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MANAGING COMPETING PROJECTS: UNPACKING THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF BREXIT

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Introduction

During the 1990s and 2000s EU-member state relations were predominantly framed in terms of Europeanization, the process of 'domestic adaptation to European regional integration' (Vink and Graziano 2007: 7). The Eurozone, refugee and Brexit crises have presented a fundamental challenge to the Europeanization perspective. Policy-making has become more politicized and the direction of analysis has moved from top-down to bottom-up, reflecting the widening of participation in European policy that has arisen during the crises. The UK referendum was called because of increasing domestic controversy around the implications of EU membership for British politics and public policy. The referendum outcome has set in train a process whereby the UK departs from the EU, aimed at a reversal of the process of Europeanization.

It is now timely to re-visit how we interpret the impact of domestic politics on European policy, taking the empirical evidence afforded by Brexit. We understand Brexit as the lead-up to the June 2016 vote by the British electorate to leave the EU and the process of dis-engagement that it has set in train. The paper is structured in four parts. We start by briefly reviewing the insights of the existing literature, such as liberal intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. We then explore the key interpretations offered in the emerging Brexit literature. The next section constructs an alternative explanation for the 'new' domestic politics of European integration that takes into account the contemporary situation. We then apply our analytical framework to explaining Brexit focusing primarily on the time-period from the commencement of re-negotiations by the Cameron government through to the present, although there is a much longer temporal period that serves as context. Finally, we conclude.

Our distinctive analytical approach is to build on critical integration theory (see Bulmer and Joseph 2016) but with the distinction that its principles are applied in this paper at the member state, rather than the EU, level. In practical terms this means that we explore the changing macro-structural circumstances in global politics and political economy along with their impact on UK politics and political economy; how the political forces, primarily the political parties, have responded to these changes in their European policy (agency); and how this contestation has played out within the institutions of UK politics (structure). We understand domestic political contestation to be organized around alternative visions of politics and economics—we term them competing hegemonic projects—and seek to demonstrate how the ensuing political cleavages have presented major problems for the European policies of governments and political parties over the Brexit time-frame.

We draw on neo-statecraft theory to help understand the complexities faced by political actors in managing the divisive issue of British membership of the EU. Neo-statecraft analysis adds leverage to understanding the critical role that political agency has played at different critical moments in relation to Brexit. For instance, it helps us understand the commitment made by Prime Minister David Cameron to hold a referendum in the event of a future Conservative government (rather than the coalition government that he headed at the time: see Cameron 2013). Yet structure must also be taken into account as the strategic context for political action. The referendum vote has posed major questions regarding the structure of the UK as a

state, particularly its territorial make-up, and for some of the fundamental aspects of the British political economy, notably state-finance/business relations. These structural constraints have made it difficult to for observers (and political actors) to chart the direction of Brexit negotiations following the referendum. This complexity has only been further compounded by the outcome of the 2017 general election, which failed to give Theresa May's government the desired strengthened mandate for conducting Brexit negotiations. It has introduced a further contingency, namely the need to pay careful attention to parliamentary arithmetic, to the structural conditions that condition the domestic politics of Brexit.

Brexit and the state of the art in integration theory

In seeking to explain how the UK's relationship with the EU came to the referendum outcome in June 2016 and the subsequent negotiations to leave, an immediate need is to identify appropriate theoretical reference-points in order to try and identify patterns of what is important amongst a wealth of detail. We therefore review a range of literature to identify strengths and weaknesses in the existing frameworks. We focus on frameworks that address the bigger picture of the UK's relationship with the EU rather than meso- and smaller-scale approaches that are better attuned to shedding light on relationships in particular policy sub-fields. In consequence, we focus more on integration theory than the governance literature. Initially, we focus on why Europeanization, the predominant toolkit for examining EU-member state relations in the 1990s and 2000s, has limited value in this context.

The Europeanization literature came to the fore as the impact of the single market and monetary union on member states and the transfer of the *acquis communitaire* to the candidate states of the 2000s became focal points of attention (e.g. see Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Graziano and Vink 2007). However, the Europeanization literature is primarily concerned with the downstream impact of the EU upon member states. It has developed insights into the relationship between the uploading and downloading of policy between the EU and member states (Börzel 2002), and between the reception and projection roles of national governments in the EU (Bulmer and Burch 2009; James 2011). There has been work on resistance to/non-compliance with Europeanization (Saurugger 2012), on the Europeanization of political parties (e.g. Ladrech 2012) and how Europeanization has been 'used' as a resource in other political contestation at the domestic level (Woll and Jacquot 2010). Yet the magnitude of the UK's exit from the EU is so broad that these studies arguably lack the scale to capture the seismic changes that are associated with Brexit. One notable exception is the work of Peter Mair (2013). In his analysis of the hollowing of western democracy he highlighted the way in which the EU represented a classic case of the wider phenomenon in governance of de-politicization (Mair 2013: 99-142). Yet the resultant problems of democratic accountability arising from Europeanization were also giving rise to 'opposition to Europe' and Euro-scepticism. Mair recognized the broader consequences of Europeanization, albeit regarding it as part of a wider trend in western democracies including beyond the EU. Thus, with a few exceptions, the Europeanization literature has struggled to come to terms with capturing the rise of Euroscepticism and populism: key parts of Brexit. More generally, the literature remains problematic in the context of Brexit, which is about '*de*-Europeanisation'.

The most developed analytical framework for exploring member state preference formation remains liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) (Moravcsik 1993; 1998). The first stage of this two-stage theory focuses precisely on preference formation at the domestic level. Yet the theory's focus is primarily on policy negotiation rather than on broader member state-EU relationships. Thus while it is regarded as the 'benchmark' integration theory, its suitability for analysing Brexit may well be confined to the Brexit negotiations launched by Theresa May's 29 March 2017 letter to commence the Article 50 process of disengagement from the EU.

There are some further characteristics of LI that act as limitations for exploring Brexit. First, in ontological terms it is a positivist/rationalist approach that brings with it parsimony but will not satisfy those preferring a post-positivist approach. It also is elitist in nature—government elites matter—and thus collides with one of the realities of Brexit, namely that discord amongst Conservative Party elites led to a referendum that gave voice to the people as a whole and, indeed, to some voters signalling their discontent with governing elites in voting Leave. As part of this process the standard account of LI attributes key importance to economic interests and geo-politics in defining member state preferences. It is difficult to align this position around the Eurosceptic and populist positions that were given voice during the referendum campaign and with the rise of the United Kingdom Independent Party, UKIP. The recent rise of new intergovernmentalism as an interpretation of EU governance recognises the increased salience of domestic politics within the EU (Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter 2015a; 2015b). However, it is much less clear on propositions as to *how* domestic politics is important.

A key development in EU governance, most evident in the British referendum result but also present in populist responses to the Eurozone and refugee crises, is that elites' control over EU policy has declined. The transfer of core state powers to the EU level has encountered increasing resistance from European publics (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2014). The long-standing European integration theories are consequently challenged not only because of their teleological assumptions about integration but also because of their elitist foundations. This applies to neo-functionalism—with its emphasis on elites transferring allegiance to the supranational level—as much as to intergovernmentalism.

Hooghe and Marks (2009) had already identified the elitist weakness in their 'postfunctionalist' analysis of how wider publics had moved from providing a permissive consensus to a constraining dissensus on the approach of member states' political elites to integration. Three claims are central to postfunctionalism (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 1-3): that European integration and governance has become politicized, not only in episodic referendums but also in elections; that the views of public opinion and parties had become important in relation to debates about integration; and that identity had become an important reference-point in political contestation about the EU. These are key observations and they bear directly on Brexit.

Hooghe and Marks' postfunctionalism built on their earlier work on multi-level governance (MLG) (see Marks et. al 1996; also Bache and Flinders 2004). MLG approaches reject state-centric perspectives of European integration whereby national governments control interaction between member states and the EU. Instead it

assumes that EU politics and policies are the result of interactions between the EU institutions, member states, regions and interest groups. In particular, it challenges the view of member states as unitary actors by emphasising the increasingly important territorial dimension of EU policy making.

MLG's credentials as a theory of integration have been contested but are relevant for understanding Brexit. The central claim of MLG is that national governments no longer serve as gatekeepers between citizens and interest groups on the one hand, and the EU on the other. Rather, direct engagement with the EU on the part of subnational government, interest groups (and potentially citizens) was facilitated, by-passing government. The classic case explained by MLG analysis has been how subnational government engages directly with the EU, notably in practising the partnership principle in cohesion policy (Bache 2015: 256). The Brexit vote goes beyond what was considered in the original discussions about MLG in the 1990s but it is not inconsistent with its assumptions. UK citizens were asked to engage directly with the EU issue and responded by voting against the recommendation of their own government.

The terminology of multi-level governance is also used in a more configurative manner: to simply highlight the different levels of governance pertinent to EU membership. This use is also important here. The Brexit process cannot be conceptualised as a simple two-level game played between the UK and the EU. Nor can the UK and the EU be considered unitary actors with fixed preferences, capable of making strategic or tactical decisions in isolation. Instead, MLG allows us to disaggregate the vertical (EU-member state-subnational) and horizontal (member state-civil society) dimensions of Brexit that are part of the relationship with the EU. MLG is particularly important for understanding the 'territorial politics of Brexit'.

An important contribution made by postfunctionalism was to highlight the new political cleavage around identity that sits alongside the longer-standing left-right cleavage in relation to socio-economic policy issues (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 14-18). The 'gal-tan' cleavage between green/alternative/libertarian voters and those favouring traditionalism, authority and nationalism was key. Once again this observation resonates with the experience of voting in the 2016 'Brexit' referendum. Postfunctionalism has much to offer in analysing the political sociology of the UK vote to leave the EU

Postfunctionalism has also led to the developing literature on politicization. This literature develops a research agenda centred on the first of the assumptions of postfunctionalism. Thus it identifies the wider chorus of voices now articulating views and impacting on EU policy. The key contributions of this literature are to identify '(a) the growing salience of European governance, involving (b) a polarisation of opinion, and (c) an expansion of actors and audiences engaged in monitoring EU affairs' (de Wilde et. al. 2016: 4). Politicisation thus also offers a view of the politics of EU policy that extends out well beyond elites and captures the current climate where Eurosceptic parties, such as UKIP, have challenged the position of mainstream counterparts on European integration.

Both the postfunctionalist and politicization literatures provide important insights that correct elitist assumptions of the longer-standing integration theories. However, they

have not yet been applied to understanding wider aspects of member state-EU relations. The politicization literature in particular tends to focus on quite specific issues, such as the voting patterns of German deputies during the Eurozone crisis (Wonka 2016). These literatures are also associated with a positivist approach and the use of quantitative data. Social constructivists might wish to deploy an intersubjective ontology that places emphasis on how the reality of the UK-EU relationship has been constructed over decades, with an issue such as sovereignty forming a rallying point for Eurosceptics—if we may apply that term to a period before it was coined--predating British accession in 1973. In other words, the social construction of reality has arguably been an important factor for much of UK membership and certainly was during the referendum campaign. The framing of the debate, not to mention misleading claims, departed from a sense of 'natural reality' to 'social reality'. The way in which the referendum result was constructed by the May government as a mandate for an end to free movement at the anticipated cost of full membership of the single market enables constructivist analysis to shed important insights.

Our overall conclusion at this point is to argue that the tools for interpreting Brexit remain under-developed. Domestic politics approaches to understanding EU policy-making have been developed in the past but in a quite different state of integration (Bulmer 1983). Such analyses have remained under-specified and under-developed. Our ambition is to remedy this deficiency. We aim to provide an account of Brexit that incorporates macro-social change and how political actors within the UK have contended with these challenges alongside European integration itself in such a way that led to the Brexit vote and the complex legacy its implementation presents for the British state. Before we develop our approach further we give a brief review of the existing accounts offered in relation to Brexit.

The literature on Brexit

Existing explanations of Brexit differ significantly with respect to the relative causal significance attributed to structure and agency. Accounts that develop a political economy approach highlight the long-term structural drivers of Brexit. For example, Hopkin (2017) and Blyth and Matthijs (2017) view the UK's departure not as an isolated event, but part of a populist, 'anti-system' politics sweeping western democracies since the financial crisis. This backlash constitutes a rejection of mainstream political elites and values, and challenges the consensus around economic integration, free markets and liberal values. In the UK, this new politics has been compounded by the failure of austerity to restore economic growth and the refusal of politicians to provide real ideological choice. By contrast, Thompson (2017) views Brexit as a consequence of the UK's 'singular' macro political economy. She explores the interaction between contingent political decisions and events, such as the 2015 general election and 2016 EU referendum, and pressures arising from the changing political economy of the UK and EU, which she argues made the Leave vote 'inevitable'. Thompson's argument is that the roots of Brexit lay in the Britain's eschewal in 2004 of transition arrangements on freedom of movement for the new EU accession states which led to a significant rise in immigration from the Eurozone periphery. Moreover, she points to the importance of the Eurozone crisis, and the determination of Eurozone states to push ahead with further integration, as exposing the UK's lack of influence. These structural conflicts forced the Cameron government

to seek special protections for the City of London which antagonised relations with other EU leaders and eroded democratic consent for membership at home. They also highlighted the contradictions in the Cameron government's strategy of pledging to hold a referendum to prevent further powers being delegated to Brussels (the referendum 'lock'), while also demanding treaty change as a way of returning powers to Westminster.

From a constructivist perspective, Gifford (2017) employs a critical political economy perspective to explain Brexit. He argues that successive UK governments have deliberately sought to differentiate Britain from the rest of the EU. This has been achieved by constructing a distinctive Eurosceptic political economy which positions the UK as an 'outsider' or 'neo-liberal pioneer' that strives to reform the EU in the UK's mould. Brexit is viewed as the consequence of a populist turn in this Eurosceptic discourse, with Leave supporters claiming that the EU is no longer in the UK's economic interests and incompatible with notions of sovereignty and autonomous nationhood.

Finally, explanations from political science emphasise the socio-institutional roots of Brexit. Like Thompson, Jessop (2016) interprets Brexit as a singular event, but one that is a symptom of a continuing organic crisis of the British state and society. The Brexit 'conjuncture' reflects a long-running split in the establishment, a worsening representational crisis in the party system, a growing crisis of authority for political elites, a legitimacy crisis of the state, and a crisis of national-popular hegemony over the population. Similarly, Menon and Salter (2016) and Glencross (2016) see the outcome of the EU referendum as the result of the confluence of several long-term and contingent factors. Both draw attention to the domestic party-politics of EU membership; namely, the importance of longstanding intra-party divisions over European integration, and the failure of successive governments to challenge Eurosceptic assertions or trumpet British leadership in the EU. Against these historical-political 'background conditions', Menon and Salter judge Cameron's strategy of renegotiation and referendum as an exercise in political expediency which was highly reckless.

While these accounts provide important and valuable insights into Brexit, we argue that there remain significant gaps and deficiencies in the existing literature. First, and most problematically, none of these accounts specifies the precise relationship between structure and agency. As a result, the tension within these explanations between contingency and inevitability is never satisfactorily resolved. In particular, there is a tendency to view Brexit in teleological terms, as the result of a linear process rooted in EU enlargement, the Eurozone crisis, a crisis of the British state, and/or Eurosceptic discourse, which generate pressures for political separation. From this perspective, the role of contingency is limited to the timing and speed of the process, not the outcome. The literature arguably lacks a convincing theoretical account that locates political actors in their strategically-selective context (Hay 2002: 126-134).

Second, the emphasis on the political economy of Brexit stresses the importance of underlying socio-economic structures, but says relatively little about how these are mediated or interpreted by agents through distinct ideational and discursive lenses. The one important exception is Gifford's work, the key strength of which is to show

how Eurosceptic discourse has been deployed strategically to legitimate the UK's continued EU membership. In doing so, however, this account risks falling into the trap of ideational-determinism: that is, viewing Brexit as the logical but unintended consequence of a set of ideas promulgated by UK political elites.

Finally, most explanations have sought to explain Brexit as a singular event or as a result of the UK's singular political economy or domestic party-political context. Problematically, this generates a sui generis problem: if Brexit is a unique and unpredictable event, the extent to which comparative insights can be used to leverage our understanding of the process is inevitably limited. Although Hopkin (2017) and Blyth and Matthijs (2017) address this to some extent by subsuming Brexit into a wider anti-politics backlash, these accounts exogenize causation by relying on external socio-economic shocks for their explanatory power. What is therefore lacking is a theoretically-grounded framework for analysing the endogenous political dynamics that underpin wider processes of European disintegration, of which Brexit is a single case (Rosamond 2017).

Critical integration theory

Based on our discussion of the theoretical approaches as well as the emergent literature on Brexit, we argue that a richer account of the domestic politics of European disintegration necessitates an analytical approach which better balances structural aspects, emphasising institutions and path dependencies and the important role of agency, expressed through party management, party-political contestation, Euroscepticism, populism as well as lobbying. The framework we present develops from critical integration theory and the assumptions upon which it is based (Bulmer and Joseph 2016). This approach emphasises a three-way relationship between macro-structural change, political agency and the institutional context within which political actors select their strategies and tactics. We consider each of these in turn.

First, macro-structural change is important because we are keen to understand developments such as the changing form of capitalism (marketization and financialization), changing patterns of governance (for instance, depoliticization), securitization and demographic change (including population movements) as important overarching developments that are *intrinsic* to our explanation. These macro-structural developments are like the shifting of tectonic plates. Pressures build up from them gradually and cumulatively. However, they contribute to the eventual seismic event that is triggered by just one stage in what is a much larger pattern. The analogy of the natural environment breaks down, of course, in that human agency can trigger the political earthquake. Nevertheless, we argue that it is important to incorporate these underlying structural changes into the account rather than just labelling them as exogenous.

Political agency is very important in an account of Brexit. Political choices such as Cameron's Bloomberg commitment to a referendum on membership, or the choice of Theresa May and her government to prioritize an end to both free movement and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice over continued membership of the single market are an important part of any account. Yet so are the choices of voters in the referendum itself. In order to account for political agency we make two steps. The

first is to explore the wider cleavages and struggles in politics and political economy when confronted with the macro-structural changes of the contemporary era. We explain these through the notion of competing hegemonic projects. The second step is to examine the strategy and tactics of political leaders—whether in government or opposition—in managing the challenges that they face. For this we deploy neo-statecraft theory to explore how agency is exercised within the prevailing institutional context (to be considered below).

The notion of competing hegemonic projects is drawn from the work of a group of neo-Gramscian scholars in Germany (see Buckel 2011: 643–644; also Kannankulam, 2013). Its appeal is that it outlines a simplified set of contours of political debate against which we can locate the positions of political actors and voters alike. The projects are heuristic devices that simplify reality but we argue that they assist with understanding the complexity of the Brexit debates. They give a sense of the political contestation that is at stake and therefore offer an alternative macro-political 'take' on the subject matter considered by postfunctionalism and the proponents of the politicization literature.

The predominant hegemonic project is a neoliberal one that has been strongly entrenched in British politics since the transformative changes in economic management introduced during the Thatcher era. Advocates of this approach push for market solutions at domestic and global levels in relation to manufacturing and through introducing analogous arrangements to create markets in the provision of public services. The project appeals to European integration as a mechanism for widening and deepening markets, and extols the benefits of British leadership in an attempt to reform the EU in an economic liberal direction (Baker and Seawright, Gifford 2016). For example, the Thatcher government was a key advocate of the creation of the single European market (Baker and Seawright 1998). Successive governments—Conservative and Labour—have pushed for the single market's extension to services and financial services as well as advocating a liberal external trade policy and limits to EU regulatory burdens. There was no fundamental change to the paradigm during the New Labour years. Indeed, Prime Minister Blair's advocacy of what became the 2000-10 Lisbon Strategy was concerned with increasing competitiveness and it adopted market-like processes such as benchmarking and league tables that presented little domestic concern about the sovereignty implications (James 2012: 16-18). The appeal of neoliberalism is linked to a positive understanding of the macro-structural change arising from globalization, i.e. that it is beneficial. The neoliberal hegemonic project has significant advocates in post-referendum UK politics, notably the position of the Trade Minister, Dr Liam Fox. Nevertheless, the consequences of financial crisis commencing in 2007, the adverse effects of globalization on certain communities and concerns about increasing inequality have begun to reveal the limits to the predominance of the project.

The second and third hegemonic projects are both welfare-statist in orientation, reflecting the classic left-right division in politics. They differ in the means pursued, particularly in relation to the role of the EU. Thus a national-social hegemonic project aims to preserve strong social welfare systems at the member-state level through an interventionist state role designed to offer re-distributive outcomes and mitigate the adverse effects of the neoliberal system. This project has been advocated from centre-left and trade union circles across Europe but also has its advocates within the UK.

This is the project most closely aligned with the current Labour Party leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell.

The third project is also concerned with social welfare but its advocates have taken the view that it needs to have an EU or international dimension. The origins of this approach lie particularly in the efforts of Commission President Jacques Delors in the 1980s, when he sought a 'social dimension' to the EU. The objective was to avoid adverse social consequences arising from the single market. This pro-European social-democratic hegemonic project had modest consequences (but see Corbett 2008). Nevertheless, it did have quite an important impact in the UK that helps explain some of the continuing political contestation. For Mrs Thatcher herself this initiative was a major factor (along with Delors' advocacy of monetary union) that led to her famous Bruges speech (Thatcher 1988). This speech, the downfall of Mrs Thatcher in 1990 and the UK's ill-starred two-year membership of the European Monetary System's Exchange-Rate Mechanism (ERM) form key reference points for the espousal of the national-conservative project (below) amongst elements of the Conservative Party. Delors' ambitions for the social dimension also had a transformative impact on the British centre-left. His 1988 speech to the Trades Union Congress led to the chairman, Ron Todd (the general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union), to declare that after a decade of Thatcherism the EU was 'the only card game in town' (quoted in Corbett 2008). As part of the party's modernisation under Neil Kinnock and John Smith, Labour shed its left Euroscepticism and embraced European integration as a mechanism for resisting neoliberal reforms and entrenching social rights at the supranational level. A decade later Tony Blair's international efforts with the 'Third Way' represent an extension of this pro-European social democratic project. The project remains an important reference point in British politics, providing the intellectual foundation for Ed Miliband's leadership, as well as the basis of support for the Scottish and Welsh nationalists, and a large section of the Liberal Democrat party.

The fourth 'national-conservative project' has brought together forces resisting further integration. It has gained popular support from those who have lost out from globalization and who resist left-liberal cosmopolitan politics. The roots of this project lie in the fringe politics of the Bruges Group, the Anti-Federalist League, the development of the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Under the leadership of Nigel Farage, UKIP's populist, anti-elite strategy of demanding a referendum on EU membership and advocating the UK's withdrawal has proved highly effective. Success in European elections gave it voice and funding, enabling it to achieve a 12.6% vote share in the 2015 general election, albeit with only one MP (Ford and Goodwin 2014). But the project also finds expression in those members of the Conservative Party (and many post-Thatcher generation MPs) that drew anti-EU conclusions from the Bruges Speech and the ERM debacle. Successive Conservative leaders since John Major have increasingly sought to appeal to 'soft' Euroscepticism, short of calling for full withdrawal, by deliberately differentiating the UK as an 'outsider' from the rest of the EU, ruling out UK participation in further integrationist measures, and calling for the repatriation of policy making powers to national parliaments (Forster 2002; Daddow 2013; Gifford 2016). The growth of Eurosceptic populism has become part of a wider pattern across the EU, compounded by the Eurozone and refugee crises (see Leruth et al 2018). This project aligns most clearly with the 'tan' position in the 'gal/tan' cleavage identified by Hooghe and Marks

(2009) between green/alternative/libertarian voters and those favouring traditionalism/authority/nationalism.

It should be noted, however, that the EU is not the only reference-point in this 'tan' position. Identity politics may well take this kind of shape in England. However, support for nationalism in Scotland and to a lesser degree Wales introduces a further layer of identity politics. Similarly, the two communities in Northern Ireland contain considerable support for either allegiance to the UK or to a united Ireland and these positions impact on their respective positions with regard to hegemonic projects. Identity positions in the nations and regions make alignment with the hegemonic projects outlined here more complex (but not impossible) to determine.

The final project is left-liberal in outlook. It is influenced by cosmopolitanism and environmentalism and its concerns focus on human rights, women's rights and issues of justice and political liberalism. European integration tends to be supported from an idealistic standpoint, although open to criticism when it falls short on liberal principles. This is arguably a more loosely organised hegemonic project than the others, reflecting a post-materialist outlook, but it finds important expression in the Liberal Democrat and Green parties. The weakness of the political 'centre' in British politics accounts for this project's difficulties in gaining traction in relation to Brexit.

These five projects therefore represent organizing reference points in the political contestation over Brexit in the UK. We will utilize them in our application to explaining Brexit below.

To embed the analysis of hegemonic projects in a clear account of political agency and institutional change, we draw on neo-statecraft theory (NST). NST is a framework of executive politics which analyses how political elites confront and respond to governing challenges. Analytical primacy is given to the political party (or parties) in government whose primary concern is assumed to be successful statecraft; namely, the 'art of winning elections and achieving some necessary degree of governing competence in office' (Bulpitt 1986: 21). In the domain of foreign policy, Bulpitt defines governing competence as 'the specific tactics employed to minimize the adverse impact of external forces on domestic politics in ways acceptable to the governing party, and, in the process, make life difficult for opposition groups' (Bulpitt 1988: 195–6). Concern for ruling in the national interest or on the basis of ideological principle are regarded as secondary motives. Electoral success is achieved through the use of 'governing codes' or principles which underpin policy choices, and a set of four 'political support mechanisms'. These are party management, a winning electoral strategy, political argument hegemony, and governing competence (Bulpitt 1986: 22).

NST can be used to explain how governing parties can achieve successful statecraft in a context of competing hegemonic projects. For example, governing parties can build a winning electoral strategy by mobilising electoral support around distinct hegemonic project(s). These political projects provide a unifying narrative or discourse that serves to legitimate a coherent policy programme, and thus provide the basis for achieving political argument hegemony. However, winning electoral strategies often require parties to appeal to multiple hegemonic projects in order to construct a broad coalition of public support. In government, managing tensions and conflicts between competing projects is the task of effective party management. How

effectively parties can balance the competing and conflictual demands of these projects will also directly affect its governing competence; divided parties generally produce weak and ineffective governments that are punished by voters.

NST suggests that the executive's strategic attempts to achieve statecraft can bring about policy change. We argue that policy change derives from the fact that maintaining electoral support for hegemonic projects is a dynamic process that requires careful and constant political and party management. For example, effective statecraft may mean that government ministers will quicken, slow or cancel policy change to fit with the electoral cycle. They will also strive to respond to the emergence of new policy issues or sudden shifts in public opinion to appeal to voters. At the same time, the need for effective party management may result in policy change as ministers need to placate particular wings of the party to ensure the government maintains sufficient legislative support. In addition, the need to develop a perception of governing competence can explain why governing parties may opt to pursue a strategy of inactivity or depoliticisation. To manage intra-party tensions between hegemonic projects, effective statecraft may entail putting policy decisions beyond ministers' immediate control in order to secure greater governing autonomy (Burnham 2001; Flinders and Buller 2006). Conversely, if a government believes that its strategic interests are affected by increasing support for a particular hegemonic project, which is associated with opposition parties, it may decide to deliberately politicise an issue and make a policy intervention to draw support away.

The third component in our framework comprises the institutions of governance in the UK. They are important analytically because of our underlying position on the importance of agency and structure. In line with Hay (2002: 127) institutions provide the strategically selective context within which political actors deploy their statecraft in relation to the practical challenges presented by Brexit. Our analysis is thus founded upon the multi-level pattern of governance within the UK and out to the EU as the all-important context for the conduct of political actors. The hegemonic projects may capture key cleavages in political contestation but it is how actors respond to them in the context of the institutional context that is key.

The institutional dimension is partly a matter of configuration, comprising the exact pattern of MLG, executive-legislative relations (and the adversarial system at Westminster). It also embodies institutional legacies: the institutional and policy path-dependencies that also play a key role in shaping political actors' strategic behaviour. Thus the Brexit process cannot be viewed in isolation from existing patterns of European policy established over the years. Nor does the EU wish to unravel its own institutional structure and *acquis communautaire* to give the UK a special deal for fear of unravelling the outcome of sixty-five years of European integration. Finally, there is the scope that the institutions offer for creating a 'social reality' out of the institutional set-up. By this is meant the way in which institutional reality can be constructed, such as the onerous intrusions ascribed to the European Commission or the parliamentary (and national) sovereignty that has occasionally been presented as intrinsic to the nation's integrity.

In this way, and in drawing upon critical integration theory and neo-statecraft theory, we offer an analytical framework through which to interpret and explain Brexit.

Explaining Brexit

We begin this section by outlining the three macro changes which provide the structural context for our analysis of Brexit: EU migration trends; the Great Recession; and the Eurozone crisis. The framework is then used to explain how the issue of European integration has been managed by the governing parties since 2010; namely, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government from 2010 to 2015; and the Conservative Government from 2015. We argue that competing hegemonic projects necessitated dynamic statecraft by the Cameron Government, including constant party management and continual adjustment of electoral strategy. Ultimately, however, we also explain how and why this statecraft failed, culminating with the Leave vote in the EU referendum, and how the May Government has sought to establish a successful post-Brexit statecraft, with mixed results.

At the macro level, structural changes provide the broader strategic-selective context within which political agents make strategic choices. We identify three here. First, the UK has experienced high levels of migration from lower-wage economies in central and Eastern Europe. This pattern stems in large part from the decision of the then Labour Government to forgo transitional restrictions on freedom of movement in relation to the accession in 2004 and 2007 of ten states to the EU (Thompson 2017). This decision was to have the unintended consequence of making immigration an increasingly salient policy issue (Goodwin and Milazzo 2017), particularly in a context of economic distress caused by the Great Recession. It was compounded by the EU refugee crisis during 2015-16 in which political instability in North Africa and the Middle East caused a surge in refugee numbers entering the EU (Bulmer and Joseph 2017) that generated significant negative press coverage in the UK, some of which was 'constructed' by Leave campaigners, assisted by parts of the print media.

The second macro level change concerns the 2008 financial crash and the Great Recession. The immediate impact of the crisis led to the taxpayer-funded bail-out of two high street banks and a variety of special measures by the central bank to support the financial system. But in the medium to longer term, the severe contraction in the economy, declining tax revenues and record levels of public debt provided the pretext for the incoming Coalition Government to develop a programme of austerity, combining large public spending cutbacks with moderate tax increases. These policies exacerbated wage stagnation and rising inequality, which had been apparent over the previous decade. It is against this negative economic backdrop that we have seen an 'anti-system' and 'anti-elite' backlash, characterised by growing disillusionment with mainstream politics and parties, and increasing support for populist parties such as UKIP (Hopkin 2017).

The Eurozone sovereign debt crisis constitutes the third structural change relevant to Brexit. The bail-out of several Eurozone states since 2009, triggered by their inability to refinance government debt, graphically exposed the governance failings of the single currency. Moreover, the subsequent enforcement of harsh austerity measures by the troika of EU institutions and the IMF has highlighted the dominance of German leadership and ordo-liberal economic orthodoxy. This has fuelled anti-EU sentiment and contributed to the rise of anti-EU parties in both the Eurozone core and periphery (Bulmer 2014). The UK's position outside the Eurozone has provided some

isolation from the political turmoil surrounding the crisis. Yet at the creation of the 2010 Conservative-Lib Dem coalition government—a novel development in recent Westminster politics—there was real concern about the financial-market exposure of the UK's public finances due to the experiences of Eurozone debtor states, and this reinforced the decision in favour of austerity politics. Further, the Eurozone's determination to strengthen its institutional framework has exacerbated existing tensions with the UK, such as London's status as the EU's largest international financial centre, and the fact that it now lies outside the new Banking Union.

To understand how these structural developments have shaped the behaviour of political actors in the UK, we examine how they mediated by the interaction of hegemonic projects around European integration. The divisiveness of the European issue in UK politics reflects the fact that the two main parties commonly appeal to competing hegemonic projects, effectively to manage the tensions that these generate within their respective parties. For example, the Blair Government embraced 'utilitarian supranationalism' by presenting a positive vision of UK membership and providing EU-level leadership around several important, but relatively low-key, integration initiatives (Bulmer 2008). Yet this was tempered by ambiguity over more explicitly integrationist projects, such as the EU Constitutional Treaty and the single currency. In both cases, the party leadership feared that these would create internal party divisions and alienate voters. In response, the Blair Government's strategy was to take the final decision over the UK's participation out of the hands of the government and parliament, and instead to commit to putting both to a public referendum. In statecraft terms, this was an attempt to deliberately depoliticise the European issue. As a strategy for building electoral support and party management, the referendum pledge proved highly effective, enabling Labour to win three successive elections with large parliamentary majorities.

Since 1997 the divisions within the Conservative party over Europe became increasingly pronounced, and it faced a mounting electoral challenge from UKIP. To manage these internal tensions, and draw support for the national-conservative project away from UKIP, David Cameron as leader made the symbolic decision to withdraw Conservative MEPs from the European People's Party in the European Parliament in 2009 and form a new grouping of right-wing Eurosceptic parties.

The formation of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government following the 2010 election posed a profound challenge given that the two parties expressed opposing views on European integration drawn from competing hegemonic projects. The demands of managing this contestation reinforced the statecraft strategy pursued by the previous government, by making the depoliticization of the European issue even more imperative. The Coalition Government's depoliticization strategy had four key elements, which we outline briefly here. The first aimed to underpin governing competence. The 2011 Fixed Term Parliament Act was designed to provide greater political stability by restricting the government's ability to call a snap general election. Although this was in part a symbolic act intended to reassure the markets at the height of the Eurozone crisis (Seldon and Finn 2015), it also had the potential to defuse the European issue by reducing short-term electoral pressures on the government.

Second, the Coalition Government used the referendum pledge to rule out the UK's participation in further European integration. The coalition agreement guaranteed that there would be no further transfers of sovereign powers to the EU until the next election. This was strengthened the following year by the European Union Act (2011), which committed the government to holding a public vote in the event of future treaty change (Wellings and Vines 2016).

The third part of the strategy was to conduct a detailed review of the 'balance of competences' between the UK and the EU. This exercise, conducted between 2012 and 2014, gathered evidence from a wide range of stakeholders to assess the appropriateness of the division of powers between the national and supranational levels. As an exercise in statecraft, however, it had mixed results. On the one hand, the review facilitated the management of inter-party relations within the Coalition as the initiative was strongly supported by the Liberal Democrats. On the other hand, the review's conclusions were largely supportive of the status quo, which further antagonised Conservative backbenchers. As William Wallace (2017: 3), a Lib Dem minister at the time notes: 'The response of No. 10 … was to bury them …'

Fourth, at the EU-level the government pursued a strategy of passive disengagement. Chancellor George Osborne enshrined this in his 2011 speech in which he called on Eurozone leaders to 'get a grip' on the crisis and accepted the 'remorseless logic' of greater fiscal union. The speech represented a major turning point in UK EU policy, signalling that the UK Government would no longer seek to stand in the way of further Eurozone integration (Financial Times 2011). Yet the extent to which Eurozone reforms would impinge on British interests was dramatically exposed in December 2011 when Cameron refused to support a new EU treaty designed to strengthen the fiscal governance of the Eurozone. Moreover, during 2012 and 2013 the UK secured a series of institutional changes, and took the EU institutions to the Court of Justice, to protect the interests of the non-euro states from the potential for Eurozone caucusing (Schelkle 2016).

Cameron's depoliticization statecraft was explicitly intended as an exercise in party management, designed to temper support for an immediate referendum on UK membership that had been backed by 81 Conservative MPs in a Commons motion in 2011. Yet the strategy failed. In January 2013, under relentless pressure from Eurosceptic backbenchers, Cameron promised, if elected in 2015, to establish a 'new settlement' for Britain in the EU, following which he would call an in/out referendum on EU membership. The Bloomberg speech (Cameron 2013), as it became known, represented a clear shift in statecraft strategy from deliberate *depoliticization* to strategic *politicization*. Rather than continue trying to deescalate internal party tensions over Europe, Cameron sought to tackle them head on by committing to renegotiating the UK's terms of membership and putting this to a referendum.

During the final two years of the parliament, it became abundantly clear that the new statecraft strategy had done little to quell support for the national-conservative hegemonic project. For example, in January 2014, 95 Conservative MPs signed a letter calling for parliament to be able to block and repeal EU laws via a repeal of the 1972 European Community Act. Meanwhile support for UKIP continued to surge, with the party gaining 27.5% of the vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections, and winning two by-elections following the defection of two Conservative MPs to the

party (Menon and Salter 2016). Nonetheless, the politicisation strategy did prove surprisingly successful in electoral terms, enabling the Conservatives to build an electoral winning strategy and secure an overall majority at the 2015 election.

Cameron's politicization statecraft was predicated on two assumptions: first, that the UK could secure membership terms through renegotiation that would be better than those it currently enjoyed; and second, that these terms would appeal to both the neoliberal and national conservative hegemonic projects. The UK's renegotiation strategy therefore deliberately combined different, and arguably contradictory, elements. On the one hand, it sought to push Europe in a more liberal, market-oriented direction by strengthening the single market to raise competitiveness and growth, while demanding special protections for non-euro members, and particularly to defend the interests of the City of London. On the other hand, the government also called for a stronger role for national parliaments, and a symbolic opt-out from the treaty commitment to 'ever closer union'. In 2014, new demands related to the ability to restrict the welfare entitlements of EU migrants were added. This was a direct response to UKIP's success in exploiting the EU refugee crisis by mobilizing support around the need to end freedom of movement.

The outcome of the renegotiations during 2015-16 was neither transformative nor trivial (Booth and Ruparel 2016). Cameron secured a series of modest changes, including an exemption to ever closer union, a new 'red card' procedure to strengthen national parliaments, new guarantees for the status of non-euro states, and new restrictions to in-work benefits and child support payments to EU citizens (Menon and Salter 2016: 1306). Yet these concessions fell significantly short of expectations of a new 'settlement', which is what the Prime Minister had promised. Consequently, as an exercise in statecraft through politicization, the renegotiation strategy failed to draw support away from the national-conservative hegemonic project. As a result, 138 Conservative MPs defied the Prime Minister by supporting the Leave campaign in the referendum called for 23 June 2016.

The referendum campaigns mobilized support from different hegemonic projects. The official pro-Remain campaign, Britain Stronger in Europe, drew heavyweight backing from the Prime Minister, Chancellor, the majority of the cabinet, and most other Westminster party leaders. Its central message focused on the importance of EU membership for economic security, and aimed to mobilise a broad coalition of support around the neoliberal and social democratic hegemonic projects. By contrast, the pro-Leave campaign was divided between two groups. Leave.eu, back by UKIP leader Nigel Farage, promoted a strident national-conservative message which stressed the need to 'take back control' of national borders, and to reassert parliamentary sovereignty and national democracy. Vote Leave, backed by six cabinet ministers, London Mayor Boris Johnson, and Labour MPs Gisela Stuart and Kate Hoey, struck a more moderate tone. Its message balanced the need for tougher immigration controls with an appeal to the neoliberal hegemonic project, projecting a positive vision of an open and competitive Britain that was free to sign new trade deals with the rest of the world. Support for this strain of neoliberal Euroscepticism, or 'hyperglobalism', has historically been based in the libertarian wing of the Conservative party (Baker, Gamble and Seawright 2002). Moreover, the Vote Leave campaign also attempted to appeal to the national-social hegemonic project by claiming that it would invest the

UK's weekly £350m EU budget contribution—a constructed 'reality' into the health service.

We do not seek to evaluate the two campaigns in detail here. Suffice to say that in mobilising support around competing hegemonic projects, the pro-Leave campaign proved more effective than the pro-Remain campaign. Leadership and organisation proved to be two key causal factors. On the Remain side, David Cameron's position had been compromised as a result of the outcome of the renegotiations, and his conversion from potential Brexiteer to committed Remainer lacked credibility (Menon and Salter 2016: 1308). Meanwhile, the support for EU membership offered by the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, was often less than effusive (McTague et al 2016). The party was also internally divided between pro-European supporters of the social democratic project, which included most of the shadow cabinet, and the party leadership, whose sympathies many suspected were closer to a Eurosceptic national-social project. By contrast, the pro-Leave campaign benefitted from charismatic and populist leadership, in the form of Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage (Hobolt 2016). Paradoxically, the Leave campaign also benefitted from having two separate organisations as this enabled them to tailor simple, but often contradictory, messages (on tougher border control, promoting free trade, and stronger public services) that could appeal to diverse constituencies (Behr 2016). These messages could appeal to supporters of both neoliberal and national-conservative projects.

The roots of the failure of Conservative party statecraft between 2010 and 2016, and the defeat of the Remain campaign in the referendum, lay in macro structural changes (EU migratory flows; the Great Recession; and the Eurozone crisis) and how it sought to manage them in interaction with meso-level institutions of governance in the UK. These institutions are important because they provide the strategically-selective context within which political actors deploy their statecraft in relation to the challenges posed by macro structural change. Institutions served to structure the behaviour of political actors in several ways. First, the institutional context provided an important source of path dependency that constrained and 'locked in' the statecraft of successive governments. The Blair Government's strategy of using referenda to depoliticise historic decisions related to European integration (Constitutional Treaty ratification and single currency membership) was a critical juncture. Not least it established an important political precedent, creating the expectation that henceforth all major decisions related to European integration would be put to a public vote. In our view, the Brown Government's ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 without a referendum reinforced this. It became a source of considerable political controversy and was exploited by both UKIP and the Conservatives, both of whom demanded that the treaty be put to a public vote (Gifford 2014). This episode undoubtedly played an important role in shaping Cameron's subsequent commitment to a referendum 'lock' on future EU treaty reform. In effect, by establishing a new normative standard for ratifying major decisions on European integration at home, the Blair Government's statecraft can be seen to have 'tied the hands' of future governments.

Second, elected governments have the power to periodically re-write the constitutional rules of the game: using referendums to take decisions out of the hands of parliament and delegating them to the public. Moreover, governments have significant discretion over the timing of such votes, the organisation of the campaigns, and the wording of the questions. The referendum therefore proved highly flexible as

a tool of statecraft. Blair and Cameron (pre-2013) used it as a *passive* device in which change (such as joining the euro) required a positive vote, while a negative vote would simply result in a continuation of the constitutional status quo. By contrast, Cameron's post-2013 strategy reversed this logic and used the referendum as an *active* device, such that a positive vote was necessary for the status quo to prevail (continued EU membership), while a negative vote would result in major constitutional change. This was a high-risk strategy, not simply because the stakes of the game were greater, but because it required the government to implicitly discredit the current terms of UK membership in order to justify the negotiation of a new settlement. Crucially, the use of the referendum as a tool of political statecraft was only possible because of the UK's distinctive constitutional fluidity. With turnout for the referendum, which formally had 'advisory status', reaching 72 per cent, ahead of the 66 per cent at the 2015 general election, the constitutional fluidity created a situation where direct democracy trumped representative democracy, constraining the scope for statecraft on the part of the post-referendum government led by Theresa May.

Third, shifting the location of political contestation over European integration from parliament to the wider public arena fundamentally changed the institutional context within which actors mobilise and manage competing hegemonic projects. This context provided new opportunities for charismatic leaders to mobilise a wider body of support outside Westminster, and to engage sections of society that do not traditionally vote, around the national-conservative hegemonic project. It also provided scope for populist parties like UKIP to reactivate policy issues, such as immigration, which have been deliberately depoliticised by the main Westminster parties. The Leave campaign's central message, that UK citizens would be 'better off' if parliamentary sovereignty was restored, EU immigration was restricted, and the UK's budget contribution could be reinvested in public services, was a powerful one which resonated with many voters in deprived areas. By contrast, this institutional context constrained the capacity of the Conservative government to pursue a successful statecraft strategy. After years of austerity and stagnant wages, mobilizing mass support around an alternative neoliberal hegemonic project that promoted European integration on the basis of its deregulatory and liberalizing credentials was always going to prove difficult. Nor was an attempt to negotiate a slightly 'looser' relationship with the EU likely to pacify those who viewed full withdrawal as the logical end point of a 'Eurosceptic political economy' articulated by successive British leaders (Gifford 2016).

To summarise, the Brexit outcome can only be understood through a framework that analyses how macro structural changes interact with the institutional context to shape the behaviour of strategic agents. Next, we briefly examine the post-referendum context and attempts to construct a post-Brexit statecraft.

Negotiating Brexit

Following the political turmoil caused by the referendum and the Conservative leadership contest, the new Prime Minister, Theresa May, set about trying to construct a new political statecraft around Brexit. During the first few months of her premiership, the government failed to provide clear direction as the Conservative

party, and Parliament as a whole, was deeply divided between supporters of a so-called 'soft' Brexit (which we define as membership of the single market and customs union) and a 'hard' Brexit (which involves withdrawal from both). May concluded that to rebuild a winning electoral strategy, and to manage internal party divisions over Brexit, it was essential to mobilise support around the national-conservative hegemonic project. She calculated that neither Conservative backbenchers, nor Leave voters, would countenance any 'backsliding' on EU membership. More importantly, the government believed that ending freedom of movement was the main concern animating Leave voters; consequently, this ruled out any attempt to remain in the single market through membership of the European Economic Area (EEA). In terms of political statecraft, appealing to the national-conservative project would also enable the Conservatives to directly target UKIP voters and to build a winning electoral strategy based on a broad, right wing coalition of support (Clarke et al 2017). The government's strategy, as set out in May's Conservative party conference speech in October 2016, and reaffirmed in the Lancaster House speech in January 2017, was therefore to pursue a hard Brexit. Yet this created further constitutional difficulties because a hard Brexit was opposed by the Scottish National Party government in Edinburgh and by the Labour-led coalition in Cardiff. Meantime the compatibility of this goal with Northern Ireland's wish to avoid re-introduced border controls with the Republic raised further concerns.

May's decision to call a snap general election in June 2017 reflected confidence that this electoral strategy would deliver a large Commons majority. The fact that this gamble spectacularly backfired, producing a hung parliament and forcing May to seek a confidence-and-supply deal with the Democratic Unionist Party, is a testament to the failure of the government's early political statecraft. This outcome can be interpreted in part as a consequence of the May Government's attempt to mobilise support around the national-conservative project; in doing so, the Conservative party marginalized and alienated supporters of the neoliberal hegemonic project, many of whom had voted Remain and/or preferred a soft Brexit. Evidence comes from the business community, which complained that their concerns over Brexit were being ignored within government (Financial Times 2017a; see also Lavery 2017). It is also supported by initial analysis of the results of the 2017 election which indicate that large numbers of Remain voters, many in the south east of England, voted for Labour in protest at May's hard Brexit strategy (Heath and Goodwin 2017).

Since the election, there has been a further shift in the government's Brexit statecraft. Although its official position on Brexit has not changed, there has been a notable softening in both tone and rhetoric. May has sought to heal internal party divisions around transitional arrangements to avoid a 'cliff edge' scenario for Brexit. This can be viewed as an attempt to reconcile supporters of both the national conservative (hard Brexit) and neoliberal (soft Brexit) projects. Led by Chancellor Philip Hammond, the government has also set out to rebuild relations with its natural supporters in the business community with the creation of a new business advisory council on Brexit (Financial Times 2017b).

The challenge of negotiating Brexit, and constructing a post-Brexit statecraft, has been profoundly shaped by the institutional context. We offer three brief examples. First, the process for managing the Brexit negotiations has resulted in the largest upheaval of Whitehall departments since accession. Institutional reform has

circumvented the normal process for coordinating EU business by creating a dedicated Brexit Department. The cost of doing so, in terms of the logistical challenge and bureaucratic upheaval, is slowly becoming apparent, with individual ministries having divergent views on the form of Brexit desired. Nowhere is this more apparent than with the Treasury, which historically was the Whitehall department that was most lukewarm about the EU (Bulmer and Burch 2009: 133-145). Now, by contrast, it is seen as the best hope for a soft Brexit or a long transition period. Second, tensions between the constituent nations of the UK have increased as a result of the fact that the majority of voters in Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to Remain. Third, ambiguity surrounding the process for triggering Article 50 led a private citizen, Gina Millar, to take the UK government to the High Court. Although the November 2016 outcome reaffirmed the role of Parliament in giving final authorisation, the process by which any final Brexit deal with the EU will be ratified remains a significant cause of controversy (Armstrong 2017: 213-228).

Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that the European issue in recent times has created significant fissures in UK politics. By deploying the notion of competing hegemonic projects we have seen how both main British political parties were divided on the European issue in the mid-2010s: between the neoliberal and national conservative projects (Conservatives) and between the national and EU social projects (Labour). Inter- and intra-party divisions over integration have been a recurrent feature of the UK's relationship with EU, even before accession. Governments with a weak majority were always at risk, as the different experiences of the Cameron and Major governments revealed. However, the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition proved to be particularly explosive.

Vulnerability to a major eruption on the European issue had been managed by governments taking advantage of the UK's distinctive constitutional fluidity, i.e. the ability of elected governments to reconfigure the rules of the institutional game for purposes of electoral statecraft (winning elections and party management). Although this strategy worked, for a time, as an exercise in *depoliticisation*, it failed catastrophically when deployed as an exercise in strategic *politicisation*. Since the referendum the UK's constitutional fluidity has proved to be more a hindrance than help in reassuring the regions and nations, the City and manufacturing interests, never mind Remain voters, that their voices will be heard in the negotiations.

Attributing Brexit to either long-term macro structural changes, or the contingent actions of reckless political actors, we argue, is therefore insufficient as an explanation. Rather, greater explanatory leverage is provided by exploring how governments and other actors use statecraft to mobilize competing hegemonic projects around European integration within a strategically-selective (yet flexible) institutional context. Our first conclusion, therefore, is that macro structural change, the UK's distinctive constitutional context and political statecraft in harnessing competing hegemonic projects are *all* intrinsic to a complete explanation of Brexit.

Our second conclusion steps outside of the comfort-zone of proclaiming the singularity of the British case. We argue that the management of hegemonic projects

is intrinsic to all EU member states. Hegemonic projects are transnational by nature and exist across all EU member states. All of them are addressing macro structural change, such as globalization and migration. The institutional context differs; policy legacies differ; historical context differs. However, we suggest that each government is pursuing a neo-statecraft approach of its own: whether it is Chancellor Merkel 'managing' domestic public opinion on the Eurozone and refugee crises or the rather different, illiberal 'anti-Brussels' approach pursued by Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orban. The positions of national governments on European integration are shaped by statecraft: how agency (parties, leaders) mobilize support and manage contestation between competing hegemonic projects within a distinct national institutional context. Our framework, we suggest, offers the foundations for a 'new' domestic politics approach to understanding the EU through analysis of its member states.

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