the governing party. It also discusses the thematic interplay between voter-perceptions of politics at the time and the disproportionality of the election results, underpinned by the ideological alignments between the top-three parties following 1997.

Table 2.1 2005 General Election Results

Party	*Stood*	*Elected*	*Gained**	*Lost**	*Net*	*Seats (%)*	*Votes*	*Votes (%)*	*Net (%)**
Con	630	198	36	3	33	30.7	8,784,915	32.4	0.7
Lab	627	355		47	-47	55.2	9,552,436	35.2	-5.5
Lib	626	62	16	5	11	9.6	5,985,454	22	3.8
UKIP	496	0	0	0	0	0	605,973	2.2	0.8
SNP	59	6	2	0	2	0.9	412,267	1.5	-0.2

* Represents changes from 2001

Adapted from Kavanagh and Butler, 2005

A notable feature of this election was the increasingly reported disconnect and apathy between voters and parties, and the growing disproportionality and bias in the election results

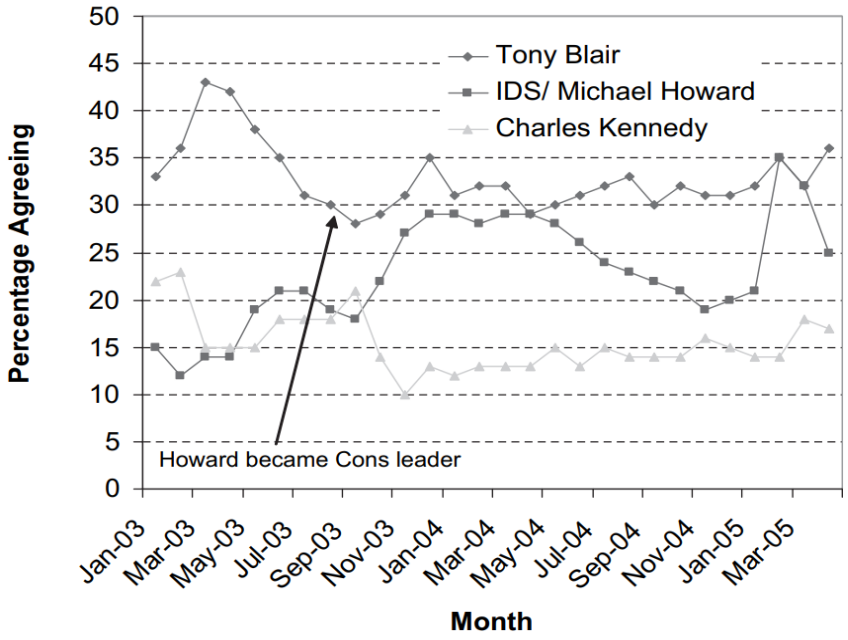
themselves (Kavanagh and Butler, 2005). On this front, 56.5% of the parliamentary representation was achieved by Labour on a vote-share of 36.2%, in a GE with comparatively low turnout. Johnston et al. (2006) summarise it: "Such disproportionality in the translation of votes into seats is not unusual in FPTP systems, and is generally recognised. […] Labour's majority of 64 seats over all parties in the House of Commons was achieved on the smallest share of the vote […] since 1832". Labour's victory marked the lowest ever vote-share (%) for a single-party majority government, and as Curtice (2005, 199) notes, the "fall in the vote was the greatest any incumbent Labour government had ever suffered.". This, paired with only a 3% difference in vote-share (%) between Labour and the Conservatives, yet a 157 difference in seats, arguably was febrile ground for the relevance of the UK's electoral system to come into question.

Tony Blair, once Labour's hero of electoral fortunes and re-elected with a landslide only four years previously, is debatably one leading example of how the favourability of party leaders can drastically change over time. Blair, rather than injecting enthusiastic boosterism into the Labour Party as he had done so in 1997, became instead something of a drag on the party and its perceptions amongst voters (see Evans and Anderson, 2005; Webb and Bale, 2021). A study in to the impact of the main party leaders in the political arena during the immediate timeline prior to the GE shows that Blair had an increasingly unfavourable disconnect with voters en-mass, the study citing "the Iraq war with its cover-ups, David Kelly's suicide, and the PM's tactical evasions proving to be a geopolitical escapade that was taken too far in the eyes if much of the electorate" (Evans and Anderson, 2005, 818). Although we should be cautious in making bold causal inferences when discussing the impact of leadership effects on party prospects, Evans and Anderson (2005) found that public assessments of Blair, Howard and Kennedy were in-fact strongly correlated with party-preferences during the 2005 vote. The scholars find that Blair's unpopularity cost the Labour party votes and seats, and suggest that the Prime Minister himself was the largest factor over any other in Labour losing votes in 2005 (Evans and Anderson, 2005, 177). Whilst the Tories' leader Michael Howard enjoyed a modest level of public approval, this did not translate into a great improvement in the Conservatives' electoral fortunes, perhaps suggesting varying degrees to which a leader can impact party support given the political structures in which they operate and the agency of the individual at the time. Charles Kennedy's leadership of the Liberal Democrats appears to have had the least impact on the leaders' respective parties. For example, despite Kennedy enjoying a relatively high level of public popularity, not nearly as many voters who thought

positively of Kennedy actually opted for the Liberal Democrats at the election, which implies that distinctions in public support for the Liberal Democrats and the larger two parties are potentially related to long-term partisan attachment (Evans and Anderson, 2005; Denver et al., 2022).

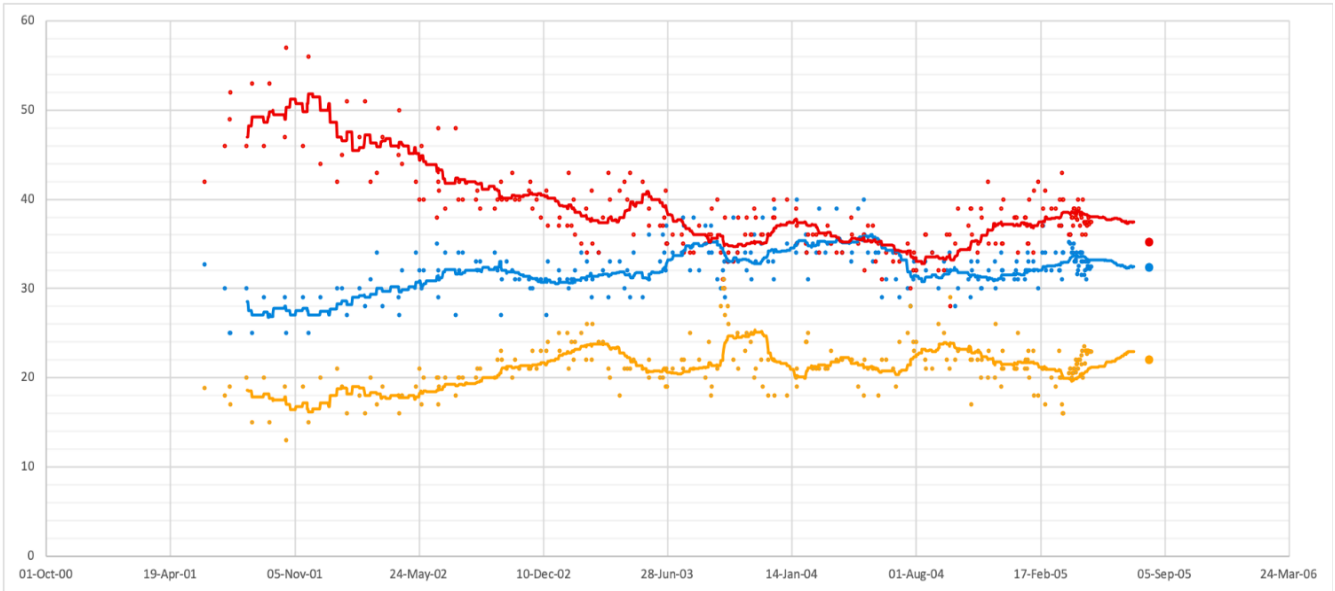
For the latter, the Liberal Democrats, despite a healthy level of support nationally in pre-election polling (see Figure 2.2), were disadvantaged by a voting system which does not accommodate for *widespread*-but-*thin* support. This acts as almost a self-fulfilling fate which third-parties, such as the Liberal Democrats, have had to contend with at General Elections which employ FPTP; that even though they may have favourable electoral appeal and popular policies, many people do not vote for them in elections because they are not perceived to be likely winners or able to enact legislation as a party of government (King, 2002). Therefore, we can confidently theorise that this is why Kennedy enjoyed relatively popular support, as he was not a realistic candidate for Prime Minister, and thus less of a threat to either side (Evans and Anderson, 2005). Some evidence to support these claims can be inferred from two graphics below, the first of which shows trends in 'Who Would Make the Best Prime Minister' polling as quoted from Evans and Anderson (2005), and the second trends in voting-intention opinion polling 2001-05 from all pollsters, from *UK Polling Report.*

Figure 2.1: Who Would Make the Best Prime Minister?



(Evans and Anderson, 2005)

Figure 2.2: Aggregate Voting Intention Trends 2001-05



Key: Lab | Con | Lib

(Pumpkin, 2005)

The data here suggests that no matter the growing unpopularity of Labour and Blair, the Opposition parties were to be no match in posturing themselves as a credible alternative government. The ENPP at this election increased significantly from the level returned in 2001; suggesting that the decline in support for Labour favoured the progressive Liberal Democrats, and therefore increased the distribution of votes and seats amongst parliamentary parties. The scale of change per the ENPP compared to 2001 is staggering; although Labour won a majority which in common parliamentary terms would be considered excellent (66), their loss of 47 seats in 2005 saw approximately 70% go directly to the Tories, not nearly even enough to boost the Conservatives in the way required to force Labour from power. As a result, the Conservatives' stagnated growth which bore them only 33 gains to add to their historically low tally of 165 seats won in 2001, while the Liberal Democrats' increased representation at Westminster to their best result yet, partially explains why the ENPP in 2005 reached 2.46.

This is, however, amidst a backdrop of relatively low turnout: just 60.9%. Not only is this the second-lowest recorded figure for turnout since 1945 (the lowest recorded turnout was the preceding election in 2001: 59.4%), it offers us some insight into how voters felt towards politics and participation at the time. The Liberal Democrats were able to muster their best result yet in this election by playing what is arguably their most successful-strategic card: positioning themselves as the party of protest (Curtice, 2007; Smith, 2005). Curtice notes that historically Liberal (/Democrat) support tended to decline during times of Labour government, but as of 2003-2005, this was reversed (Curtice, 2007; Kavanagh and Butler, 2005). Under Charles Kennedy's leadership, the party had moved decisively to the left of the political spectrum, threatening Labour's monolithic-esque hold on voters from that echelon of the voter-base (Smith, 2005; Russell; 2005); now offering a realistic alternative to New Labour's policies for left-wing voters. A platform of popularist backlash against the Iraq War, tuition fee policies, anti-terrorism laws and attracting the defection from Labour of veteran left-wing MP Brian Sedgemoor prior to the 2005 GE increasingly positioned the Liberal Democrats as genuine party for which disillusioned voters on the left could put their support in. The impact of sentiment against the Iraq war, and the wider so-called 'War on Terror' (Bush, 2001), is not understated in terms of the correlated benefit it brought to the Liberal Democrats; In a pre-election MORI poll 33% of Labour defectors to the Liberal Democrats cited 'Iraq' as the key influence in their changing of allegiances (Geddes & Tonge, 2005, 270). A post-election study by Fieldhouse (et al.) found that the Liberal

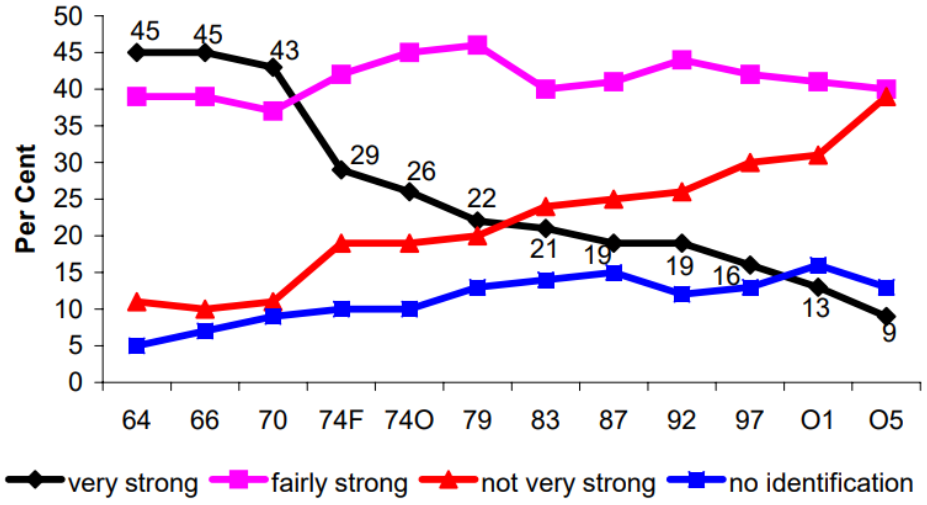
Democrats strongest impact was felt among Muslims and university-educated students/graduates; this combination may have won them as many as 14 seat gains (Fieldhouse et al., 2006). On the former, Labour was traditionally the party of British-Muslim voters (Geddes & Tonge, 2005; Fieldhouse et al., 2006), yet the party's pro-Iraq war stance alienated many of these; conjunctively, anti-terror legislation brought forward by the Labour government and a continuous post-9/11 unease disproportionately targeted at Muslims amidst British society further served to push Blair's party away from these *natural* Labour voters (Cameron, 2005). Rochdale, a seat which at the 2001 Census reported 17,000 Muslims, saw a gain for the Liberal Democrats from Labour on an 8% swing. Elsewhere, George Galloway's Respect Party won the seat of Bethnal Green and Bow from his former Labour colleague Oona King in the biggest shift of the political landscape of the election, capturing the Muslim vote on an anti-war platform (Casciani, 2005). Though the alienation of British Muslims was not entirely endemic, evidenced in Labour's retention of Blackburn which had an estimated 26,000 Muslim residents, it certainly exemplifies a shifting cleavage which was borne from the foreign policy decisions of the 2001-05 Labour administration. And ultimately, this is another reason for the increased ENPP at this election; a shift in support from increasingly marginalised groups in society, for minor/smaller parties such as Respect and the Liberal Democrats which they feel better represents a positive protest against the Labour party.

The obvious implication for the Liberal Democrats here is that attracting protest votes could only achieve so much in terms of building a solid electoral coalition; and despite winning their highest tally of seats yet, credence is given to the argument that third-parties can only advance so much when competing in an electoral system which favours a widespread and concentrated vote-share over a vote-share which may be large overall, but weak locally in seats (Fieldhouse et al., 2006; Electoral Reform Society, 2019); a form of geographical favouritism.

Interestingly, *strong* support for all mainstream parties somewhat diminished during 2005, further evidencing a decline in trust and confidence in political actors. Using partisanship as a variable, the deterioration between 2001 and 2005 is only slightly greater than that between 1997 and 2001, and significantly less dramatic in scale than the change in partisan alignment between 1970 and 1974. However, the continuation of this trend in 2005 further explains the increased democratisation of the ENPP. In one specific Guardian/ICM poll in advance to polling day, only 17% of Labour voters and 13% of Conservative voters said they were "strong supporters" of their respective parties (Guardian/ICM, 2005). To demonstrate the

long-term picture, Figure 2.3, adapted from Sanders' (et al.) report to the Electoral Commission, illustrates the overall decline in levels of party identification 1964-2005.

Figure 2.3: Aggregated Levels of Party Identification in UK, 1964-2005



(Sanders, Clarke, Stewart & Whiteley, 2005)

Partisan dealignment is one obvious reason for the figures recorded in the graph, another potential implication being that as the base of strong identifiers and supporters of established parties shrinks, they must campaign harder to achieve a substantial vote share. Between 2001 and 2005, Labour and the Liberal Democrats' suffered partial declines in partisan alignment with voters, the former likely due to having been in government for eight years and pursuing policies which caused traditional left-wing Labour voters to vacate their affiliation with the party (Baston, 2005), and whilst the Liberal Democrats' gained new support from voters at the ballot box, many of these votes were lent (Geddes & Tonge, 2005) and thus not an indicator of party-identification for voters. For the Conservatives, Loft reports partisanship fell initially after the 2001 GE but rebounded to a figure slightly higher in 2005, indicating a resilient sense of identity with the party (Loft, 2019). This further gives credence to the above argument that the weakness of the opposition parties at the time to not just maintain a healthy level of support, but attract it too, enabled another Labour majority despite the unpopularity of Blair and his policies.

Notably, the relatively low vote shares received by the established parties, conjoined with another poor turnout year-on-year, suggests they were unsuccessful in reversing this trend of

apathy and the alienation of the electorate. If we are to take turnout on face-value as an indicator of political participation (Rolfe, 2012), then we can perhaps draw some conclusions from the 61% figure recorded in 2005. Though only a modest increase from the 59% figure in 2001, this election was perceived to be much less one-sided during the campaign (Sanders et al., 2005) compared to the preceding one, and therefore more competitive given a tightening of opinion polls during the 2001-05 parliament (see figure 2.2). A perception of increased party competition could be taken to boost turnout (Hoffsteter, 1973; Denver et al., 2022; Vowles et al., 2015), yet in another supporting argument which suggests a general apathy/alienation of the electorate, four-in-ten of eligible electors opted not to cast a ballot at all. Given that only counted votes contribute to the ENPP, this further implies a disconnect between the makeup of our parliamentary party system, and the actual make-up of UK voters.

The implication to be drawn from this is that the Liberal Democrats' improved performance amidst a relatively-low Conservative seat share and a reduced governing majority for Labour meant that the ENP increased significantly at the parliamentary level. Kavanagh and Butler remind readers of the 20th-Century *truism* which holds the Conservative Party to be the natural party of government (Kavanagh and Butler, 2005, 28); usually returning to office shortly after ever losing an election, either through refreshing the policies and changing leadership, or building momentum off the back of popular sentiments towards a divided, incompetent opposition party in government. For the traditional two-party system which dominated British politics in the 1950s-70s (see 1951 case study), and the more nuanced entity the party system evolved into during the 1980s-90s (see 1974, 1997 case studies), the Conservatives had been able to occupy the political space most associated with the median voter (Denver et al., 2022; Webb and Bale, 2021; Geddes & Tonge, 2005); often faring against a Labour party which was often seen as inept, inwards-looking and struggling to make a persuasive case for democratic socialism amidst a widely-conservative media machine (Kavanagh & Butler, 1997; Shaw, 2002).

The steady decline of the Conservatives since the 1992 GE in terms of public opinion, vote-share and seat-share was therefore an unprecedented change in fortunes for the party which had dominated government office for 60 years, on-and-off, during the 20th Century. Conjunctively, the ENPP reached a high-watermark in 1992 at the onset of Conservative decline (2.27), lowering substantially in 1997-2001 to 2.13-2.17 as Labour's large majority swamped the parliamentary distribution of seats, before rebounding to 2.46 at this General Election. However, the Conservatives' result in 2005 was by relative standards a disaster;

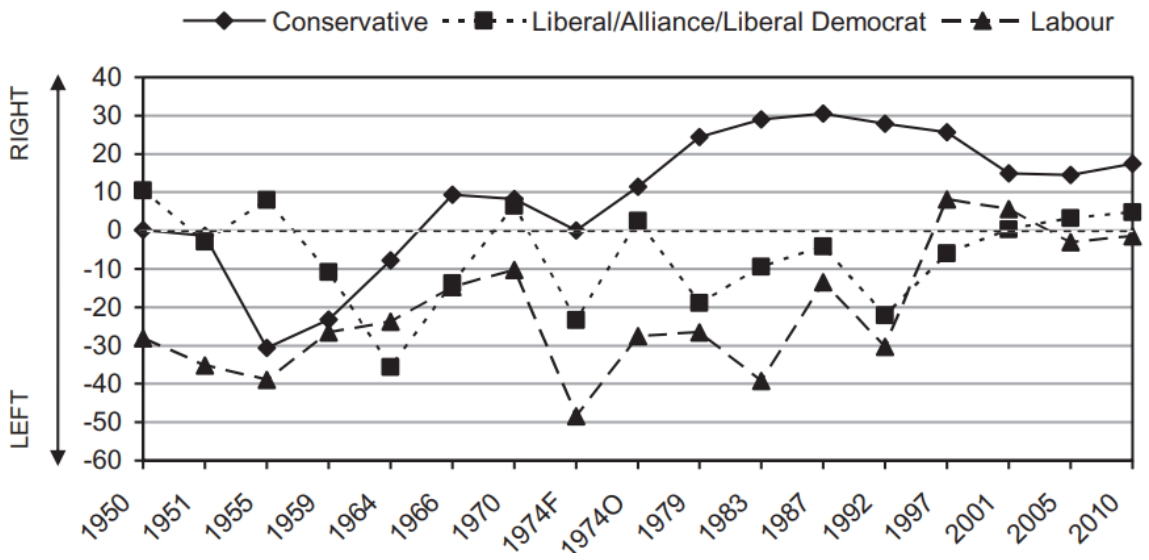
gaining only 33 seats after eight-years of the New Labour government now waning in popularity, a change of leader, and a raft of policies and rhetoric which, in circumspect, did more to unite the right of British politics but offered little in which the median voter would contemplate. For example, the party had adopted an increasingly Eurosceptic position since 1992, an approach to the new world-order which was at odds to the majority of British voters' beliefs or even priorities (Kavanagh & Butler, 2005; Clements and Bartle, 2009). Likewise, the Conservatives' hoped that tax-cutting pledges would resonate with voters, but the widely-held suspicion of broken tax-promises (as had happened when Major's government increased taxes rather than cutting them as promised in their 1992 manifesto) failed to ignite swing-voters' interests in voting Conservative (Kavanagh and Butler, 2005; Curtice, 2005). With Blair's Labour now occupying the centre-ground of politics, the Liberal Democrats were peeling votes from the left-of-centre; but with nobody seriously speculating that the Liberal Democrats would bridge the gap between themselves and the Tories to become Britain's second-largest party. However, with their unambiguous messaging on issues like Iraq (see above), the Liberal Democrats were becoming increasingly seen as the most significant critic of the government (Geddes and Tonge, 2005; Curtice, 2005).

This naturally left the Conservatives in disarray, as they themselves too were divided over Iraq, and lacked a substantial domestic policy platform which could galvanise votes from the political middle-ground (Kavanagh and Butler, 2005; Geddes and Tonge, 2005). The suggestion that the Conservatives were therefore able to unite the right-wing of politics behind them in this GE, as briefly made above, is perhaps more nuanced than initially thought. For example, through the Euroscepticism and tax-cutting pledges, to name but two headline positions of the Conservatives in 2005, paired with the national campaign slogan of "Are You Thinking What We're Thinking?", the Conservative brand attracted support from voters of other right-wing parties such as UKIP, which by comparison polled 16.1% of the vote-share in 2004's European Parliament elections, but only 1.5% of the national vote-share in the 2001 General Election. Ford and Goodwin (2014) suggest that the support lent to the Conservatives at General Elections during their wilderness years by parties such as UKIP is symptomatic of tactical voting due to the distortiveness of FPTP. However, since the Conservatives were not able to occupy the middle-ground and could only attract votes from the centre-right to the far-right of UK politics, let alone benefit in the same-way the Liberal Democrats did by appealing to millions of dissatisfied 2001 Labour voters, this potentially evidences where the median-voter in the UK really was.

The ENPP of 2.46 is made-up, predominantly, of centre-left political parties, with the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties enjoying a combined-seat share of by 64.8%, to the Conservatives' 30.7%. Interestingly, as already discussed, the distribution of seats at this General Election was indeed remarkably disproportional, but the combined vote-share of 57.2% for Labour and the Liberal Democrats still dwarfs the 30.7% achieved by the Conservatives which held mass appeal to supporters on the right-wing of the political spectrum.

118 political parties contested the 2005 GE (Fisher et al., 2005), making it among the most widely-contested in election history. Despite the pluralism derived from this range of parties, and the Conservatives' galvanising of right-wing support, the three largest parties all fought the election with relatively centripetal manifesto positions, converging on the 'median voter' (Duverger, 1963). This is evidenced in Figure 2.4, which maps the shifts in left-right manifesto positions amongst the three largest parties 1950-2010.

Figure 2.4: Left-Right Positions of Con/Lib/Lab Manifestos 1950-2010



(Quinn, 2013)

The data suggests that ideological polarisation was relatively small in 2005 amongst the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, at least in their respective manifestos. A similar trend from 2001, we can draw inference from this that the party system was almost reflecting the wider notions of the so-called 'neoliberal consensus' which had engulfed British political economy at the time (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004; Byrne et al., 2020). I

have already briefly discussed some of the policy differences above and where the median-voter seems to converge on the left-right political axis, yet notably these are issues which remain largely outside the immediate realm of economic visions, barring only the prominence of tax-cuts in the Conservative camp. For example, the Iraq war was a foreign policy issue, tuition-fees a statement on education equity, anti-terror surveillance a discussion for home affairs and justice, etc. The economic argument was said to be 'settled' by 2005 (Gamble, 2009), Gordon Brown already having declared there to be "no more boom and bust" (Brown, 2018); and following the 2005 General Election David Cameron promised to match Labour's plans for spending; although neither of these was not to last with the onset of the global banking crisis in subsequent years.

Ideological alignment between the two major parties, and the Liberal Democrats' presence on the centre-left; makes this election amongst the most *centrist* in the dataset. This was, arguably, the cementing of the ideological realignments which began to emerge in the 1997 election, which is discussed in depth in Chapter Four. Essentially, the 2005 General Election highlights the starkest contrast yet with the party system of the 1950s/60s; multi-partism something of a norm at the electoral level, with considerable representation for minor-parties at the parliamentary level. It also marks a clear shift in the political-economic debates which defined much of the 1970s/80s; no-longer were the Conservatives the party of capitalism, Labour of socialism, but both perceptibly committed to a less Thatcherite, more social-mixed economic model for the UK. The ENEP (3.49), and the ENPP (2.46), supports the former claim when comparing the ENPs in the early post-war elections, and the data available on differing manifesto positions 1950-2010 (see figure 2.4) evidence the latter claim when comparing the evolution of each party's outlook on political economy.

To conclude this case study, all three main parties could claim varying degrees of success and satisfaction from the 2005 General Election. Labour emerged victorious overall with an excellent majority of 66, albeit one diminished by 100 since 2001. The Conservatives were successful in gaining 33 constituencies taking them to 198 seats in total, yet this is still one of the worst election returns for a major party in the 21st century, faring worse than Corbyn's Labour in 2019 but still bettering their disappointing 2001 tally of just 165 seats. To truly emphasise the scale of disaster for the Conservatives at this election, only 1906, 1997 and 2001 had seen them return fewer seats than the total they achieved in 2005. The Liberal Democrats here were offered a genuine opportunity to make major breakthroughs, and in many respects did so; evidenced in their best-yet result in the post-war party system.

However, the actual net-increase in seats they achieved at the GE was below the 20 which may have been reasonably hoped for by LDHQ, and suggests that the left-leaning voters which were attracted to the Liberal Democrats due to the anti-war/anti-tuition fee protest stance of the party contributed 'soft' support to the party; leaving them vulnerable to increased erosions of support as Labour and the Conservatives reappraise their policy positions in the next parliament.

The Liberal Democrats' failure to make bigger breakthroughs is, however, understandable and to a lesser extent a situation many could empathise with: the voting system which determines the make-up of our parliamentary party system is grossly distortionary. For the Liberal Democrats to yield nearly one-quarter of the national vote-share demonstrates the support they enjoyed at this election, but the self-interest which motivated Labour to steer-clear from electoral reform in-office ensured this 22% were left with fewer than one-in-ten seats in the House of Commons. Similar situations for the Liberal Democrats (and the predecessor Liberal Party) are evident throughout the other case-studies; symptomatic of the enduring presence of FPTP despite the advanced fragmentation of the party system since 1970 (see Table 1.1) The most-volatile election (in terms of the ENPP) on record, whilst also being amongst the most disproportional at the time, makes 2005 a notable juncture-point for the UK's party system.

Chapter Three: The General Election of February 1974

The February 1974 election is the second-most volatile election in post-war party history in terms of the ENPP. A key turning-point in the UK's party system, for reasons explored in this case-study, it marked a decisive shift towards multi-party politics and the fragmentation of the party system. In the 23 years since 1951, where 96.8% of the electorate voted for either the Conservative or Labour parties (see Table 1.2; and/or Chapter Six), the electorate were no longer as attached to their loyalties to any party, and the party system was increasingly volatile in terms of both the transfer of votes between parties, and in the distribution of seats which make up the Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENPP). It was a rare and significant occasion for the UK's party system on several fronts: first, the Conservatives polled a higher vote-share but Labour won a plurality of seats (a sole parallel with 1951 where Labour polled the most votes but the Conservatives won the most seats); second, this was the first time since 1929 that the Conservatives and Labour gained a combined vote-share below 80%; third, the surge of minor parties (such as the Liberals and regional parties) ushered in a direction of travel away from the traditional two-partism which had dominated post-1945 politics up to this point, leading to the increased level of multi-party politics we would come to experience in later years; and fourth, the hung-parliament which resulted from this General Election was also the first instance of no party winning a parliamentary majority since 1929.

Table 3.1, as will continue to be commonplace in the introductory sections of the case-studies, demonstrates the headline results from this election.

Table 3.1: Feb 1974 General Election Results

Party	*Stood*	*Won*	*Gained*	*Lost*	*Net**	*Seats(%)*	*Votes*	*Votes(%)*	*Net(%)**
CON	623	297	5	42	-37	46.8	11,872,180	37.9	-8.5
LAB	623	301	34	14	20	47.4	11,645,616	37.2	-5.9
LIB	517	14	8	0	8	2.2	6,059,519	19.3	11.8
SNP	70	7	6	0	6	1.1	633,180	2	0.9
PC	36	2	2	0	2	0.3	171,374	1	-0.1

* Represents changes from 1970 General Election

Adapted from Butler and Kavanagh, 1974

We can infer from Table 3.1 some indications that the UK's party system was undergoing noticeable change. Firstly, the situation arose in February 1974 where more voters actually opted for Conservative candidates than a Labour one, and yet due to the voting-system disproportionately allocating seats through the framework of FPTP, the Labour Party (despite experiencing a fall in the vote-share from 1970) made a net increase in their number of seats by 20, enough to become the largest party in the resulting hung-parliament. The realisation of a hung-parliament in Westminster following the election of February 1974 was the first occurrence of such an event since the General Election of 1929, another of just six instances under the secret ballot where the party which tallied the most popular votes came short of winning the most seats (Craig, 1989). The hung-parliament and the disproportionate party victor of the February 1974 election are not the only parallels with 1929; for the 1929 General Election, like February 1974, saw an impressive showing for the third-party Liberals; the 1929 election resulting with an ENPP of 2.4, an increase of 1.9 from 1924 (Casal Bértoa, 2022). Interestingly, this lends reason to the expectations of increased figures for the ENPP during times of hung-parliaments; as was also the case in 2010 and 2017. Hung-parliaments, too, give credence to notions of electoral instability, a concept which I will discuss in greater depth in the following paragraphs.

Looking across the 1945-2019 dataset, the February 1974 General Election evidences one of the starkest representations of a party system undergoing major change, and rising electoral instability being both a symptom and a consequence of this. As discussed in Chapter 1, the stable class/party-alignments of the immediate post-war party system began to show higher

levels of volatility following 1970; though scholars have suggested that the causes of such volatility probably predate the manifestation of instability in February 1974 (see Webb and Bale, 2021; Franklin, 1985), as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Webb and Bale suggest that one means to measure electoral instability is to "refer to standard deviations around the mean share of the vote won by each party" (Webb and Bale, 2021, 53). The logic here is that this will demonstrate the long-term dispersions surrounding this average for each party's vote-share: "the greater the dispersion, the more variable that patterns of aggregate electoral support have been" (Webb and Bale, 2021, 53). Doing this, we can see evidence of increased volatility in voting behaviour post-1970. A useful measure for appraising volatility in the electoral sense is the *Pedersen Index,* described by the eponymous Mogens Pedersen in the paper *The Dynamics of European Party Systems: Changing Patterns of Electoral Volatility* (1979). To calculate the Pedersen index, according to Pedersen's paper, we must first determine the percentage gains of the winning parties. The consequential index will range between 0 (meaning no parties gained, so no parties lost) and 100 (meaning all parties from the previous vote achieved zero-votes); for every gain there is an equal loss, in terms of vote percentage (Pedersen, 1979). Put simply, the index is equivalent to the net percentage of voters who transferred their votes from one party to another. Table 3.2 shows the total net volatility as measured by the Pedersen Index for each GE, and in this case 'volatility' refers to "the net change within the electoral party system resulting from individual vote transfers (Ascher and Tarrow, 1975, 480), not to be confused with the measures of ENPP volatility used throughout the thesis.

Table 3.2: Electoral Instability Indicated by Net Volatility in Voting Behaviour, 1964-1983

Year of GE	Pedersen total net volatility index
1964	6.1
1966	4.4
1970	6.2
Feb 1974	15
Oct 1974	3.4
1979	8.9
1983	11.6

(Fieldhouse et al., 2019)

In the three data-points prior to February 1974, the mean average level of total net volatility was 5.6; in the four data-points following 1970, this average number rose to 9.7. The data shows that in February 1974, voters changed their vote from the 1970 election by more than double the figure recorded in 1970. The Pedersen Index usefully enriches our understanding of just how significant Feb 1974 was a turning-point for the UK's party system.

Conjunctively, we can see from Table 1.1 (Ch. 1, p.9) the volatility in terms of both the ENEP and the ENPP. Electorally, the number of effective parties was 3.13, an increase of 0.67 on 1970. Significantly, this represents electoral instability insofar as this is the first occasion the ENEP has risen above 3, evidencing the first time that the UK had an absolute multi-party system electorally, no longer a simple two-party one. Recapping Sartori's arguments as discussed in Chapter 1, the ability for a party to be effective relies upon its' ability to compete well enough to make gains from other parties, and hold a degree of coalition-building power. Electorally, at least, the balance of power was then tipped away from both the Conservatives and Labour towards a more pluralistic party environment; best evidenced in neither major party's ability to win an overall majority. Yet, the translation of the electoral plurality of parties winning votes into the parliamentary realm remains, as is nearly always the case throughout these case-studies, due to the distortive effects of FPTP. For the 6 million votes (19.3%) out of all votes counted, the Liberal Party won only 14 seats (2.2%) out of the 635 up for election. Butler and Kavanagh suggest that the Liberals' electoral success was drawn from gaining fairly equal support from both Conservative and Labour voters (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974, 259), and therefore the national absorption of so many

votes was not concentrated enough at the constituency level in dozens of seats to win them proportional parliamentary gains. This is a recurring theme for parties (especially the Liberals/Liberal Democrats) which enjoy national support during and between General Elections (vis-à-vis vote-share/opinion polling), but struggle to break the Tory-Lab duopoly on the party system (Webb and Bale, 2021), and as explored in other chapters. In preceding years, the Liberals had gained support between elections only to be later squeezed of votes by the major parties who would reassert their dominance over their traditional voter base (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974, 129), perhaps further supporting the notion that the traditional two-party system was on-notice by February 1974, given how many voters opted not to revert to either the Conservatives or Labour. The optimistic temperament in the Liberal ranks during the campaign about their prospects palpably suggest an impending paradigm shift for the party system; confident that there was something different about this election compared to the ones before, expectations were running so high that anything less than 50 Liberal seat wins would be a disappointment (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974). Four days before the election, on the 24th of February, the Liberal campaign committee went as far as predicting 64 seat wins without much difficulty (Cyr, 1988; Butler and Kavanagh, 1974); with the actual results for the Liberals in terms of seat-share understandably disconcerting. Cyr notes that "the ultimate success - genuine strength in the House of Commons--continues to elude the Liberals ... there remained a great, in most cases unbridgeable, gulf preventing translation of local strength into parliamentary seats" (Cyr, 1988, 116). However, this is not to be confused with thinking this was a bad result for the Liberals, as it was arguably was one of their most successful elections having polled 19.2% of the vote. The frustrations held ought to be realised not with the party's inability to win parliamentary representation, but with the electoral structures (i.e., FPTP) which prevented this.

In Wales, the nationalist party fared well in concentrated areas where they drew votes from Welsh-speaking areas; able to win constituencies at Westminster for the first time at a General Election where thousands of voters held a stronger sense of alignment with convictions of a singular Welsh identity than they did a Unionist one (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974; see Madgwick and Balsom, 1975). However, across Wales their aggregate support dropped to the point where (barring Carmarthen), there were no other seats where the Nationalists came within 25% lower than the winning vote-share. Rather, Wales as a whole saw a marginal swing to Labour in terms of votes. Consequentially, the breakthrough of minor parties beyond just the Liberals to reach the given sum of 3.13 in the ENPP did not

come from a minor-party surge from all corners of the UK. Scotland, however, was a very different picture. The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) recorded its best result to that date, increasing representation in Westminster by 6 seats to a total of 7, representing 2% of the overall national seat distribution. Their vote in Scotland though was an impressive feat, increasing their vote-share from 1970 where they recorded 11.4% to 21.9% in February 1974; finishing second-place in 16 seats, and dissimilar to the misfortunes berefting the Welsh nationalists, the SNP finished within 20% of the winning vote-share in 14 seats.

At the same time, the situation in Ulster also had implications for the party system at this General Election. Northern Ireland diverged significantly away from the rest of the UK, with all twelve candidates elected coming from local parties in the region. Though eleven of these were of Unionist persuasions, the Conservative Party at Westminster were unable to rely on the support of the Ulster Unionist Party (7 seats) which had historically supported the Conservatives until the Sunningdale Agreement (See Holohan, 2009). Unable to form a minority government with the confidence and supply arrangements with the Ulster Unionists, and botched attempts to form a Coalition with the Liberals, the Conservatives had little option left but to resign the levers of power and allow a Labour minority government to take office.

The surge in support for the Liberals in England, the rise and breakthroughs of varying degrees to nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales, paired with the muddled picture of local parties in Northern Ireland, thus created febrile ground for considerable volatility within the party system. If this is not just reflected in the changes to both the ENEP and ENPP since 1970, it is also evident in the earlier discussion regarding the volatile voter, as measured by the Pedersen index.

Interestingly, as Crewe (et al.) wrote: the election was "contested in the wake of, if not a catastrophe such as war or economic depression, a conjuncture of inflation, short-time working, industrial unrest and constitutional stalemate which might be fairly described as a national crisis" (Crewe, Sarlvik and Alt, 1977, 134). It is therefore entirely possible to reasonably suggest that the increased volatility in this election was borne from frustrations and a sense of disillusionment against the two major parties which were culpable for the policies and practices of the post-war settlement in the UK. Butler and Kavanagh wrote much the same, but caveated this with urging caution against mistaking disillusionment with apathy, for the two are distinct (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974, 260). Supporting this, the level

of turnout at this election increased to 78.8%, up 6.8% from the 72% recorded in 1970 (see Table 1.1, Ch. 1, p.9). From Table 1.1, we can also see that turnout increased *substantially* for the first time in 23 years at the election of February 1974 (turnout increased 11.2% between 1945-1950, rising only marginally by 1.9% between 1955-1959). This matters for two reasons: first, an apathetic voter base is commonly associated with a franchise which does not vote (see Lipset, 1960; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2006). Given the significant rise in voter-turnout in February 1974, we can assume the electoral franchise was actually engaged in political practice, not apathetic. Second, the dispersion of the vote-share from the Conservative and Labour parties towards a plurality of minor parties around the country, predominantly to the Liberals, suggests the old loyalties to either party from their traditional social base were to be no longer relied upon. Butler and Stokes' seminal book *Political Change in Britain*, published before the 1974 General Election, claimed the weakening of the class-party axis began in the early 1960s, exacerbating from 1966 (Butler and Stokes, 1971).

The explanation given by these scholars, based upon findings from their studies of voter behaviour, is that the differences between social classes vis-à-vis living standards had actually receded from the high-level experienced during the inter-war period. The aggregate convergence in living standards across the board thus blurred the lines between class distinctions and so-too the notions of identity to any one class and/or political party. The new generation of voters that had entered the franchise during this time could therefore not be relied upon by the major parties for they would struggle to connect with thematic narratives of remembering 'hard times' (Butler and Stokes, 1971), and have less a stake in any one party. Likewise, distinctions between the parties became just as blurred as both major parties converged on the centre-ground of politics; Labour by this point had come to broadly agree to a mixed-economic model for the UK, accepting a degree of involvement for the private sector, and becoming less working-class in image and make-up of party members (Webb and Bale, 2021). The Conservatives, per contra, appeared less aristocratic in image by the late 1960s, having also came to reconcile the paired pillars of a Keynesian economic model of welfare and public spending to fund a managed post-war UK economy (Butler and Stokes, 1971; Crewe, Sarlvik and Alt, 1977; Webb and Bale, 2021; Denver et al., 2022). The implication that arises for the February 1974 election from this work is that voter choice had become more sophisticated, where the number of voters vulnerable to a range of parties' persuasions has exacerbated in scale, and can perhaps explain why this election is amongst the most volatile for the UK's post-war party system.

This is highlighted by Gamble (1984), who noted that "in the elections of 1964, 1970 and 1974, there was no difference in the principles of economic management espoused by either [of the Conservative and Labour] parties and relatively little in the weighting which was attached to goals, instruments, and techniques of policy" (35). The little ideological distance between the parties therefore translated into voters' perceptions of a two-party system which was, according to the *February 1974 British Election Study,* a little too complacent and uninspiring (Crewe, Sarlvik and Alt, 1974). To use a phrase from Denver, "its foundations less solid and secure" (Denver, 2022, 82), the UK's party system was experiencing increased electoral volatility between 1970 and February 1974 as a consequence of the dealignment discussed above. The corrosion of partisan-alignment, paired with an increasing convergence between the Conservatives and Labour in the eyes of voters, offers us a comprehensive understanding of why so many opted for neither, but voted for alternative parties untinged by the memory of governance.

For these implications analysed above, the General Election of February 1974 remains a critical footnote in the UK's post-war party system. The ENEP rose above 3, reflecting something akin to a multi-party system when analysing the share of votes between the parties. Similarly, the ENPP experienced a significant increase which was strong enough to make the election a data-point worth considering as a case-study, the second-most volatile general election in terms of the ENPP across the dataset. The surge of minor parties could not, however, translate directly into parliamentary representation due to the effects of the simple-plurality voting system used in Westminster elections; but nonetheless we have discovered and discussed the implications which led the electorate to become more open to third-parties, and the consequences these had for the UK's party system more broadly. Chapter 7 discusses how many of the themes and issues surrounding party and voter relationships in this election had not dissipated by the time of the next General Election in October 1974, but were rather consolidated in an indication that the changes to the party system which came to bore-out in this election were far from a temporary divergence, but more a pointer in the further fluctuations yet to come in later contests.

Chapter Four: The General Election of 1997

The General Election (GE) of 1997 was identified as the third-most volatile election for the ENPP between 1945 and 2019, demonstrating a decrease of 0.14 from 2.27 in 1992 to 2.13 in this election. The direction of volatility in 1997, insofar as that it was a negative change, is a contrast with the previous two-case studies which were concerned with high-volatility swinging in the positive direction. The 1997 election resulted in the Labour Party, under the leadership of Tony Blair, defeating John Major's Conservatives in a remarkable election victory, as illustrated in Table 4.1, winning 418 Westminster constituencies (excluding the Speaker's seat). Labour returned to government after eighteen years in Opposition and with the largest majority (179) of any governing party in post-war history. Alongside other parties, they deprived the Conservatives of any seats outside of England, therefore inflicting one of the worst results for the Tories since 1906, which lost 148 seats at this GE. Notably, the Liberal Democrats made impressive gains in the election, adding to the plurality of parties represented at both the electoral and parliamentary levels, winning 46 seats.

This case-study will discuss several key factors behind this, ranging from the extent of impact third-parties such as the Referendum Party and the Liberal Democrats had both electorally and parliamentarily, the disastrous Conservative result, and why realignments surrounding the ideological and social bases of Labour made this such a watershed election for the UK's party system.

Table 4.1: 1997 General Election Results

Party	*Stood*	*Won*	*Gained*	*Lost*	*Net**	*Seats(%)*	*Votes*	*Votes(%)*	*Net(%)**
Con	648	165	0	178	-178	25	9,600,943	30.7	-11.2
Lab	639	418	146	0	146	63.4	13,518,167	43.2	-11.2
Lib	639	46	30	2	28	7	5,242,947	16.8	-1
SNP	72	6	3	0	3	0.9	621,550	2	0.1

*****Represents changes from 1992

Adapted from Butler and Kavanagh, 1997

Winning 419 MPs on the largest post-war swing of 10.3% (double that achieved by the Conservatives in 1979), the term ‘Labour landslide’ is associated with the 1997 GE due to the scale of the parliamentary victory (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997; Webb and Bale, 2021). However, Crewe (et al.,) suggest that upon closer analysis such a term can overshadow some interesting peculiarities will draw upon in this chapter. First, the 43.2% vote-share for Labour in 1997 was better than any election since that of 1970 (see Table 1.1), "but -note- lower than any election from 1945-66, including those it lost in the 1950s. Taking turnout into account, we see that only 30.9% of the registered electorate ... came out and voted Labour” (Crewe et al., 1998). The implication which emanates from this is, to a degree in contradiction to the rhetoric of Blair’s 1997 victory speech where he claimed to "know well what this country has voted for today. It is a mandate for New Labour ... a mandate to get those things done in our country that desperately need doing for the future.", the level of turnout for Labour sparsely resembles a mass mobilisation for political renewal. Linked to the turnout for Labour, the total turnout at this election was the lowest since 1935 at 71.3%.

Significantly, the low-turnout was marked as unexpected (see Crewe et al., 1998; Pattie and Johnston, 2001); especially-so given the strong build-up of momentum in the electoral sphere in the run-up to the vote; namely the 6 weeks of intensive media coverage of the campaign, the rise of the Referendum Party, and a record number of parliamentary candidates (see Butler and Kavanagh, 1997; Crewe et al., 1998). Pattie and Johnston, however, suggest that the turnout figure in 1997 is understandable if we accept that higher levels of electoral party competition produce higher turnouts at elections (Pattie and Johnston, 2001), implying the inverse that widely predicted landslides for one party result in lower turnout. Opinion polling showed consistent, substantial Labour leads over the Conservatives throughout nearly all of the 1992-97 Parliament (see Crewe, 1997; Butler and Kavanagh, 1997), perhaps evidencing the suggestion that turnout was lower because the strong Labour performance was largely expected.

Notably, the constituencies where turnout dropped the most were safe Labour seats (Crewe et al., 1997), and turnout fell the least in safe Conservative ones. Likely a result of two factors; the first being the ideological gravitation of New Labour to the centre-ground of politics disillusioned traditional left-wing Labour supporters in their heartlands, and the second being a virtually invisible ground campaign by the Labour Party in these seats it considered to secure, instead opting to ruthlessly concentrate their energies and resources into marginals they needed to win (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997). The UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the Referendum Party posed very little-risk to Labour in this election, and were widely considered a reactionary

threat to Conservative MP's (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997), namely because these parties were made-up of, and appealing to, voters considered natural Conservatives, but mobilised and disillusioned with the single-issue of European integration (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). Together, they ran candidates in 547 seats in 1997, and achieved 2.9% of the vote. However, the vote-share for these parties in rural and seaside-town seats was sometimes up to 9% (Crewe et al., 1998). McAllister and Studlar note that the impact of Conservative Euroscepticism was understated in the immediate electoral analyses post-ballot, pointing to the work of psephologists which suggest the anti-EU parties cost the Conservatives 3.4% of the national vote, and anywhere between 4-16 parliamentary seats (McAllister and Studlar, 2000). This may imply, due to the perception of Eurosceptic parties and voters at the time being entwined with disillusioned Tories, that the Conservatives suffered the most because of the strong UKIP/Referendum Party presence in some areas. This is not the case; the Conservative vote-share did not actually decrease the most in areas where these minor-parties did best; in-fact the Liberal Democrats did. To offer a possible explanation for this, I draw from Ford and Goodwin's work which finds that such perceptions of Eurosceptic voters were misplaced. They challenge the common assumptions that most of those who voted for the UKIP/Referendum Party in 1997 would have *stayed loyal* to the Conservatives had they taken a stronger anti-European stance or in the absence of a Referendum movement to stoke a change of positioning in the Tory party. They found that although these single-issue parties attracted voters who would have been more likely than not to have voted for the Conservatives in 1992, only around half did so (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). There will be further discussion regarding Euroscepticism and the associated demographics/psephology in Chapter 6 (The 2015 GE), where the UKIP vote actually did more damage to Labour's prospects than the Conservatives'.

Despite failing to make a breakthrough parliamentarily, the Referendum Party and the UKIP definitely contributed, albeit mildly, to the Effective Number of Electoral Parties (ENEP) in 1997, up to 3.22 from 1992's 3.06. The extent of their impact is not entirely understood, but we can make some evidence-based assumptions. First, Labour's 43.2% vote-share, paired with the Conservatives' 30.7% (see Table 4.2) meant that the combined vote for the two largest parties was 73.9%. In 1992, the joint-vote share was 76.3%, a difference of 2.4%. Notwithstanding the Liberal Democrats' actually net-gaining 28 seats, their vote-share dropped by 1% between 1992 and 1997. The dominant regional parties (e.g., Scottish Nationalist Party/Plaid Cymru/Northern Irish Parties) all increased their combined vote-share by a total of 0.2%; hardly an impact big enough to consequentially increase the ENEP by 0.16. Rather, the

2.9% gained by UKIP and the Referendum Party could be a rather significant contributor to party system fragmentation at the electoral level. Relatedly, reports of widespread tactical voting in this election could also explain this.

For example, the correlation between the Labour and Liberal Democrat performance is notable, for in constituencies where Labour did notably well, the Liberal Democrats did not, and vice-versa. This is likely a result of mass dissatisfaction with the Tories after 18 years of government, by many voters. But in 1997, voters still had to choose which party to vote for, or not vote at all. Butler and Kavanagh detail voters varying systematically between one constituency and another as to which of the challenger parties to the Conservatives they opted to vote for; "Voters exhibited a striking tendency to opt for whichever of the [Labour or Liberal Democrat] parties appeared best placed to defeat the Conservatives locally" (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997, 309). In seats where Labour came second-place to the Conservatives in 1992, but where there was substantial distance between them and the third-place party, Labour saw a mean 3% increase in their vote-share, compared to areas where Labour were already the incumbent. This, paired with a decline of 3% for the Liberal Democrats' vote-share in these Conservative-held seats (prior to the election), suggests Labour benefitted from 1992 Liberal Democrat voters who opted to vote tactically in 1997 (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997). Liberal Democrat performance in many seats where they came second-place in 1992, also where there was substantial distance between them and the third-place party, also benefitted from supposed tactical-voting, with such seats seeing an uptick in Liberal Democrat vote-share by a couple of points at the expense of Labour, the latter declining on average also by 3%. The Conservative performance in both these types of seats were almost identical and showed little variation, suggesting a great proportion of vote-switching was done amongst voters of the opposition parties; not necessarily a direct incumbent-main challenger vote-swap, which I expect would perpetuate a lower ENEP than the actual figure we got given how many seats Labour were the main challenger in from 1992. The evidence from three-way marginals which had a Conservative incumbent also support this claim. Where the Conservative Party vote-share on average remained roughly unchanged, Labour was able to increase their support by being regarded as better-placed to unseat the Conservative incumbent and thus squeezed the Liberal Democrat vote to varying degrees across these seats, and surprisingly more so in three-way marginals where Labour were third-placed in 1992.

The 46 Liberal Democrat seat wins in this election, therefore, were composed predominantly of the 30 gains taken from Conservative-held seats where they were the predominant challenger

in the previous election, at the expense of Labour. Although they made a net-gain of 28 seats in this election, losing two to Labour, this offers the strongest evidence up to 1997 of a more fragmented make-up in the party system electorally and parliamentary. Labour's 146 overall gains were taken from 144 Conservative-held seats, where they were either the second-place or third-place party in the previous General Election.

The dramatic decrease of 0.19 in the ENPP from 1992 is therefore a consequence of this burgeoning of the Labour seat-share in 1997, at the expense of Conservative Party representation at Westminster. The greater the level of representation for one party, then the more concentrated the ENPP will become; and with a 63.4% share of House of Commons seats, Labour was rewarded with the most sizeable majority in the legislature in post-war history. Though the Liberal Democrats more than doubled their seats, this was not enough to counteract the decrease in the ENPP due to the sheer scale of Labour's majority and of the Conservatives' disastrous showing. With reference to Chapter One, where I discussed how measures for volatility account for either positive or negative change, such a rapid turnaround of fortunes for all parties in 1997 explains why this election is a critical turning-point for the UK's party system. First, the changes in both the ENEP and the ENPP are spectacularly notable between 1992 and 1997 elections, as discussed above. Second, such vast alterations to the make-up of the UK's party system further evidences my scepticism of gradualist interpretations of party system change in the UK. To recap critical election theory (see Ch. 1), watershed elections are characterised by three interdependent lineaments, these being: realignments in the ideological basis of party competition; the social basis of party support; and the partisan loyalties of voters (Norris and Evans, 1999; Need, 2000). The 1997 General Election, like others in the case-studies, hosts an array of these features we can draw from. On the first feature, Norris notes that the Labour manifesto in 1997 differs substantially from the manifesto offered by the party in 1950 (Norris, 1999). Considering it to be the most right-wing Labour manifesto to the time she was writing, Figure 2.4 (in Chapter Two) evidences the significant variation between the leftist manifesto of 1992 (-30 on the left-right axis), and the more right-leaning policy pledges offered in 1997 (<10).

Nearly 40 units on the left-right axis separate the 1992 and 1997 Labour election manifestos on the left-right axis in terms of their ideological positions within the literature. Comparatively, we can also infer from this data that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats' ideological alignment remained relatively indifferent between the two elections, the latter overlapping Labour on the left to become the most left-wing of the three, but only because Labour moved so swiftly to the right. Some immediate implications which arise from this is that the radical ideological realignment between 1992 and 1997 was solely experienced by the Labour Party. Converging on the centre-right of politics, they secured a broad coalition of traditional Labour voters who would not at that point desert the party, progressive voters (not traditional Labour) who tactically voted to defeat the Conservatives, and soft-Conservative supporters who could stomach a right-leaning social democratic alternative to Major's party. This intimately relates with the second feature listed above in critical election theory: the changes of social bases of party support. Butler and Stokes already noted their observations on the changing social structures which for decades governed how different demographical factions of the electoral franchise would vote until the late 1960s (see Butler and Stokes, 1971), and Labour's programmatic adaption in the period between 1992 and 1997 ushered in another round of partisan realignment.

For example, the millions of voters who abandoned Labour since 1983 who opted to abstain, vote for the Liberals/SDP, or vote Conservative in subsequent elections returned to the fold en-masse in 1997; a result predominantly of the sensational rebrand of the party's image in the eyes of voters (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997; Lilleker, 2002; Webb and Bale, 2021), enabling it to look like a competent party worthy of high-office. This occurred whilst turnout overall declined, as discussed above. This therefore raises some important implications in how we understand the effect such returning Labour voters had; whilst conjunctively, the rebrand itself was to aid Labour's new target voter-base the party believed would win the election for them: the so-called *Mondeo Man* (See Blair, 1996). *Mondeo Man* was the type of voter Labour needed to secure a switch from the Conservatives to enter government: a stereotypical figure much like the *Essex Man* which described the electoral base which guaranteed electoral success for the Tories during the Thatcher years, and the *Workington Man* which was integral to the Conservatives' 2019 election strategy. All three are used in the jargon to characterise the median-voter; with *Mondeo Man* being in his late thirties, a homeowner, married, and residing in the South East of England, and driving the eponymous Ford Mondeo. Notably, this was Conservative territory the Labour Party were explicitly

targeting; the ABC1 social-grades. The IPSOS Exit Poll from 1997 show distinct evidence of class-based voting. Amongst ABs, the Tories dropped 15%, where Labour increased their vote 12%. The same broadly happened amongst the C1s, while a significant shift amongst the C2s and DEs also swung to Labour but not as strongly as those in the higher social grades (See IPSOS, 1997). The strong direct swings to Labour from the Conservatives, from the relatively better-off electorate amongst the wider franchise, therefore evidences a fundamental realignment in British politics which even the pre-election opinion polls (and the election night exit poll) did not quite anticipate (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997; Webb and Bale, 2021).

In terms of the movements in voter's partisan loyalties, these too were significant in 1997. Crewe and Thompson, reflecting on this topic of partisan dealignment, observed that "the most notable weakening [of partisan identification] occurred at the two elections which ushered in long-lasting changes in the shape of the party system – February 1974 and 1979" (Crewe and Thompson, 1999, 70). They argue that 1997 was also a realigning election, given the further weakening of party identifications amongst voters since 1992, akin to way they did between 1974 and 1979 (Crewe and Thompson, 1999). In addition to Crewe and Thompson's work, Tilley suggests that a realignment of partisan loyalties took place in 1997 on a similar scale to the movements between 1974 and 1979; with data from long-term British Election Study (BES) panels/surveys, he finds that the large drop in strength of party identification through the 1970s, having stabilised by 1979 and remaining moderately static even in 1992, falls again somewhat by 1997 (Tilley, 2006). Taking Crewe and Thompson's findings that the changes in levels of party identification in 1997 was larger than the change in the Conservative and Labour share of the vote in this election (Crewe and Thompson, 1999, Need, 2001), and Tilley's analysis of BES trends, we can infer that the convergence of Labour onto centre-ground terrain weakened the attachments of its' traditional base, and to an extent its' ability to become more palatable for traditional Tory voters in the South had a consequence for the Conservatives' own partisan loyalties. There are of course other factors behind the drop in party identification, for example, as discussed above, the disillusionment of Tory Eurosceptics under Major's government, and the Liberal Democrats' breakthrough also evidences a shifting voter base in 1997. Nonetheless, the impact of these changes on the ENP cannot go understated.

Galvanising different electoral bases, weakening their image as the party solely of the working class by expanding their appeal beyond traditional social loyalties, and significantly

re-positioning their party on the ideological spectrum explains why Labour's advances in this election almost entirely remoulded the shape of British Party Politics almost in one thrift go. The ENPP therefore suffered a sharp decrease from the previous data-point, returning to the lowest figure recorded since 1983. This scale of change further evidences my reasoning throughout this thesis that changes within the UK's party system, much like as evidenced in the 2005 and February 1974 case-studies, is far from gradualist. Instead, what these three chapters of case-studies have shown thus far is that changes in the ENPP, and perhaps to a greater extent in fluctuations in the ENEP, is that the composition of the UK's competitive party arena can shift and transform at almost unprecedented pace. The realignment that occurred in 1997 remained relatively immobile in the subsequent election (the ENPP increasing by only 0.3), but only eight years on from 1997, in the 2005 election, another sizeable change occurred which brought on the highest variation in the ENPP over this time-period. 1997 and 2005 pulled the ENPP in different directions, the former by 0.14 and the latter by 0.29, for the two elections in less than a decade (albeit not held immediately one after another) to be watershed turning-points for the party system implies party system change in the UK is anything but gradual.

Chapter Five: The General Election of 2015

The 2015 General Election (GE), held 7th May, resulted in the return of single-party majority government after five years of coalition. Widely expected to produce another hung-parliament in lieu of the 2010 election providing no party an overall majority (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016), the 2015 election confounded expectations; the Conservatives won 330 seats, up 24 since 2010, meanwhile their Coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats, suffered a near-wipe out; retaining only 8 seats out of the 57 they won five years beforehand. Labour suffered a net loss of 26 seats, taking their tally to 232. The Scottish National Party (SNP) supplanted the Liberal Democrats as the third-largest party in Westminster with 56 seats, whilst minor-parties such as UKIP and the Greens increasing their vote-shares exponentially from 2010 (the former also replacing the Liberal Democrats as the third-largest electoral party) they failed to secure any major breakthroughs at this election.

Table 5.1: 2015 General Election Results

Party	*Stood*	*Won*	*Gained*	*Lost*	*Net**	*Seats (%)*	*Votes*	*Votes (%)*	*Net (%) **
Con	647	330	35	11	24	50.8	11,299,609	36.8	0.7
Lab	631	232	22	48	-26	35.7	9,347,273	30.4	1.5
SNP	59	56	50	0	50	8.6	1,454,436	4.7	3.1
Lib	631	8	0	49	-49	1.2	2,415,916	7.9	-15.1
UKIP	624	1	1	0	1	0.2	3,881,273	12.6	9.5

*Represents Changes from 2010

Adapted from Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016

The Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENPP) in 2015 was 2.54, down 0.03 points from 2010's 2.57. This was the third-least volatile GE vis-à-vis the ENPP in the dataset; the figure staying relatively similar to that from the 2010 election. The Effective Number of Electoral Parties, however, drastically increased from 3.72 (a previous record-high) in 2010 to 3.93 in 2015. Despite this election being known for returning a Conservative majority which ultimately led to both the EU Referendum in 2016 and Labour's consequential lurch to

the left by electing Jeremy Corbyn as Leader, the analysis I will be offering in this chapter will predominantly focus on the interesting sub-plots of this election. Despite producing an ENPP akin to that of the 2010 GE, the composition of the party system altered drastically and, writing in 2022, appears to have made a long-lasting impact. The first sections of this chapter will analyse the Liberal Democrats' decline, Labour's losses at this election, and the SNPs rise to third-place. The latter half of this chapter will scrutinise the voter-migrations between the parties with UKIP as a focal point, before discussing the important age cleavage in our party system and political arena which this election exposed.

Kavanagh and Cowley (2016), and Green and Prosser (2016), note that the important story of this election, which is often overlooked, was the collapse of the Liberal Democrats' national performance in both terms of seats and votes (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016; Green and Prosser, 2016). The Liberal Democrats were down from 23% (2010) to 7.9% in 2015, and lost 49 out of the 57 seats they won just five years prior; Cutts and Russell argue that this fate was likely sealed by the end of 2010, as the party started consistently polling at 8% in the national voting-intention surveys, a tally very close to the actual vote-share they achieved in 2015. They also find that in the early months of 2015, the Liberal Democrats were barely even fighting for third-place in the national polls; instead, UKIP had stabilised in the low-mid teens in national polling from 2013 (Cutts and Russell, 2015; Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016). Rather, the Liberal Democrats, at one instance polling at 5% (see Ashcroft Poll, 9 March 2015) were often battling with the Greens for fourth-place. In the actual GE, the party's share of the vote fell the most in England and least in Scotland (Cutts and Russell, 2015), 335 candidates losing their deposits overall. Their appeal since 1992, as discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 of the thesis, had been their distinctive abandon of equidistant offerings which proved little risk to their ideological integrity; conjunctively maximising their favourability and support in various regional areas and a amidst a spectrum of social groups (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). In 1997, they profited from a Conservative Party in disarray and a surge in progressive tactical voting (see Chapter 4). In 2005, they benefitted from staunchly opposing established parties' support for the Iraq War, and offered a refuge for left-wing progressives disillusioned by Labour and moderate Conservative voters (see Chapter 2). By 2015, their role in the Coalition government with their vocal support for tight austerity programmes and u-turning on controversial issues such as VAT increases and student finance (an issue which was predominantly potent in Liberal Democrat-held areas, not so much nationally) cemented an unfavourable perception amongst the voters who had supported the Liberal Democrats in

elections gone-by; leaving its' electoral base feeling angry and betrayed (Cutts and Russell, 2015; Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016). This is supported by the internal review launched in the aftermath of their catastrophic election losses in 2015, which reports that the Liberal Democrats' near-wipe out in 2015 was rooted in the seeds sewn early in the Coalition years when Nick Clegg purportedly allowed the Liberal Democrats to be the "willing appendages" to the Conservatives (Morris, 2016). By doing-so, the Liberal Democrats appear to have fallen trap to the so-called "punchbags for heavyweights" (O'Malley, 2010) thesis, which argues that minor parties in coalition arrangements fare worse than larger parties in subsequent elections for the record of their shared administration's term in office. Do consider, however, that this is not always the case; one instance being when the Liberal Democrats continued to enjoy support across Scotland despite governing with Labour in the first two Scottish Governments 1999-2007.

The Liberal Democrats' sudden crash in the electoral stratosphere in 2015, however, does evidence one of the thesis' central claims; that party-system change in the UK can happen rapidly, and at pace. The Coalition government itself is testament to this, though coalition governments are not necessarily to be a consequence of increases in the ENPP. For example, the UK's SMP voting system is designed to safeguard against power-sharing in the executive; and even in 2005 had produced a sizeable majority government for Labour. Only five years later, the pre-requisite for governance following the 2010 General Election was for Coalition-building and negotiating inter-party settlements. Such a circumstance had no precedent in the post-war party system, and despite all the expectations that this style of doing government was here to stay post-2010, 2015 proved once again to upset any notion of a constant, linear interpretation of change in the UK's party system. The Liberal Democrats' reversal of fortunes in the early-mid 2010s has also been credited to other movements in the political party arena (Cowley and Kavanagh; 2016; Ross, 2015; Green and Prosser, 2016); a perfect storm of a well-funded, disciplined Conservative campaign, a weak performance from Ed Miliband's Labour, and the sudden rise of the SNP.

Of the 49 seats that the Liberal Democrats lost in 2015, 27 were gained by the Conservatives, 12 by Labour and 10 by the SNP. For more than half of their losses to be to the benefit of the Conservatives, despite sharing power with them for the previous five years, can be explained by the listed three movements above. The Conservative campaign in the South-West of England (strong Liberal Democrat territory since 1997) was focussed on two dominant themes: the '*long-term economic plan'* and '*coalition of chaos*' narratives. The first, the so-

called '*long-term economic plan*' (see Whiteley et al., 2017) and implied threat of a Labour government disrupting the progress made on the economy. Miliband's Labour was living under the shadow of the Global Financial Crisis 2007-08, which occurred under the stewardship of the last Labour government. The Conservatives had successfully framed a narrative before the 2010 GE, and during Coalition aided by Liberal Democrats, to weaponise this and discredit Labour's record on the economy and place an untrustworthy perception of Labour amongst the public as profligate with tax/expenditure and fiscally irresponsible (Gamble 2015; Bale, 2015). Labour was repeatedly challenged on the campaign trail by voters and competitor parties about their economic position, often in the context of an electorate which had ultimately accepted the Tories' version of events. In a Question Time Leader's Q&A, Miliband was asked if he accepted Labour spent too much when they were in government, to which he replied repeated the same narrative as Brown had done in 2010, that the economic turmoil in the UK was the fault of a Global financial crash, not Labour's economic stewardship; not parrying to the now widely-held belief Labour had in-fact overspent and overborrowed (Gamble, 2015). During the same event, however, Miliband did accept Labour's mistakes vis-à-vis the deregulation of banks and a missed-opportunity to diversify emerging sectors from the increasing power of financial services. Despite this, Labour could not persuade enough voters to trust them with economic policy; a conclusion which scholars have reached to portend that this was the predominant reason why lost Labour the General Election of 2015 (Kavanagh & Cowley, 2016; Ross, 2015; Gamble, 2015).

The losses for both the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties were considerable at this election; and yet the ENPP remained relatively unchanged from 2010. In a party system which had since 1997 been described as a *'two-and-a-half party system'* by some (see Quinn, 2013) (in the sense that the Conservatives and Labour have dominated party politics, yet the Liberal Democrats have enjoyed strong electoral showings), a Labour and Liberal Democrat decline could be expected to benefit the Tories directly. However, whereas Labour and the Liberal Democrats lost a net 75 seats between them, the Conservatives gained only a net 24 seats; in fact, while the Conservatives' lead over Labour grew to 98 parliamentary seats in 2015, a House of Commons briefing paper credits this predominantly to the Conservative gains at the expense of incumbent Liberal Democrat seats and Labour haemorrhaging seats to the SNP (Hawkins et al., 2015, 42). Interestingly, Labour gained more seats from the Conservatives in 2015 (10) than vice-versa (8). The ENPP, we can argue, is therefore very similar to the ENPP from 2010 because although Labour and the Liberal Democrats suffered

losses, the share of parliamentary representation achieved by the SNP offset any major volatility in the number and size of parties at Westminster. Logically, this entails that although the Liberal Democrats were supplanted as the third-largest parliamentary party by the SNP and now relegated to joint-fourth with the Democratic Unionist Party, the minor movement in the ENPP can only tell us so much about party-system change; and without the contextualisation provided by case-studies, could perhaps overshadow/downplay some of the game-changing shifts which occurred in 2015.

The SNP's performance in this election was remarkable, offering another example of a sudden shift in the tectonic-plates of the UK's party system. In 2010, they had won 6 seats on a vote-share of 1.7% nationally and 19.9% in Scotland. Following their victory in the 2012 Scottish Parliament elections and persuading the UK government to hold a Scottish Independence referendum, their rise and rise during the 2010-15 UK Parliament precipitated their best-ever showing at a Westminster election in 2015; increasing their tally of seats to 56 out of the 59 Scottish seats contested, and winning these on a vote-share of 4.7% nationally and an impressive 50% in Scotland. This change occurred within the timeframe of just five-years, almost in tandem with the decline of the Liberal Democrats as an electoral force. As the SNP's support grew and their position in the national political psyche increased, the Conservatives toom advantage of notions of English nationalism and sow anxieties of an overbearing SNP dictating government policy unless the Conservatives were re-elected with a majority of their own. This tactic became better-known as the '*Coalition of Chaos'* narrative leading Tory figures pushed in key target-seat constituencies and in national media (Ross, 2015). By tapping into the hearts and minds of English voters susceptible to fears of an SNP-backed Labour government, who couldn't be trusted on the economy and would break up the United Kingdom, voters in areas which were formerly held by the Liberal Democrats opted for the Tories (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016). This partially explains why the Conservatives were the main beneficiaries of Liberal Democrat collapse. It is also the case that the Tories' framing of a weak and reckless Labour, propped up by a perceived anti-English nationalist party, staved off the UKIP insurgency they had feared would deny them victory.

Tory fears of a UKIP breakthrough can, however, be understood taking stock of the voting-intention polls throughout the 2010-15 Parliament. As aforementioned, UKIP began showing impressive polling averages from mid-2013, and after winning two by-elections in 2014 resulting from 2 Tory defections, their footing going into the General Election looked strong

(Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016 Ross, 2015). Their pre-election polling averages held-up well during the actual election, achieving 12.6% of the national vote but due to the wide geographical spread of this support, they were only able to win one Westminster seat. However, they did manage to come second-place in 120 constituencies, perhaps evidencing their growth from 2010 where they came second in no constituencies. Ayres analysed regions where UKIP came second-place in 2015 to evaluate the party's chances of building further support for the next election which was expected to be held in 2020; finding that in the South-East of England, a region which in 2015 saw 78 out of the 84 seats here won by the Conservatives, UKIP came second-place in 40% of the constituencies (Ayres, 2015). He chooses this region to focus on for one important reason; the Liberal Democrats had previously been the second-place party in most of these seats where UKIP were now the main-challenger. It is unlikely that the cause for this was a sudden transfer of support from 2010 Liberal Democrat voters to UKIP in 2015, evidenced by projected data from the British Election Study (BES). The BES suggested only 11% of 2010 Liberal Democrat voters switched to UKIP in 2015, with more of those who said they would not be voting for the Liberal Democrats again going to the Conservatives (20%) and Labour (37%) (Evans and Mellon, 2015). Ayres charts a clear negative relationship in these constituencies the Tories won between Liberal Democrat vote-loss and increases in the Conservative vote-majority (Ayres, 2015), suggesting that many Liberal Democrat losses bolstered Conservative vote-shares in the region, thus bumping UKIP candidates into second-place but nowhere near-enough to provide a real threat to Tory incumbents. Extrapolating this understanding to the wider-UK picture, it perhaps evidences that the Conservatives' campaign to focus on themes of the economy and 'coalition of chaos' rhetoric had paid off in stagnating UKIP's progress.

UKIP, as a result, made little-to-no impact on the ENPP as it did not translate its substantial vote-share into seats, further evidencing the differences and disparities found between the ENEP and ENPP due to the UK's voting-system. The high ENEP of 3.94 in 2015 is reflective of the breakthrough enjoyed by non-major parties electorally, not least the 12.6% national vote share won by UKIP, the 7.9% won by the Liberal Democrats, the 4.7% and 3.8% won by the SNP and Greens respectively; a combined vote-share of 29%. To highlight the importance of this compared to the previous election, the Liberal Democrats alone in 2010 had a vote-share of 23%. By 2015, that third-party vote-share was fragmented and distributed amongst a wider spread of parties, thus increasing the ENEP. The SNP, as discussed above, won 56 seats out of 59 contested on a vote share of 4.7% nationally and 50% in Scotland.

Yet, when we adopt a regional breakdown of these results, Scotland's ENEP is calculated to 2.96; this is because although 50% of Scottish voters opted for the SNP in 2015, another 24.3% opted for Labour, 14.9% for the Conservatives, and 7.5% for the Liberal Democrats; predominantly down to a fragmented Unionist vote against a united nationalist one (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016). Nevertheless, despite this high ENEP in Scotland, the ENPP of 1.11 is closer to indicating that of a one-party system. The SNP, therefore, did remarkably well from the Single-Member Plurality voting system, benefitting from skewed proportionality between the ENEP and ENPP. This is an even greater disparity on a national level, where the SNP won 8.6% of the seats in Parliament on 4.7% of the vote. UKIP, per contra, took only 0.2% of the seats in Parliament despite 12.6% of the national vote. Of UKIP's vote-share, 93% of this came from English constituencies. Akin to Scotland, England's disproportionality between the ENEP and ENPP is stark, 3.38 for the former and 1.98 for the latter. In England, the Conservatives took 40.9% of the vote, and 59.7% of the seats; Labour 31.6% of the vote and 38.6% of the seats, UKIP 14.1% of the vote and 0.2% of the seats, the Liberal Democrats 8.2% of the vote and 1.1% of the seats.

We see here both the Conservatives and Labour receiving a greater number of seats relative to their respective vote-shares, and a near-complete blindsiding of the Liberal Democrats and UKIP in parliamentary terms relative to their respective vote-shares. These regional breakdowns of the ENEP/ENPP in 2015 are important to analyse if we are to have a more circumspect understanding of the contextualising reasons why the ENPP in 2015 remained relatively static, amidst a mass-fragmentation in the ENEP; and the conclusion we can draw from the analysis above is that because the ENPP is not, and nor is the ENEP, concerned with *which* parties make-up the composition of the party system in any one arena, but *how many*; the replacement of the Liberal Democrats by the SNP by a similar share of seats in 2015 is the main factor. Yet, this was enabled by a voting-system which skewed a national vote-share of 4.7% into 8.6% of national seats, whilst the Liberal Democrats won a national vote share of 7.9% and took just 1.2% of the seats.

To understand why the party system fragmented to the extent it did in 2015 is to understand one of the key social cleavages which became a predominant observation during the analysis which followed the immediate aftermath of the 2015 GE, throughout the Brexit process and the elections which followed: that of the rising age divide in the UK population's political participation. Chrisp and Pearce (2019) plotted out age-ranged voting for each party sine 1970 to determine whether this was a new phenomenon, or just now much-more observable

given the strength of feeling over issues such as EU preferences and national identity, key themes of the 2015 GE and subsequent electoral activities. They found, using a wealth of BES cross-sectional surveys, that the Conservative Party has always received greater support from older people; and a large age divide exacerbated from 1997 (Chrisp and Pearce, 2019). What is clear is that Labour's appeal appeared to be more equally divided across the age groups, but a more consistent age divide appears when collating Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Green Party as one constituency left-of-centre constituency, and the Conservatives and UKIP as a right-of-centre one. By doing this, they demonstrate that younger people are more inclined to vote for the Greens and Liberal Democrats and their previous incarnations (Chrisp and Pearce, 2019). Per contra, older people were much more likely to vote UKIP which further widens the age cleavage when added to the Conservative bloc of votes. Given some of the inherent disparities between the ages and propensity to turn-out, older voters tend to outnumber young voters as evidenced by Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, which estimates that over-55s constituted over half of the voting public since 2020 (ONS, 2021). In 2015, for example, the turnout figures for the 55-64 years old age group and the over 65s were 77% and 78% respectively (IPSOS, 2015).

The 18–24-year-olds, and the 24–34-year-olds, in contrast, experienced 43% and 54% turnout figures respectively (IPSOS, 2015). Not only are there fewer young people than older people, partly a result of increased life-expectancy and the demographical ballooning-effect of the elderly by the so-called 'baby boomer' generation (Bell and Gardiner, 2019), but their propensity to vote is also much lower due to a series of factors as discussed in Chapter 2; chiefly disengagement, disenfranchisement, and the consequence of the older generation having a greater influence in public debate and the shaping of party policies which drowns out the interests and voices of younger people (Bellinger, 2017). In 2015, for all the progressive parties which fielded candidates and achieved that ENEP of 3.93, if the majority of voters are conservative-inclined, and they grossly outweigh the number of young voters across the constituencies, then arguably it would have been difficult to envisage a scenario where the party-system didn't result in a situation where 15.2 million voters opted for the right-wing parties (Con and UKIP), outnumbering 12.9 million voters who opted for parties amongst the progressive bloc of national parties on the centre-left (Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green). Especially so, given the election was fought in the context of the economy, immigration, and the scaremongering tactics of an anti-English SNP bolstering up a Labour

Party which was not perceived strong enough on the economy or on immigration (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015; Ross, 2015).

Nonetheless, the little movement in the ENPP between 2010 and 2015 masks the incredible changes which took place during this election. 2015 marked the highest figure for the ENEP throughout the dataset, and yet the ENPP decreased, albeit marginally, from 2010. It therefore followed that the most sizeable fragmentation in the electoral party system since 1945 resulted in a single-party government and a marginally less-competitive parliamentary share of seats. Curtice (2015) argued that the electoral system and the skewering of geographical vote distribution was making it incredibly difficult for any one party to win a majority of seats despite the Conservatives just doing so.

This argument was interpolated by Green and Prosser, using it to argue that instead of the UK experiencing a return to business as usual (insofar as traditional single-party government is back after a five-year hung-parliament) in 2015, it was rather a "deviation from the new era of party system fragmentation and minority and coalition government" (Green and Prosser, 2016, 5). Whilst the party-system was in fact to tumultuously reverse this fragmentation in 2017 with an ENEP of 2.89 (the lowest since 1979) and an ENPP of 2.48, the consensus during and immediately following the election of 2015 was that multi-party politics was to become a permanent fixture in British politics (see Garland and Terry, 2015; Green and Prosser, 2016; Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015). Only two years separated 2015 from this return to a more concentrated party arena, and further evidences the breakneck pace at which the party system malleates from voter-movements between elections. For 2015, at least, the static ENPP from 2010 was mainly due to the SMP voting system replacing one large third-party with another, despite a great disproportionality relative to the ENEP. As such, the 2015 GE's many sub-plots could go understated given these calculations do not account for which parties constitute the party-system either parliamentarily or electorally.

Chapter 6: The General Election of 1951

The General Election of 1951 was held just twenty months after the election of 1950, in which the Labour Party won a precarious majority of five seats. The election was called with the intention of increasing this majority, a noticeable similarity with the October 1974 GE which occurred after a very short space of time from the previous GE providing no definitive winner. This led some to argue that this election was "simply a second phase of the election of 1950" (Nicholas, 1952, 1). The Conservatives won the election with 329 seats, compared to Labour's 295. What the election is memorable for, despite this failure by Labour to increase their number of seats, was their winning of the popular vote whilst the Conservatives won the most seats due to the disproportionality in the electoral system (FPTP) (see Table 6.1). The 1951 GE is also the second-lowest volatile election in the dataset, vis-à-vis the Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENPP), the ENPP contracting from 2.08 in 1950 to 2.06 in 1951, a change of 0.2 (see Table 1.2).

Table 6.1: 1951 General Election Results

Party	*Stood*	*Elected*	*Gained**	*Lost**	*Net*	*Seats (%)*	*Votes*	*Votes (%)*	*Net (%) **
Con	617	329	23	1	22	51.4	13,717,850	48	4.6
Lab	617	295	2	22	-20	47.2	13,948,883	48.8	2.7
Lib	109	6	1	4	-3	1	730,545	2.6	-6.5
Ind. Nationalist	3	2	2	0	2	0.3	92,787	0.3	N/A

*Represents changes from 1950

Adapted from Butler, 1952

This election has some significant features of which distinguish it heavily from the others in the case-studies. Namely, the predominance of two-partism and the highest joint-vote share (96.8%) recorded between the Conservatives and Labour over the 1945-2019 time period, means that the 1951 election was the peak of the United Kingdom's two-party system, vis-a-vis vote-share. Overall, 497 constituencies had straight two-party competition between the two major parties, compared to the 112 one-on-one contests of 1950. This was, however, mainly because the minor-party Liberals withdrew from many of the seats they had previously contested, allowing the two parties to hold an elevated presence in the national

psyche (Nicholas, 1952; Butler, 1999). Sharing parallels with the Liberals' internal issues in October 1974, the reasons for this vary from financial difficulties and scarce campaign resources so soon after the previous election, with the additional reality that the Liberals' support base was socio-demographically weak and unable to compete with the strength of feeling felt by Conservative and Labour supporters, especially during this time period of concentrated two-party politics (Butler, 1952; Sanders 2003).

Sartori (1976, 107) notes that "the strength of a party is, first of all, its electoral strength". Yet, party funds and connection with the electorate are absolutely necessary for it to secure this strength. For the Liberals, which could not rely on donor funding from wealthy bankrollers, as the Tories could, or trade union groups, as Labour could (Butler, 1999; Cleary and Pollins, 1953), this meant they had to abstain from competing in hundreds of constituencies due to difficulties financing candidates. Interestingly, the Liberals' vote tally in 1950 (over 2.6 million) plummeted to just 760,000 in 1951. Liberal candidates were pulled from 366 constituency contests, suggesting that nearly 2 million ex-Liberal voters across the UK were in constituencies where there was no Liberal candidate, and thus had to opt for a different party, or not vote at all. The vacuum of Liberal candidates therefore became an issue of great significance: Attlee even noted in his memoirs that the General Election would rest "on the way Liberal electors cast their vote" (Attlee, 2019, 208).

Table 6.1 gives us an indication of where the Liberal voters cast their ballots. Votes for the Conservatives in 1951 increased from 12.5 million (1950) to 13.7 million, an uptick in their vote share of 4.5%. Labour's vote also proved robust, adding 700,000 votes from the previous election and increasing its vote share by 2.8%, but not by near as much required to meaningfully galvanize the 1950 Liberal vote (Butler, 1952). Note, though, that although the number of votes cast increased in 1951 from 1950 by 100,000, turnout as a percentage decreased. *The Floating Vote,* a 1949 Conservative research survey, found the ordinary Liberal voter was near-identical to the 'floating voter'-type of elector (Crowcroft and Theakston, 2013), indicating little ideological distance between the Liberal and Tory parties' voter-base, a shared scepticism of Labour, and the Liberals voter-base thus providing an overall a useful market of voters to break into (Crowcroft and Theakston, 2013; Fieldhouse et al., 2019).

In the context of the post-war consensus, the ideological differences between the two major parties were becoming increasingly limited anyway. Liberal voters, who themselves may not

necessarily have immediately Conservative tendencies/sympathies, are usually to be found in-between the Tories and Labour on the political spectrum (Fieldhouse et al., 2019), and are therefore arguably the kind of 'median' voter Sartori writes about when he suggests in a classic two-party system, the main parties converge on the 'median' ground, aka the 'centre-ground'. Crowcroft and Theakston (2013) sum the Tory offensive:

"The Conservatives exploited the issue of austerity and the collapse of the Liberals to capture middle-class floating voters, attract those who previously supported the Liberals, and thus win back seats in suburban areas. While Labour secured large majority in its heartlands, the Conservatives won smaller – but ultimately sufficient – majorities elsewhere. It was a strategy that worked well"

The Labour Party were ejected from office (Jenkins, 1952; Cleary and Pollins, 1953), and the already minute ENPP of 2.08 was lowered still to 2.06. In similar fashion to the Brexit Party's decision to not field candidates in more than half of the seats contested in the 2019 General Election, the influence which the absent Liberal party held on the direction of a GE by not competing was significant. The vacuum to be filled was seized by the Conservatives, but we can also credit the low ENPP with there being no clear third-party fielding candidates to win seats. If anything, the small change in the ENPP from the concentrated 2.08 to 2.06 suggests that the UK's party system was more-or-less a purist two-party system regardless, as the change from 1950, where the Liberals (and minor parties more widely) contested far more seats than they did in 1951. A significant change, however, can be seen in the ENEP from 1950, down from 2.44 to 2.13 in 1951, a reduction of 0.31. This represents the second-largest fall in the ENEP over the 1945-2019 period (2015-17 sees the largest decline of 1.04), which suggests that even during the pre-1974 party landscape, there was still a modest level of electoral support amongst the electorate for the Liberals and other minor parties when they stood candidates, yet not sufficiently concentrated enough at the constituency-level to result in meaningful seat gains.

As discussed in previous chapters, social class was not regarded as a significant determinant of voter-preferences until the late 1950s (Dorling, 2006); social equity, at the time of the 1951 General Election, was still increasing. Despite the problematic international politics preceding the GE; such as the unfavorable Balance of Payments status; growing tensions with Iran over petroleum; and precipitating events in Egypt which lead to the Suez crisis of 1955-56; the 1951 election was framed and fought on domestic issues (Butler; 1999; Jenkins,

1952). Churchill was slightly-able to benefit from the Korean War which broke out in 1950 and position himself as an acclaimed wartime hero (Fry, 2005; Nicholas, 1952), but the pressing issue for voters at the time was the 'cost of living' (Butler, 1999; Jenkins 1952). The post-war economy was experiencing burgeoning inflation and rising tax burdens, during a time of rising social equity, meaning voters from all echelons of society were affected. With the Conservatives making domestic strife the focus of their campaign (CDC, 1951), enabled by a Labour government reluctant to campaign on its international record (Jenkins, 1952), they were able to cut-through to an electorate weary and tiresome of the Labour government. The social-cleavage of socio-economic status, therefore, was narrowing simultaneously with a narrowing of ideological difference between the two major parties amidst the post-war consensus. This suggests that, to an extent, some of the foundations which led to the fragmentation of the party system and the increased sophistication of voters to switch parties was already evident in an election so early on over the post-war timeline of the UK's party system. The marginal decrease of the ENPP, however, as well as the significant decrease in the ENEP, masks these implications.

Economically, the policies proposed by both parties were minimal in difference as to how they pledged to respond to the economic situation. As per the Keynesian post-war settlement, the predominant clashes were over the nationalisation of steel which was of little importance in the minds of voters (Jenkins, 1952) and Labour's so-called *restrictive* economic policy (Butler, 1999); which the Tories' analysis correlated with inflationary pressures and balance of payments problems. The flagging Labour party, out of steam since fulfilling the majority of its 1945 pledges and making little in-roads to the direction of travel set in February 1950, became perhaps the deciding factor in voters' minds which enabled the Conservative victory. By framing an election campaign on the image of Labour in government, rather than offering their own distinguishable alternate vision except a shifting of government power between the parties, the election still resulted in an indecisive indication of which party voters' en-masse preferred. Perhaps it is no surprise then, that many of the 2-million ex-Liberal floating voters at this election opted to back the Conservatives over Labour at this election, due to the impression of the Labour government a sinking ship.

However, what has been argued thus far is not to diminish class as a key determinant of voting in 1951 altogether. Party alignment, connected with class cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967), was still active and strong enough to be a noteworthy factor in how electors casted their ballots in 1951. Labour, for example, were able to hold on to nearly all of their

core-supporters from the previous election (Butler, 1952), whilst gaining 700,000 extra votes since 1950. The Conservatives, also polled an increased vote from 1950, as discussed, with the help of attracting Liberal voters. Cleary and Pollins (1953) illustrates data from Gallup which indicates 60% of ex-Liberal voters voted Conservative in 1951, whereas 40% of 1950 Liberal voters voted Labour in 1951. As an approximate measure, and evidenced in Table 6.1, those swings were enough to win the Conservatives a majority whilst still producing an impressive uptick in Labour's vote-share after 6 years in government.

The implication here is that the vote-swings which caused the shift in the parliamentary makeup came not from Labour-Tory vote-switching, or vice-versa, but from ex-Liberals' vote-switching to either the Labour or Conservative parties. Liberal voters, previously described in this chapter as 'Floating' voters (see Crowcroft and Theakston, 2013), were less aligned to their party in comparison to how Labour and Conservative supporters felt towards their respective parties (Cleary and Pollins, 1953; Butler and Stokes, 1974). Vast is the amount of literature on the decline of the Liberal party, most highlighting the decline of religion and its associated divides as a major correlation offered by scholars to partially explain its' relegation to a minor party (Cleary and Pollins, 1953; Butler and Stokes, 1974), and with the breakdown of these societal divides which upheld the Liberal-Tory duopoly came fresh alignments surrounding employer-employee, and rural-urban, divides, amongst others (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Butler and Stokes, 1969). Labour and Conservative alignments took hold over these 'new' cleavages in the inter-war years of the 1920s, and consolidated over the following years. The strength of feeling and loyalty amongst Labour or Conservative supporters may have originated from their socio-economic background, but their partisan alignment proved resilient despite increasing social equity in the immediate post-war years.

This theory of partisan alignment is supported by evidence of voters' engagement with political parties beyond voting-patterns, such as membership status, a variable I will return to in the next chapter. A House of Commons briefing paper notes that the Labour Party claimed membership of over 1 million people around the time of the early 1950s, (Audickas et al. 2019). Conjunctively, the Conservatives had an estimated figure at any point between 1946 and 1953 of anywhere between 910,000 to 2.6 million card-carrying members (Audickas et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2019). Dalton and Wittenberg (2002) suggest partisan dealignment is evidenced in dwindling membership of political parties; with the 1950s being

the decade in which party membership peaked; further evidencing a strong two-party system as implied by the lower ENPs throughout the decade relative to later elections.

Seyd and Whiteley (2004) provide an estimate that by the end of the 1950s, membership of the Liberal party was in excess of 243,000 members. Comparing this to Conservative (2.3m) and Labour (900,000) membership estimates of the same time (Thompson et al., 2019), we can infer that the Liberal's membership number was equally dwarfed by the membership of the major two parties. Their identification by scholars to be 'floating' voters is also a consideration as to their loose attachment to any one party, even their own.

Nevertheless, the strength of feeling and identification voters held with *all* parties at this time are extremely difficult to ascertain, for the first behavioral surveys of partisan-relationships were still a few years off being conducted and there is a danger of assimilating membership and identification, the two are separate, but we can assume that the voters with the strongest attachments to certain parties would likely be members. I elected to use membership figures, despite them being estimates, as they do provide us with useful indicators and information which suggests that parties enjoyed support which spanned breadth and depth; evidenced by the density of membership. We can therefore infer from this that the 1950s, being the decade where the highest share of the electorate were also members of political parties, was the high-watermark for partisan alignment. This also partially explains why the 1951 General Election, thus, ranks among the least-volatile elections over the time period I am analysing.

For these factors outlined above, the low volatility of the ENPP in 1951 has been contextualised. Firstly, the 497 constituencies in which the two major parties had straight two-party battlegrounds, is perhaps the strongest argument yet for the UK's party system at this time to be defined as 'two-party'. Though I highlighted the prominence of the Liberal's absence, and the significant impact the Liberals had on the election by not standing candidates, they enabled a highly-competitive, elitist mode of electioneering by the Tories and Labour, resulting in the highest joint-vote share over the entire post-war general election landscape. This inevitably meant that the ENPP would contract, and so too the ENEP. Much like the election of October 1974, the actual result of the election offered an indecisive verdict by the electorate, but reinforces notions discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Three that, predating the turning-point election of February 1974, the UK's party system was one ultimately characterised by centripetal two-party competition, firm partisan attachments for the Conservatives and Labour, and poor showings for minor parties disadvantaged by both

inadequate resources and geographical vote biases. However, the substantial fall in the ENEP from 1950 also implies that there was meaningful electoral support for parties beyond the Conservatives and Labour, but that 1951, due to minor parties not fielding many candidates, masks this appetite. Interestingly, despite this GE having the lowest ENEP in the dataset, it did not produce the lowest ENPP. It would take until 1959 for this to take place, an election where the ENEP was higher than in 1951 by 0.40 (2.53); further evidence, as argued throughout this thesis, that FPTP is an unreliable means of producing reflective outcomes proportional to the electorate's wishes. The chasm between the vote winners and the seat winners in 1951 shares parallels with February 1974 (see Chapter Three) and the relatively static volatility of the ENPP invokes similarities with the October 1974 GE (see Chapter Seven), where similar themes of an electorate largely unchanged in mind since the preceding election, amidst growing disparities between votes-cast and seats-won per party, ensured movements in the composition of the party system remained stagnant.

Chapter Seven: The General Election of October 1974

Taking place on the 10th October that year, the second General Election (GE) of 1974 was the least-volatile GE of the dataset vis-à-vis the ENPP, with a net-movement of zero from February that year. The period of time between the February and October elections in 1974 (just 224 days) was the shortest in the scope of this thesis. Harold Wilson was returned as Prime Minister and won a very slender majority of 3 seats for the Labour Party, winning 319 seats in total and topping the popular-vote, in contrast to the outcome of February's GE (see Chapter 3). The Conservative Party lost 20 seats they had won just 8 months earlier, resulting in them taking 277 seats; whereas the repudiation of the immediate post-war party system (one characterised by two-partism at the electoral and parliamentary level and strong class/partisan alignment), continued with the minor parties consolidating their breakthroughs.

Table 7.1: Oct 1974 General Election Results

Party	*Stood*	*Elected*	*Gained**	*Lost**	*Net*	*Seats (%)*	*Votes*	*Votes (%)*	*Net (%)**
Con	622	277	2	22	-20	43.6	10,462,565	35.8	-2.1
Lab	623	319	19	1	18	50.2	11,457,079	39.2	2
Lib	619	13	1	2	-1	2.1	5,346,704	18.3	-2.1
SNP	71	11	4	0	4	1.7	839,617	2.9	0.9

*Represents changes from February 1974

Adapted from Butler & Kavanagh, 1974

First, the importance of how the United Kingdom's party system was realigning at this critical juncture cannot go understated. To best illustrate, I draw from Butler and Kavanagh (1974); "In elections from 1945 to 1970 Liberals and all minor parties combined had won on average only 7% of the UK vote; in the two general elections of 1974 they secured 25%" (p.2). The Scottish National Party (SNP) rose to increased prominence in October 1974 and bettered their previous successes in the February GE, achieving 4 constituency gains to win 11 seats in Scotland. This came thanks to an uptick of 0.9% of their vote-share nationally to 2.9% (see Table 7.1) and an arresting increase of 8.5% of their vote-share in Scotland alone, where the SNP attained 30.4% of the vote to become the second-largest party in the electoral arena. This did not, however, translate into a major share of the seats for the SNP in Scotland

due to the perverting effects of FPTP, which enabled the Conservatives instead to win 5 more seats than the SNP (16) in defiance of winning 5.7% of the vote less than them. Labour in Scotland likewise disproportionally benefitted from FPTP, on a considerably larger scale; winning 36.3% of the vote and taking 57.7% of the seats in the region. Due to their vulnerability deriving from FPTP's suppression-effect on minor parties, the SNP spent three-times the mean expenditure in the seats it won in February 1974 than Labour, further evidencing the hypothesis that smaller parties were prioritising the defence of seats they held than trying to take new ones (Johnston, 1977) in this election. The reasons for minor-parties to prioritise seat-retention likely varied in October 1974, and not just limited to Scotland either. As a result, the ENPP's absolute staticism from the previous election can partially credit these minor-parties' distribution of resources as a factor.

For example, the Liberal Party across Great Britain were thrilled with their successes in February 1974, winning 19.3% of the vote but only 2.2% of the seat-share to show for it (see Ch. 3). Their relentless campaign for electoral reform and the scrapping of FPTP as the system for voting in General Elections required as many votes as possible; retaining the 6 million+ voters they attracted in February 1974 would be paramount to this (Johnson, 1977; Alt et al., 1977). Indubitably, both the SNP and the Liberals wanted to exploit their earlier successes in February 1974 and build on these with further gains, but they were not naïve enough to ignore how difficult it was for them to compete effectively under the electoral system despite this new era of political realignment (Butler and Kavanagh, 1975) and so trade-offs had to be made on campaign resources and financial distribution, at a time when party coffers across the board were already under strain having only fought a high-stakes election campaign eight months previously (Johnston, 1977). The Liberals actually made a net-loss of 1 seat at this GE, the SNP gaining 4, and Plaid Cymru gaining 1, despite a then record-high in the ENEP, rising 0.3 points to 3.16 from 3.13 (February 1974). Comparative to other elections, however, the rise of 0.3 in the ENEP is minimal, and is the smallest change in the variable over the 1945-2019 dataset. Nonetheless, more parties than ever before were attracting considerable volumes of votes from across the electorate; the Liberals in particular suffering from the disproportionality more than any other party in October 1974; gaining 18.3% of the national vote, roughly succeeding in retaining their February voters, down just 2.1%, but having the share of seats in parliament of just 2.1%.

In contrast, the Labour Party was the greatest beneficiary of the disproportionality caused under FPTP, taking 50.2% of the seats in the House of Commons, albeit with a majority of

just three. It won 319 seats on a vote-share of 39.2%, and in doing so marked the first time that a party had formed a government despite winning less than 40% of the national vote (Butler and Butler, 2011). As February 1974 was very much a critical turning-point for British politics; evidenced in the high turnout, commonplace vote-switching amidst receding differences between the social classes, the Conservatives' loss of Ulster Unionist support, and the rise of the Liberal Party to name but a few examples of what made that General Election so remarkable (see Chapter 3), October 1974 may be justifiably perceived as an entrenchment of this notable realignment, therefore offering a reason as to why this election is the least-volatile regarding the scale of change in the ENPP from the GE immediately before.

However, in a clear change from February, the level of turnout decreased by 6% to 72.8%. Excluding Northern Ireland, Denver and Garnett (2021) note that turnout figures fell in all but three seats (pp.58-59), representing a palpable decline in political participation just 224 days after the second-highest figure of voters participating in a General Election in the dataset (1945-2019). The inaccuracies of the electoral register, insofar as that it would not have entirely been updated since February and therefore would not have accounted for internal migration and deaths, can only explain a marginal decline. Instead, we can analyse the relationship between marginality and political participation at the constituency-level as done in Chapter 4; the relationship being that the perceived marginality of a seat changing which party represents it in Parliament affects turnout. In Chapter 4, analysing the 1997 General Election, the turnout for that election (71.3%) was noted to be the lowest since 1935, despite the strong build-up of momentum electorally and the intensity of media coverage of the campaign leading up to the vote (see Ch. 4). Yet, rather than seeing the low turnout as unexpected in an election which delivered the third-most volatile ENPP figure in the dataset, analysis offered by Pattie and Johnston (2001) evidenced that the widely-predicted landslide for one party resulted in a supressed turnout figure; turnout falling the least in Conservative seats which went Labour, and the most in safe Labour seats (Pattie and Johnston, 2001; Crewe et al., 1997). Extrapolating that understanding of the relationship to the October 1997 election, the correlation between a seats' marginality and turnout appears decidedly strong. To support this, I draw from Denver and Hands' (1985) study into marginality and turnout which demonstrates that the correlation co-efficient between marginality and turnout to be 0.48 in this contest, chronologically the highest coefficient than ever before in the datasets offered (Denver and Hands, 1985, 358).

Yet, whilst voter perceptions are important vis-à-vis marginality and turnout, the efforts of political parties themselves are also worthy of consideration (Denver and Hands, 1985) as they allocate resources to winnable seats and concentrate campaign efforts in marginal constituencies, thereby hoping to stimulate voter participation (Webb and Bale, 2022; Denver et al., 2022). October 1974 shows a positive correlation between the previous marginality in February 1974 and campaign expenditure (Denver and Hands, 1985, 386), but as discussed above, with this election being held so shortly after the previous one, the capability of political parties was limited due to finite resources and a generally decreasing limit on campaign expenditure. Therefore, with parties having less resources to distribute, and as Denver and Hands (1985) refer to their activities to be perhaps more convincing when attempting to reason marginality and turnout than notions of voter perception, the low turnout in October 1974 can be better understood. However, the strength between the voter-perceptions of marginality in their constituency and turnout was greater than the link between political parties and turnout at this election (Denver and Hands, 1985)

This is likely because this GE does, though, despite being the least-volatile GE in the thesis, provide further evidence of the partisan dealignment detailed across these pages, and written about extensively in this field of academia (see Butler and Stokes, 1974; Crewe et al., 1977; Gamble, 1984; Webb and Bale, 2021). The genuine changes in the relationship between political parties and voters which exacerbated after post-1970 was a reflection of not just how voters were becoming increasingly sophisticated in their ability to choose which party to vote for, but also whether to bother casting a vote altogether. The efforts of parties in October 1974, regardless of how many resources or money they could target the voter with (out of the little resources and money all the parties they had at the time), seemingly would not have made much more of a difference to how electors would vote if our understanding of a less-responsive voter-base to political party efforts is correct. The Liberals' successes in February 1974 and the ensuing volatility in that GE were symptomatic of a populace uninspired by the two-party system and the perceptions of complacency amongst both the Conservatives and Labour to converge in their principles of economic management (Crewe et al., 1974; Gamble, 1984, Denver et al., 2022). In October 1974, not turning-out to vote appears to be how millions of electors expressed their dissatisfaction; the anti-establishment Liberal party suffering, albeit marginally, as a result. Even the swings between parties were consistently small across the UK in this GE; only 2.4% from Conservative to Labour, just 21 net-movements to the Conservatives across all 623 mainland constituencies (Butler and

Kavanagh, 1975). The Conservatives' support held-up relatively strong in the marginal seats they were defending from February 1974, so consequentially, Labour's majority of 3 seats meant that it had failed to inspire a convincing lead over the other parties and therefore far from a decisive win that Wilson was hoping for.

A contributing factor, related to the above discussion about party resources, is the dwindling number of people who do not just strongly identify with any one party, but of membership and activists too. Taking the assumption that the Liberals in October 1974 had a weak socio-demographic support base (Sanders, 2003), partly because of its centrist ideology, their party membership as a share of the electorate in the UK was less than 0.5%, comparatively low to the Conservatives' 2.8% and Labour's 1.7%. (Audickas et al., 2019). Nevertheless, these figures for the main two parties were comparatively lower than their peak-recorded memberships in the early 1950s, the Conservatives boasting a high of 2.8 million members in 1953 and over a million for Labour at approximately the same time; both figures a larger share of the electorate than they were in October 1974. This offers us an insight into the then-new way of how elections were being fought by political parties; a transition away from traditional campaigning and the flooding of streets with activists and canvassers as the number of people available and willing to do so was on decline, towards an increasing reliance upon media-dominated mediums to communicate with the electorate (Denver and Hands, 1985; Webb and Bale, 2021). Denver and Hands (1985) found that in the elections held during the early-mid 1970s, the centrally-focussed campaigns provided little stimuli for electors at the constituency level to turn out and vote. Instead, having campaigns ran from a distance and on a national-focus, at a time when voters were already having difficulty distinguishing between the two main parties on points of economic principle and governance (see above; Gamble, 1985), the thought of voting for Conservative candidates or Labour candidates appeared unappealing for so many voters; millions opted for third-parties or chose not to vote altogether. This is evidenced in the long-term trends in the two-party share for the Conservatives and Labour (see Figure 1.2), and 1974 was the watershed year which precipitated further declines in their joint-share (as a percentage) of the national vote.

In fact, the rise and breakthrough of the Liberal Party during the early 1970s was itself a symptom of this fundamental breakdown of partisanship. As alluded to in Chapter 3, the Liberal Party in the February 1974 GE drew support fairly equally from both Conservative and Labour voters (see Butler and Kavanagh, 1974, 259), when they achieved their best result to that date over the time-period this thesis is concerned with. The notable thing about their

ability to do so is that previously the two main parties were able to successfully avert any meaningful swing towards the Liberals by playing on eleventh-hour anxieties of *change* (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974, 129). Evidently, such attempts by the Conservatives or Labour in February 1974 were halted by an increasingly discontented electoral franchise actually pining for systemic reform of the political order. It is in this respect that we can almost view the Liberal surge in the early 1970s as a proxy for such discontent and the broader realignment of British politics. When the GE of February 1974 was fought on the question of 'Who Governs?' (Butler and Kavanagh, 1975), the electorate opted to send a message of rejection to both of the major parties. The results of that election, as discussed in Chapter 3, were very mixed and provided no clear answer to that question. The October 1974 GE cemented the views expressed by the electorate only 8 months earlier, handing another indication that neither of the major parties were up to the job of governing competently and representatively. We can interpret that due to the disappointment felt by nearly all the parties in this October contest (except the SNP which of course had ample reasons for celebration), this election was the consolidation of feelings that the two-party system was no longer serving the breadth of the UK; the absence of any movement in the ENPP and the stagnant increase in the ENEP evidences this understanding given that voters opted for change in February 1974, and had not given-up on their discontents by October.

As a consequence, the rise in the effective number of parties which materialised after 1970 meant that it was no longer plausible that the UK could be regarded a categorical case of two-partism in the electoral arena, and whilst this does not directly translate into a more pluralistic parliamentary arena, the entire system appears less definitively like the one characterised by a duopoly and one-on-one contests at the constituency level between the Conservatives and Labour. The decisive shift away from this mode of party competition can be traced to the February election of 1974 (for the reasons analysed in Chapter 3; see Johnston et al., 1994), and is made all the starker in future elections after the reinforcement of this trend in October 1974. To emphasise the importance of the developments which materialised in the elections of 1974, Webb and Bale (2021) point out that in 1964, "93 per cent of [constituency] contests in Britain were direct confrontations between Labour and the Conservatives (and 92 per cent of them still were in 1970), just 67 per cent (432/641) were in 1992" (p. 10). As a reflection of not just the national mood, but of a party-system undergoing transformation, the elections of 1974 are critical to better understand how party system change occurs in the UK, and how, in the grand scheme of events, can happen notably quickly. That is not to say, however, that

changes in the socio-demographical sense are rapid. In fact, these shifts can be long-term developments and not materialise in political participation for a long time after they begin, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 6; the main body of literature which I believe offers a useful insight in to the multi-partism observed in the February and October of 1974 is Butler and Stokes' *Political Change in Britain* (1971), where the authors critically reason deteriorating partisanship and social cleavages to have come to fruition by the early 1970s, concluding changes which began in earnest during the late 1950s/1960s. Therefore, whilst volatility in the UK's party system can rapidly fluctuate in successive elections held relatively close to one another, the underlying reasons which can produce the wildly varying figures in the effective number of parties could indeed be more medium-long term transformations which translate into voting behaviour. The Single-Member Plurality (SMP) voting system, however, via imposing high thresholds for third-parties to climb in order to become not just a political party which lots of people vote for but to become a political party which harbours effectiveness in the policy-making/law-making arena, ensures that such rapid changes in voter behaviour are kept artificially low, benefitting the two major parties instead of distributing effectiveness amongst the plurality of actors (parties) which reflect the electorate at-large.

The heterogeneity of the party system as of October 1974 was indifferent to the composition in the election beforehand, at least as far as the ENPP is concerned. Nevertheless, this case-study has drawn from studies of the General Election result, detailed several reasons behind these results whilst also discussing how October 1974 solidified notions of a changing electorate and their increased mobility vis-à-vis political participation. Contrasting the GE of October 1974 and the other elections covered in the case-studies of the thesis, we can almost-confidently partially attribute the net-zero volatility in the ENPP to the short space of time between this contest and the one held immediately beforehand, exacerbated more so by the strength of vexation with the Labour and Conservative parties. Where the 2015 contest proved little change in the number of effective parties in parliament, a decrease of just 0.3, after five-years due to the almost like-for-like replacement of the Liberal Democrats by the SNP in that election as the third-largest parliamentary party, the election of 1951 took place only twenty months after its' preceding election and also produced a concentration of the ENPP of 0.3. Unlike the election of 1951, where 2 million ex-Liberal voters were denied the opportunity to cast their ballot for their 1950 choice due to a variety of factors (see Chapter 6), voters dissatisfied with the two major parties were able to opt for their third-party this

time around thanks to the optimism generated for third-parties in February 1974 and the parties' determination to exploit that, notwithstanding their mixed results in this election. As argued in Chapter 5, the miniscule change in the ENPP at the 1951 General Election was predominantly due to the absence of the Liberals being able to compete in 497 constituencies, thus narrowly concentrating the contest electorally albeit amidst a decreased turnout. Although turnout fell in October 1974 from February, the option to vote for the same party as voters did in February remained an option. Therefore, it is not necessarily just the amount of time between the General Elections which resulted in low-to-no volatility in the ENPP, as the 2015 case-study demonstrates, but the plurality of candidates and the strength of voter sentiments in the political sphere.

As aforementioned in previous chapters, partisan-alignment was strong and resilient in the twenty years or so since 1945, and I drew from a variety of qualitative and quantitative data in Chapter 6 to conclude that the General Election of 1951 was the peak of two-partism in the UK over the time-period I am analysing; for example, the highest joint-vote share for the Conservatives and Labour (of 96%) at that election than any other between 1945 and 2019. Sanders (2003) pointed out that the Liberals had previously suffered from a weak support base and that was to their disadvantage in elections preceding 1974, but the durability of their backing from vast swathes of the electorate in the elections of 1974 also supports the argument that the almost like-for-like standing in this election, whether it be amongst seats contested by each party, the attitudes of electors, and even the unconvincing win for the largest party ensured that the ENPP remained stagnant in 1974, a phenomena which could have been replicated in 1951 had there been a democratisation of third-party candidates in that election.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The primary objective of this thesis was to propose a detailed account of party system change at Westminster elections since 1945, offering a comparative approach to the contrasting elections which reflected a highly volatile electorate, against those elections where there was little change. As argued throughout, the UK's party system has undergone substantial development since 1945, and at times, has done so during rapid intervals of change, directly challenging linear assumptions of party system change in the UK. This concluding chapter will recap and discuss the key trends and implications we can draw from the preceding chapters; they include the voting-system's impact on all of these elections and the party system at Westminster, and the fundamental political realignments and dealignments which have taken place. On the former, the first-past-the-post voting system at General Elections has disproportionately impacted vote and seat distributions, exacerbating from the 1970s when the party system began to fragment and minor parties (e.g., the Liberals) experienced a substantial increase in support from voters but failed to see an equitable rise in parliamentary representation. For the latter, evidence of realignments in the party system have been prominent throughout the thesis, especially during and after social class and party preferences began to become less homogenous as key voting determinants. This chapter will then close with a summing up of the potential wider implications of this research for further inquiry, namely concerning the wider-UK party arenas, beyond just analysing party system change at Westminster elections.

On the pace of party system change at Westminster elections, this thesis had suggested that change is not linear; consistent change does not necessarily take place at a gradual pace over several elections, but can occur at swift and rapid intervals as it did during the 1945-2019 period in the UK's party system, vis-à-vis large fluctuations in the ENPP. For instance, the 2005 election, as detailed in Chapter Two, saw the ENPP increase by 0.29 to 2.46; the largest change in the dataset, and was contextualised in the case-study as being the result of a declining Labour party, a relatively stagnant Tory recovery, and the high-watermark of Liberal Democrat parliamentary representation. This election, for contrast, took place only eight years after the third-highest volatile election (as measured by changes in the ENPP) in 1997; an election which pulled the ENPP in the opposite way, and a significant data-point which reflected the extensive realignments surrounding the ideological and socio-

demographic base of the Labour Party. Interestingly, the winning party after each of these elections was the Labour Party under Blair.

The short period of time between these two volatile elections evidences the aforementioned implication, that party system change can, and does, occur at pace. It also suggests that despite the rigidity of our parliamentary system, the party arena itself is relatively fluid, and the elections covered in this thesis reflect an increasingly sophisticated voter-base which has become more volatile in their voting patterns than they were during the earlier years of the post-war political landscape. For example, Chapter One contrasted the ENP during the 1945-1970 period, and post-1970 to the most recent available data point in 2019. To recap, the mean ENPP for the former period was 2.05, and then rose to a mean of 2.30 during the latter. In the same chapter, the joint-vote share (%) between the two major parties was also subject to comparison during the two time periods; a mean joint-vote share of 90.3% between 1945 and 1970, followed by a mean of 73.4%. The 2017 election, however, saw the highest joint-vote share (%) for the Conservatives and Labour since 1970: 82.4% share of the vote, up from 67.3% in 2015, before falling again in 2019 (see Figure 2.1); further evidencing volatility. This points to a distinct development in voters' autonomy and increased tendency to switch votes between elections, thus making election outcomes steadily more unpredictable as partisan and socio-demographic alignments evidenced in the first 25 years of the data-set eroding in the more fragmented party system which came to be reflected in post-1970 elections. Party system change is therefore not constant, nor linear. Instead, there are peaks and troughs and these elections which act as useful data-points to identify where and when changes take place point to distinctive junctures which genuinely disrupt how many effective parties there are.

To better appreciate the fragmentation in the party system in post-1970 elections, compared to the relatively static composition of the party system prior, the ENEP during 1945-1970 mean-averaged 2.39, and then substantially increased to a mean of 3.30 between February 1974-2019. The ENEP, as argued in Chapter One, is a more accurate proxy for helping us understand where voters' preferences truly are, as this measure reflects the relative strength of parties based on their popular vote share. The ENEP, therefore, suggests that the UK exhibits a multi-party system at the electoral level, pointing to an electorate which has progressed beyond the grip of the two major parties. Yet, as discussed throughout all the case studies, such volatility and fragmentation of relative party strength at the electoral level is distorted and is not channelled into a proportionate degree of fragmented party power at the

parliamentary level. Where the greatest changes in the ENPP took place (e.g., 2005, Feb 1974, 1997), the change in the ENEP was greater, and in the case of 1997, fluctuated in the opposite direction of the ENPP (the ENEP increased by 0.16, whereas the ENPP decreased by 0.14). The increased multi-partism which materialised in the earliest post-war hung-parliament of February 1974 was the first indication that the electorate were moving on from the purist majoritarianism of the Conservatives and Labour at Westminster elections. The SMP voting system stifled this development towards a more pluralistic party arena in Parliament; a consequence of this being that even at the latest data-point, in 2019, the Conservatives won 56.2% of the seats, a disproportionate result given they won 43.6% of the vote. That same election, the ENEP outsized the ENPP by 0.89 (see Table 1.1), implying that the Westminster system is still to catch-up on the movements and preferences of voters which accelerated in volatility from the early 1970s.

The most disproportionate election vis-à-vis vote share (%) and seat share (%) on-record was the election of 2015, discussed in Chapter Five. The relatively static change in the ENPP between 2010 and 2015 fogs the significant changes which occurred in the party system at this election; the highest ENEP in the dataset whilst the ENPP contracted, albeit minutely. The greatest fragmentation in the party-system vis-à-vis vote-share resulted in a return to single-party majority government after a period of coalition, and further evidences not just the divergence of voter-preferences and how many parties enjoy relative strength in the legislature, but also the speed at which party system change can happen. As detailed in the case-study, far from being remembered solely for the return of single-party majority government, the election also saw the almost like-for-like replacement of the Liberal Democrats as the third-largest party by the SNP, and the electoral surge of UKIP despite failing to breakthrough with any meaningful seat gains. The lesson from this election was that parties once on the fringe of politics were becoming mainstream; the data-point which offers the strongest indication of a volatile electorate. Contrasting this fragmentation in 2015 with the election results of 2017, however, upsets much of the commentary which immediately followed 2015; the seat- and vote-shares of the Conservatives and Labour concentrate in favour of a more traditional demonstration of two-partism; again, evidencing how quickly party system change can fluctuate to varying degrees over relatively short periods of time between elections.

There are some elections however, such as the elections of 1951 and October 1974, which reflect little had changed in the mind of the public about their party preference since the

previous election. A reason for this, though, is likely because these contests were held so close to their preceding elections in a way that, for example, 2017 wasn't to 2015. The election of 1951 was held just twenty months after 1950; the election of October 1974 being held just eight months after the February vote, and unlike the time period between 2015 and 2017, there was an absence of a critical turning-point in politics between these contests, on a scale such as the UK's decision to leave the European Union during the 2016 referendum. The two elections reinforced the results of their preceding elections to various extents; 1951 reinforcing the elitist two-party competition electorally and parliamentarily despite a change of government, and October 1974 emboldening claims of a transition away from traditional two-party politics to a more pluralistic, volatile party arena which materialised eight months prior. The parallels between the two were discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, primarily both elections reflected an electorate largely unchanged in mind. Both, despite bearing static changes in the ENPP, were noteworthy contests nonetheless and the case-studies evidenced them to be worthy time-stamps in the analysis of the long-term trends and changes in the UK's party system.

The key theme which runs recurrent throughout the time-period, whether it be of the earlier elections in the 1950s or the 2010s, and to varying degrees of relativity, is the aforementioned suppression of party representation as a consequence of the UK's voting system. The trend of increased distortion was exacerbated by developments in the party system from the 1970s which saw more parties competing for votes than ever before, a trend accelerating in almost each election since. Across Europe, the only other country to use First-Past-The-Post for General Elections is Belarus, a country known to suffer a great democratic deficit. The same voting system leads to election results which hand power to a party which did not win the majority of votes; in-fact, no party has won more than 50% of the popular vote in the entire dataset, yet barring rare instances where a hung-parliament has arisen, single-party majority government is the norm. The 2005 case-study discussed the implications of a Labour government which enjoyed 55.2% of the seats despite achieving only 35.2% of the vote; whereas elections such as those held in 1951 and in February 1974 saw parties gain office, the former as a single-party majority government and the latter form a minority administration, despite not even winning the popular vote.

All of these elections, however, have taken place amidst increasing political realignments and dealignments. No-longer is the UK party system one defined by traditional social cleavages such as social class and commensurate strong party loyalties. The thesis, in particular during

Chapters Three and Seven, discussed in-depth the weakening of the attachments between certain socio-demographic bases and political parties. The thesis credits the wearing down of distinct and homogenous social classes as a reason for this, namely resulting from the developing structures of the socio-economic composition since the end of World War II. In Chapter Six, the Conservative and Labour parties were found to have been able to retain their grip amongst their traditional voters; it was movements from the 1950 Liberal voters which swung the election in favour of the Conservatives. By the time we reach the most recent election which formed a case-study, in 2015 (Chapter Five), class is almost a redundant factor in determining how a voter may cast their ballot, with watershed elections like 1997 (Chapter Four) proving the vast extent of voter-movements between the Conservatives and Labour, and from these major parties to minor parties to be anything but understated. Realignments, therefore, are especially evident where new and emerging social cleavages appear, either between the centre and periphery of the political spectrum as they have done consistently from the 1970s; meaning that social-cleavages are far from redundant or non-existent. Instead, relatively newer divides have been drawn where class was once the pivotal determinant, despite the increased sophistication of voters themselves to switch their votes between elections.

Preferences on EU membership, for example, engendered a key indicator of how voters may vote, to a lesser extent in 2015, but such preferences were certainly more prominent in the General Elections of 2017 and 2019 (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020; Webb and Bale, 2021). Taking place between the 2015 and 2017 elections, the EU Referendum result brought about a tumultuous resurgence in two-party vote-share and the lower ENEP/ENPP in 2017 (see Table 1.1) reflects this; what followed in 2019 after the replacement of Theresa May with Boris Johnson was the undoing of this two-party concentration in the ENEP but further suppressed the ENPP. EU preferences, and all of their implications at the time, are therefore credited with being the cause of how the party system ebbed-and-flowed in the latter half of the 2010s, and further shows party system change is far from linear nor gradual. Even between the opposing camps on the Brexit debate, there are signs of other social cleavages; educational attainment, age, and geography to name but a few, all of which have the potential to become part and package of the new values cleavage (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020; Surridge, 2021). The implication this has for the UK's party system, though, insofar as that EU preferences will continue to be a wedge-determinant and remain a significant social cleavage is likely to be temporary. This is because the potency of the divide has since been

swamped by a multitude of other issues (Walker, 2022; Yougov, 2022), and as competing parties have come to coalesce around a common agreement that the UK will not re-join the EU (Walker, 2022), we will have to wait until the next election to observe which factors will significantly determine how the electorate opt to place their vote.

The major political parties and the party system have, however, been proven to be relatively resilient over the time-period analysed, despite the changing composition and pace of change within it; and will likely continue to remain resilient. This is because for as long as first-past-the-post stifles electoral reform and the introduction of more proportional elections, which is likely only to come about when the greatest beneficiaries of it (the Conservatives and Labour) apply themselves to the cause, and they can continue to evolve and adapt to the electorate's dynamic and changing priorities, the major parties can expect to dominate national politics in the UK for the foreseeable future.

For further lines of inquiry, I acknowledged that this thesis was limited to analysing Westminster elections exclusively in Chapter One. Yet, the UK has multiple electoral and democratic arenas and structures, each hosting various forms of party competition, composition, and representation; some of which can be found, for example, in the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, local councils, Police and Crime Commissioner elections, until 2019, European Elections, and at the constituency level in all of these (including General Elections). The methodology which underpinned this thesis was interpolated from Laakso & Taagepera (1979), whose ENP criterions were in-turn concerned with national elections. Since then, as aforementioned, a lot more party competition is done in the UK outside the context of General Elections, which raises several implications further study could research. Namely, are there observable differences in voter behaviour in these other party contests which take place between national contests? Reif and Schmitt's (1980) conceptual theory of First- and Second- Order elections would suggest so; as would the proportionality between vote share (%) and seat share (%) in some of these contests which eliminate the need for tactical voting.

For example, data could be run for elections in the devolved administrations or local government in the UK to find out if the volatility in the party system at General Elections matches up with changes in these other contests. Datasets could be collated of Scottish and Welsh elections for their respective devolved administrations from the last two decades; are there spikes in Westminster voting patterns which are not replicated in these other elections?

If so, this would further evidence the proposals in this thesis that change is not actually gradual, nor does change equally exist in every area in the UK. Would there be similar patterns of safe seats as we see at Westminster, and equally do those seats which vote a certain way in General Elections swing a different way in these other contests? Why may this be the case? There is also the potential to study overlaps should they exist, between General Elections and other contests, one line of inquiry could concern the case of whether Scotland loses faith in Labour before England does, or before? Does Wales follow Scotland or England or forge its own path? These nuanced pointers would be interesting to pursue and would hold wider applicability. Hypothetically, such a study could time-stamp whether certain regions are behind or ahead in producing trends towards or against certain parties and issues, something the parties themselves and political strategists will be interested in.

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