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**HOW HAVE THE CONSERVATIVE AND UNIONIST PARTY, LABOUR PARTY,
SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY, AND LIBERAL DEMOCRATS CHANGED THEIR
GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTOS FROM 2017 TO 2019 BECAUSE OF BREXIT?**

Bachelor's thesis

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ABSTRACT

This paper dives into the evolving political party manifestos in the United Kingdom (UK) during the general elections of 2017 to 2019 and draws linkages to the impact of the Brexit phenomenon on these manifestos. The study employs qualitative content discourse analysis methodology, examining the shifting approaches to Brexit as portrayed in the manifestos of major political parties: the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, the Scottish National Party (SNP), and the Liberal Democrats. The analysis examines the dynamics that are driving these changes and applies a lens of Euroscepticism to provide additional context. The research and analysis in the thesis contribute to an understanding of how Brexit influenced political discourse in the UK in 2017 and 2019 and look into the future of the UK's politics - to 2024 and beyond.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Brexit refers to the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union (EU), a decision formalised by the 2016 referendum in which almost 52% of voters opted for leaving the EU. This event marked a significant turning point in UK politics, causing profound impacts on its domestic and international policies. This paper examines how Brexit as a phenomenon and a process influenced the general election manifestos of major UK political parties in 2017 and 2019.

Manifestos express the views of political parties on society's key issues and explain their viewpoints to voters. Because of this, these documents make it possible to understand and compare the parties' policies and their implementations. When substantial changes take place in society, these processes are likely to be reflected in party manifestos, making these documents valuable sources of information.

The years 2017 and 2019 correspond to the two general elections that both took place post-referendum, each offering a reality check in their own right on how Brexit influenced political party manifestos. The 2017 election was held shortly after the Brexit referendum, with the parties having only 52 days to develop their general election manifestos. The 2019 election was held after lengthy and difficult Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU. Examining these two elections enables a nuanced analysis of the evolution of key party positions during a time when Brexit was an existential issue in British politics.

This paper demonstrates that the 2016 Brexit referendum reshaped Britain's political parties' strategic priorities and manifestos and that Euroscepticism evolved significantly between 2017 and 2019. The Conservative and Unionist Party, Labour Party, Scottish National Party (SNP), and Liberal Democrats, representing a diverse ideological spectrum, have all had to adjust to Brexit and its ramifications for Britain's future. The subsequent manifestos in 2017 and 2019 reflect these shifts, highlighting how Brexit has become a defining issue in contemporary UK politics.

2. GENERAL BACKGROUND

In 2015, the UK's Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Cabinet Office and Prime Minister's Office released an EU Referendum Bill. The Bill was introduced to the public 40 years after the last referendum on the UK's membership of the EU (GOV.UK, 2015). It was Prime Minister David Cameron's commitment to give the British people a say in whether they, as a nation, wanted to continue being a member of the EU. The Bill contained information on the upcoming referendum, in which the voters were asked: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union?" People eligible to vote were British, Irish and Commonwealth citizens over 18 years old who were residents in the UK and UK nationals' residents overseas for less than 15 years. The Bill stated that the referendum would be held by 31 December 2017.

The first Bill, published in 2015, focused on whether the UK wanted to continue being a member of the EU. The press release of the 2015 Bill states: "Ahead of the referendum, the Prime Minister will discuss with EU leaders how the UK can work with partners to reform the EU and renegotiate our relationship with it" (GOV.UK, 2015). Therefore, when the UK's Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Cabinet Office and Prime Minister's Office released the EU referendum Bill, there were no concrete plans of what the aftermath would look like if most UK citizens voted to leave the EU. At the time, there were campaigns for and against Brexit, and the government provided the public with information on the membership of the EU - for example, papers on the rights and obligations of EU membership and the process for withdrawing from the Union. The Cabinet Office also released papers on the topic of "Alternatives to membership: possible models for the United Kingdom outside the European Union" (GOV.UK, 2016).

The Brexit referendum took place on the 23rd of June 2016. While 48.1% of all voters voted to remain a member of the EU, 51.9% voted to leave the EU. Over 46 million people from - England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Gibraltar were registered to vote. In the end, over 33 million people voted, representing a turnout of 72.2%. It was the highest turnout since the 1992 UK Parliamentary general election, except for the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. The group leaders of the Leave campaign, who had campaigned for Brexit, seemed surprised, too,

because they admitted they had no plan for what Brexit would actually look like (The Electoral Commission, 2016) (Sherr, 2016).

Following the referendum on 23rd of June 2016, then Prime Minister David Cameron addressed the nation and stated in his speech, "I do not think it would be right for me to try to be the captain that steers our country to its next destination" (Brexit: David Cameron's Resignation Statement in Full, 2016). David Cameron had said many times before that he was anti-Brexit (Sherr, 2016).

On the 13th of July 2016, Britain got a new Prime Minister, Theresa May. Her task was to negotiate a deal with the EU and begin the process of Article 50, which provides a mechanism for the voluntary and unilateral withdrawal of a country from the European Union (*Withdrawal from the European Union*, n.d.). The goal was to get the best possible deal for the United Kingdom that would have as many perks as possible while no longer being a member of the EU (Theresa May vows to be "one nation" prime minister, 2016). However, after trying to negotiate a deal for a year, Prime Minister Theresa May decided to call for a general election. Her reasoning was to strengthen her hand in Brexit negotiations. In her speech, delivered in front of 10 Downing Street on April 18, 2017, she stated: "I have a simple challenge to the opposition parties: you have criticised the government's vision for Brexit, you have challenged our objectives, you have threatened to block the legislation we put before Parliament. This is your moment to show you mean it, to show you are not opposing the government for the sake of it, to show that you do not treat politics as a game" (Time Staff, 2017). The snap election took place on the 8th of June 2017. The political parties had 52 days to develop their general election manifestos and campaigns (Bate et al., 2019). Ultimately, it was a chance for every single party to present their idea and approach to Brexit to the public.

The 2017 general election resulted in a hung Parliament, with no party winning an overall majority. 68.8% of the citizens eligible to vote voted in this election. The Conservative Party emerged with the highest number of seats and collected 42.3% of the popular vote, amounting to 317 seats, marking an increase from their 2015 performance of 36.8%. The Labour Party secured 262 seats and captured 40.0% of the vote, experiencing an upsurge from their previous performance of 232 seats and 30.4% of the vote in 2015. The SNP secured 35 seats, down from 56 seats in 2015. Furthermore, the Liberal Democrats attained 12 seats, marking a net gain of 4 seats compared to

2015, alongside a 7.4% vote share. The Brexit referendum results showed the division in society, and the 2017 general election confirmed it (Bate et al., 2019).

The negotiations with the EU had lasted for three years when, on 24 May 2019, Theresa May announced her resignation as Prime Minister after failing to deliver an agreement that would lead the UK out of the EU (Theresa May quits: UK set for new PM, 2019). Boris Johnson won the Conservative leadership contest and became the new Prime Minister of the UK (Boris Johnson wins race to be Tory leader and PM, 2019). The 2019 general election took place three years after the Brexit referendum. It had been agreed that Brexit would officially take place on the 1st of February 2020. Therefore, when the general election took place in December 2019, Brexit was in the final “home run” stage (Baker et al., 2020). The political parties had closely followed the difficult Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU for nearly three years and now had the opportunity to reflect their own vision of Brexit through their political manifestos.

The 2019 general election resulted in a Conservative victory. 67.3% of the citizens who were eligible to vote voted in this election. The Conservative party won 365 seats, which is 48 more than in 2017, and 43.6% of the vote. The Labour Party won 202 seats and 32.1% of the vote but lost 60 seats. The Liberal Democrats won 11 seats, one fewer than in 2017, and 11.5% of the vote. The SNP won 48 seats, up 13 compared to the 2017 election results (Baker et al., 2020).

The Brexit referendum and the general elections of 2017 and 2019 in the UK took place as Euroscepticism was also on the rise in continental Europe, including in France, Italy, and the European Parliament itself (Banks, 2016).

3. THEORY AND CONCEPT

3.1. Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism is a multifaceted phenomenon that occurs in party politics, public opinion, comparative politics, international relations, institutions, psychology, sociology, economics, law, geography, and history — it can be found everywhere. It is characterised by scepticism and criticism towards the EU and its institutions and has become a central part of contemporary political discourse in Europe (Leruth et al., 2018).

The term ‘Eurosceptic’ comes from the United Kingdom. Journalists and politicians first used it to refer to MPs within the Conservative Party who were unsure about the path of European integration in the post-Single European Act era. The term has since expanded across Europe and taken various forms, making it difficult to pinpoint a single ideological core. Euroscepticism is often viewed as a negative construction, characterised by opposition rather than a coherent ideology - this complicates the effort to theorise this concept (Leruth et al., 2018) (de Wilde, Teney, 2018).

The term has been in use for over forty years, but we still do not know what impact Euroscepticism has or what truly drives it. It is believed that strategic opportunism among political parties often drives Euroscepticism, linking it to broader criticism of government and elitism. Moreover, economic, and cultural factors shape Eurosceptic attitudes, with citizens’ perception of losing out to global competition influencing their views on issues like migration and economic integration. Euroscepticism falls somewhere between the economic and cultural dimensions of globalisation conflict (Leruth et al., 2018) (de Wilde, Teney, 2018).

Euroscepticism is not solely a mass-driven phenomenon but is also influenced by elite cues and party responsiveness. Structural factors and individual considerations contribute to the complexity of Eurosceptic attitudes. Theoretical propositions about Euroscepticism, while diverse, offer insights into whether it is a standalone phenomenon or embedded within broader societal issues.

Further research is needed to unravel the complexities of Euroscepticism and its impact on European governance and society (Leruth et al., 2018) (de Wilde, Teney, 2018).

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative content discourse analysis methodology to examine the evolving manifestos of 2017 and 2019 in the UK and the impacts of Brexit on these shifts. It analyses the key changes in the treatment of Brexit within the general election manifestos of prominent political parties in the United Kingdom between 2017 and 2019 and links this analysis to the broader dynamics of Euroscepticism.

4.1. Data Collection

The principal data sources encompass the official manifestos published by the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, the SNP, and the Liberal Democrats for the respective general elections under consideration. Manifestos from the years 2017 and 2019 will be collected from the official party websites, electoral commission archives and the British Government Official webpage. The focus of the analysis will be on sections specifically related to Brexit and the EU. These sections will be extracted and compiled for detailed examination and analysis.

4.2. Content Analysis

The content analysis will be guided by the research questions and objectives outlined in the study. The analysis will involve identifying and categorising the following:

1. *Isolated Connotations:* The study will assess the frequency and prominence of discussions related to Brexit within each manifesto. This will involve examining the extent to which Brexit is discussed in relation to other policy areas and issues.
2. *Narratives and Policy Focus:* The study will analyse each party's overall narrative and framing of Brexit, including the language, words, and actors used, any shifts in framing between 2017 and 2019, and how Brexit is situated within their broader policy agendas, identifying key policy areas like the economy, immigration, and trade associated with Brexit in their manifestos.

3. *Comparative Analysis:* The analysis will compare the manifestos of Britain's key political parties to identify shifts in their approaches in 2017 and 2019. This will include assessing whether parties modified how they presented their ideas of Brexit to the public between 2017 and 2019, as well as identifying any shifts in emphasis or focus. The study will try to answer questions such as: How did the party's narrative evolve as the decision of Brexit took place and progressed into difficult Brexit negotiations?

4.3. Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the Wider Context

Finally, the paper will interpret the empirical research findings and the content analysis and consider the implications of the relationship between electoral politics, Brexit, and Euroscepticism in the UK.

5. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

5.1. The 2017 United Kingdom General Election

In 2017, against the backdrop of Brexit uncertainty, the United Kingdom found itself in a state of political flux as parties needed to navigate the aftermath of the referendum. Prime Minister Theresa May's decision to call for a snap election was primarily aimed at strengthening her negotiating position in the Brexit talks. Against this backdrop, the political parties needed to come up with their own Brexit strategies in 52 days that would reflect their stance and vision of Brexit.

5.1.1. The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2017

- In the case of the Conservatives, the mention of Brexit is concentrated in their 2017 manifesto. The word Brexit is mentioned 15 times in the 88-page manifesto. The Conservatives focused on Brexit in the foreword and in 1 chapter out of the 5 in the manifesto.
- When it comes to Brexit, the overarching adjective used to emphasise their ideas and vision is “strong.” Conservatives want to ensure that the economy “stays strong” and that the country emerges from Brexit as a “strong and united nation” (*FORWARD, TOGETHER Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future*, 2017, p. 8-10). They approach the topic of Brexit as a status quo and as a policy issue. The main idea of the manifesto is to urge the British nation to be united and strong together after Article 50 has been revoked.

The party's manifesto from 2017 is named “Forward Together. Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future.” It starts with a foreword from Theresa May who was the party leader in 2017 and the Prime Minister of Britain. May emphasises the crucial nature of the upcoming election for the country's future. She stresses the need for strong leadership and a stable government to navigate the challenges of Brexit and to ensure prosperity. May outlines her vision for a stronger, fairer Britain, focusing on building a Great Meritocracy and addressing burning injustices. The manifesto pledges investment in public services, support for workers, and efforts to tackle mental health stigma. May calls for unity and optimism, presenting her plan as a commitment to overcome

challenges and build a better, more prosperous Britain (*FORWARD, TOGETHER Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future*, 2017, p. 1-5).

The manifesto addresses “five giant challenges”: (1) the need for a strong economy; (2) Brexit and a changing world; (3) enduring social divisions; (4) an ageing society; (5) fast-changing technology. By highlighting these five challenges, the Conservatives' idea was to provide a vision that would be relevant and appealing to a wide range of British citizens. The manifesto emphasises that Conservatives are “governing from the mainstream” and will “govern in the interest of ordinary, working families” (*FORWARD, TOGETHER Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future*, 2017, p. 6-10).

Chapter 2 is called “A Strong and United Nation in a Changing World.” One of the promises that Theresa May’s Conservatives will deliver is “the best possible deal for Britain as we leave the European Union delivered by a smooth, orderly Brexit” (*FORWARD, TOGETHER Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future*, 2017, p. 30). The chapter has a “Leaving the European Union” section that discusses Brexit. The manifesto does not describe their idea of Brexit in detail and rather invites people to read their approach to Brexit from the White Paper on the United Kingdom’s Exit from, and a new relationship with, the EU during the passage of the EU (Notification of Withdrawal) Act, in the Prime Minister’s letter to the president of the European Council invoking Article 50, and in the Great Repeal Bill White Paper (*FORWARD, TOGETHER Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future*, 2017, p. 35-37).

In the upcoming Brexit negotiations, Conservatives are focused on their key priorities to secure the best possible outcome for the United Kingdom. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Theresa May, the idea is to negotiate a deep and special partnership with the EU that would also maintain strong partnerships and alliances with other member states. It is also highlighted that no deal is better than a bad deal for the UK. The idea is to ensure control over laws, immigration, and the entitlement of EU nationals in the UK and British nationals in the EU. The aim is also to maintain a frictionless border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, safeguard workers’ rights, pursue free trade with European markets and establish new trade agreements with other countries. While the United Kingdom will no longer be part of the single market or customs union,

the Conservatives wish to seek a deep and special partnership with the EU, including comprehensive free trade and customs agreements. Conservatives also seek to collaborate with the EU in areas such as crime and terrorism, science, and innovation while protecting the democratic freedoms of territories like Gibraltar (*FORWARD, TOGETHER Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future*, 2017, p. 35-37).

The end goal is to advocate for fair, orderly negotiations that minimise disruption and provide certainty for both sides. It is important to reach agreements on both the terms of withdrawal and the future partnership within the two-year timeframe stipulated by Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union (*FORWARD, TOGETHER Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future*, 2017, p. 35).

After giving a short overview of what Conservatives consider to be important in the process of leaving the EU, they present a new idea. The title is “Repatriating EU Law to the United Kingdom”. In it, the Conservatives propose that they enact a Great Repeal Bill. This legislative initiative aims to seamlessly convert existing EU laws into UK law, ensuring continuity and stability for businesses and individuals post-Brexit. By bringing the legislative process back under national control, the bill seeks to empower the UK Parliament and devolved legislatures to amend, repeal, or improve EU-derived laws as needed. Moreover, it highlights the government’s commitment to correcting any legal deficiencies arising from EU law’s transposition, thus safeguarding the legal system's effectiveness in the post-EU era. The Bill would be done with a cooperative approach, with devolved administrations to address the diverse needs and circumstances of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The aim is to provide legal clarity and certainty but also to ensure that the repatriation process respects the principles of parliamentary sovereignty and devolution within the United Kingdom (*FORWARD, TOGETHER Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future*, 2017, p. 36-37).

5.1.2. The Labour Party Manifesto 2017

- In the case of the Labour Party, the mention of Brexit is concentrated in their 2017 manifesto. The word Brexit is mentioned 21 times in the 128-page manifesto. The Labour Party focused on Brexit in the foreword and in 1 chapter out of the 12 in the manifesto.
- The key points that the Labour Party emphasises are that while they accept the results of the referendum, they wish to negotiate a deal which will foster close connections with the EU. The Labour Party emphasises continued collaboration with the EU on issues like climate change and counterterrorism and seeks a cooperative future relationship with the EU post-Brexit. They aim to maintain participation in EU programs such as Horizon 2020 and the Erasmus scheme and ensure access to EU markets for agricultural produce (*For the Many Not the Few*, 2017, p. 25)

The party's manifesto for 2017 is called “For the Many. Not the Few.” It starts with a foreword from Jeremy Corbyn, the party leader in 2017. Corbyn urges people to vote for the Labour party because it is for the people of Britain. The party plans on “building a fairer Britain where no one is held back.” They aim to negotiate a Brexit deal that would put Britain’s economy and living standards first. The idea is to have a “jobs-first Brexit” that would allow Britain to upgrade its economy for the 21st century (*For the Many Not the Few*, 2017, p. 4-5).

The general election manifesto has 12 chapters, each focusing on a different subject. Chapter 2 is for Brexit, and it’s called “Negotiating Brexit.” The chapter states, "Labour accepts the referendum result, and a Labour government will put the national interest first. We will prioritise jobs and living standards, build a close new relationship with the EU, protect workers’ rights and environmental standards, provide certainty to EU nationals, and give a meaningful role to Parliament throughout negotiations” (*For the Many Not the Few*, 2017, p. 24). Labour's idea is to scrap the Conservatives’ Brexit White Paper and replace it with new negotiating priorities. They accept the current status quo; however, they want to challenge the Conservatives' vision of Brexit and find another more comfortable way to deal with Brexit. In the introduction to “Negotiating Brexit,” the Labour Party rejects the notion of a ‘no deal’ Brexit, advocating for transitional agreements if necessary to avoid economic instability (*For the Many Not the Few*, 2017, p. 24-27).

Labour pledges to protect workers' rights, consumer rights, and environmental protections through legislation and close engagement with stakeholders. They advocate for the devolution of powers and guarantee no drop in funding for regions and nations affected by Brexit. Additionally, Labour vows to address specific concerns such as the Irish border and Gibraltar's status and sovereignty. They highlight the importance of parliamentary scrutiny and promise a meaningful vote on the final Brexit deal (*For the Many Not the Few*, 2017, p. 24-27).

However, their two key focus points are immigration and international trade. In the immigration section, Labour does not offer a concrete plan for a new system of immigration, but they vow to have a fair and just system post-Brexit. They would prioritise economic growth, jobs, and prosperity over arbitrary immigration targets. The vision is to implement fair immigration rules without discrimination based on race or creed, focusing on family attachment, and ending indefinite detentions. Labour Party also wants to protect workers from exploitation and welcome the contribution of immigrants while upholding the tradition of honouring international law by taking a fair share of refugees (*For the Many Not the Few*, 2017, p. 28-29).

In the international trade section, Labour emphasises that it's pro-trade and pro-investment. Labour's vision for post-Brexit trade revolves around promoting trade and investment while minimising barriers to exports. They wish to develop an integrated trade and industry strategy with devolved administrations to boost exports, investment, and job creation. Transparency and parliamentary scrutiny of future trade deals are crucial – particularly with the EU, which accounts for a significant portion of current exports. Through initiatives like the Just Trading program, Labour aims to negotiate free trade agreements that remove barriers and promote high standards and skilled jobs. While working on new trade agreements, Labour will also ensure that trade agreements do not undermine human rights and labour standards and uphold environmental protection while championing the export interests of small and medium-sized businesses and supporting regional trade and investment promotion (*For the Many Not the Few*, 2017, p. 30-31).

5.1.3. The Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2017

- In the case of the Liberal Democrats, the mention of Brexit in their 2017 manifesto is dispersed. The word Brexit is mentioned 23 times in the 100-page manifesto. The Liberal Democrats focused on Brexit in the foreword and in 7 chapters out of their ten chapters.
- They outline a staunch opposition to hard Brexit, emphasising their commitment to maintaining close ties with Europe. They prioritise protecting the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in Europe, advocating for simplified registration processes and continued freedom of movement.

The party's manifesto for 2017 is called “Change Britain’s Future”. It starts with a foreword from Tim Farron, who was the party leader in 2017. Tim Farron presents a stark warning about the dangers of the Conservative Party’s landslide victory led by Theresa May. He criticises both the Conservative Party’s arrogance and heartlessness and Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party for lacking real opposition, particularly on the issue of Brexit. Farron emphasises the need for a strong opposition to hold the government to account and offers the Liberal Democrats as that alternative, pledging to challenge Theresa May’s government on issues like healthcare, education, the environment, and Brexit. He urges voters to support the Liberal Democrats in order to change the country's direction towards openness, tolerance, and unity (*Change Britain’s Future*, 2017, p. 4-6).

This general election manifesto does not have a chapter dedicated to Brexit; however, the concept of Brexit is integrated into different topics and sections. The Liberal Democrats start off their general election manifesto with a chapter called “Protect Britain’s Place in Europe.” In it, the Liberal Democrats express that they are pro-EU and that Britain is better off in the EU. They do acknowledge the results of the 2016 referendum. However, they do condemn the Conservative's campaign for a hard Brexit. The Liberal Democrats insist that the effects of Brexit “are already being felt” because the pound's value plummeted, inflation has risen, economic growth has slowed, and urgent matters such as the future of NHS have been neglected. They emphasise that a hard Brexit would further complicate the already dire situation. The Liberal Democrats vow to give the British people the final say in the Brexit deal as well as organise another referendum with the

alternative option to stay in the EU. Their idea is to challenge the current status quo (*Change Britain's Future*, 2017, p. 9-11).

As stated previously, the Liberal Democrats are against a hard Brexit, and in the first chapter, they have a subheading called “Fighting a hard Brexit”. They advocate for membership in the single market and customs union to facilitate trade and uphold environmental standards and social rights that are upheld by EU law. The party also highlights the importance of preserving opportunities for young people, supporting science and research funding, and ensuring the interests of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Gibraltar are respected in negotiations (*Change Britain's Future*, 2017, p. 10-11).

The general election manifesto also mentions the impacts of Brexit in the education section, which discusses university funding and top-quality research options. Brexit would undermine the ability to attract and retain the best staff and students (*Change Britain's Future*, 2017, p. 30-31). Furthermore, the chapter “Build an Economy that Works for You” highlights that a hard Brexit would cast a shadow over Britain’s economic future. The Liberal Democrats promise to pursue a different European policy from the Conservatives and invest in technology to get public services and front-line staff online. Due to Brexit, Britain would lose European Structural and Investment Funds, which means that prosperity in the UK would be spread even more unevenly (*Change Britain's Future*, 2017, p. 35-44). Another topic that mentions Brexit is farming, food, and agriculture, again highlighting the fact that a hard Brexit would mean the loss of export markets, which would deepen the current problems in the fishing industry even more (*Change Britain's Future*, 2017, p. 52-53). Brexit would also put at risk the amount of money being currently invested into Britain’s cultural capital (*Change Britain's Future*, 2017, p. 65). Liberal Democrats would fight against campaigners of hard Brexit who pretend that racism and discrimination are part of patriotism. (*Change Britain's Future*, 2017, p. 10-11). Moreover, they would retain the European Arrest Warrant, membership of Europol and access to EU information databases when it comes to crime and policing (*Change Britain's Future*, 2017, p. 11). Lastly, the Liberal Democrats would work towards a united United Kingdom that is not decentralised (*Change Britain's Future*, 2017, p. 91-94).

5.1.4. The Scottish National Party Manifesto 2017

- In the case of the SNP, the mention of Brexit in their 2017 manifesto is dispersed. The word Brexit is mentioned 42 times in the 48-page manifesto. The SNP does not have chapters in their manifesto - they have sections with titles and subheadings. 11 sections mention Brexit at least once out of the 13 bigger sections, even though it is difficult to section the topics because some sections are thematically divided up even further.
- SNP's general election manifesto highlights that Scotland wants to have a say in Brexit negotiations and not be pushed aside, it is vital to vote for the SNP. The more seats the SNP has in Westminster, the more power the Scottish Parliament has (*Stronger for Scotland*, 2017, p. 6).

The party's manifesto for 2017 is called "Stronger for Scotland". It starts with a foreword from Nicola Sturgeon, who was the party leader in 2017. Nicola Sturgeon emphasises that voting for the SNP means voting for MPs dedicated to Scotland's best interests. She highlighted the need for Scotland's voice to be heard, especially in the face of potential further Conservative cuts. Sturgeon outlines the SNP's commitment to ending austerity, investing in public services, and protecting family budgets. The manifesto prioritises tackling inequality through fair taxation and addressing low pay. Sturgeon asserts that voting for the SNP will strengthen Scotland's position in Brexit negotiations and reinforce Scotland's right to choose its own future, ultimately aiming to make Scotland stronger at Westminster (*Stronger for Scotland*, 2017, p. 3).

A majority of people in Scotland voted to remain in the EU. In their key pledges section, the SNP highlights that it is important for the SNP to have a say in Brexit because they would seek additional powers for the Scottish Parliament to boost their economy, protect the most vulnerable in their society from damaging Tory cuts as well as mitigate the damage of Brexit (*Stronger for Scotland*, 2017, p. 4-8). Furthermore, they aim to protect Scotland's place in the Single Market because leaving the Single Market means losing approximately 80,000 jobs in Scotland. They want Scotland to remain in the Single Market even after leaving the EU; however, their proposal was already rejected by the UK government (*Stronger for Scotland*, 2017, p. 8). Throughout the general election manifesto, the SNP highlights how important it is to be part of the Brexit negotiations and that Scotland needs to have a say about their future as well. They aim to challenge the status quo.

Their idea of the position that the SNP will have in the next government is to fight for a right for Scotland to have a say in the negotiation process and fight the Conservatives on matters that would result in losing jobs in Scotland. Topics that they want to have a say in while discussing the Brexit deal would be: (1) fishing; (2) EU nationals living in Britain; (3) still having access to the European Medicines Agency; (4) Scotland's industries and a Single Market membership; (5) Scotland's tourist industry and increase of Border Forces; (6) commitment to the Open Skies Agreement which would ensure that there is no loss of flights to or from Scotland; (7) the importance of the oil and gas industry; (8) fighting for international crime and terrorism; (9) climate change (*Stronger for Scotland*, 2017, p. 4-47). Their goal is to fight for Scotland's choice at the end of the Brexit process and to avoid the situation where the Brexit deal would just be imposed on Scotland.

In the chapter "Scotland's Future", the SNP expresses its idea that if Scotland chooses to become independent, it should be a member state of the EU. They would initiate an independence referendum at the end of the Brexit process since most of Scotland voted to stay in the EU (*Stronger for Scotland*, 2017, p. 8).

5.2. The 2019 United Kingdom General Election

By 2019, after three years of difficult Brexit negotiations between the EU and the UK, Brexit continued to be at the forefront of the national agenda. The political landscape was characterised by heightened polarisation, with voters seeking clarity and direction of the country's future relationship with the EU. The parties had three years to develop their own vision and understanding of Brexit.

5.2.1. The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019

- In the case of the Conservatives, the mention of Brexit in their 2019 manifesto is dispersed. The word Brexit is mentioned 61 times in the 64-page manifesto. The Conservatives focused on Brexit in 5 chapters out of the 5.
- The Conservatives focus on delivering the message of getting Brexit done, accepting the status quo, and moving forward without the EU.

With Boris Johnson in the Prime Minister seat, the party's manifesto for 2019 is named “Get Brexit Done. Unleash Britain’s Potential.” From the first page, it is understood that it focuses on Boris Johnson and his vision of the Conservative Party as well as how to “get Brexit done”. The contents of this manifesto are divided into five categories: (1) Get Brexit Done; (2) We Will Focus on Your Priorities; (3) We Will Unleash Britain’s Potential; (4) We Will Strengthen Britain In The World; (5) We Will Put You First (*Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain’s Potential*, 2019, p. 2, 5, 9, 25, 51, 59).

The introduction starts off with painting a colourful picture for the manifesto reader about the situation in Britain: “For the last three and a half years, this country has felt trapped, like a lion in a cage. We have all shared the same frustration – like some super-green supercar blocked in the traffic. We can see the way ahead. We know where we want to go and why we are stuck” (*Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain’s Potential*, 2019, p. 2). It sets the tone of voice for the rest of the manifesto – the Conservatives see a problem with the current Parliament, which has not been able to deliver Brexit, and the Conservatives plan on winning the majority vote and delivering Brexit in the shortest time possible. They want to move forward with Brexit and put the new program into action, which the new government, along with Prime Minister Boris Johnson, has mapped out. In the foreword, Boris Johnson highlights how his government can get the job done if the Conservatives get the majority vote in the new elections: “I am very proud of the achievements of this Government in its first 100 days. We have mapped out a fantastic programme for the years ahead: to unite and level up, spreading opportunity across the whole United Kingdom” (*Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain’s Potential*, 2019, p. 2-3).

The chapter “Get Brexit Done” emphasises that when Boris Johnson entered Downing Street and became Prime Minister, he promised to get Brexit done. Since then, he has negotiated a great new deal – despite Parliament’s best efforts to block its progress. The call to action is straightforward: “We must move on. No more renegotiations. No more referendums. Every week is costing us. Investment is waiting to come into the country. Families and businesses cannot make vital decisions. The public services cannot get the attention they deserve” (*Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain’s Potential*, 2019, p. 5). Therefore, the first order of business is to get Brexit done and then turn their focus to the British public, which isn’t getting enough attention. The idea is to take back

control of their laws, money, trade policy, etc. They emphasise the following timeline: “If we elect a majority of Conservative MPs to Parliament, we will start putting our deal through Parliament before Christmas, and we will leave the European Union in January” (*Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain’s Potential*, 2019, p. 5). The key to delivering Brexit is to have a Conservative majority in Parliament and move forward with the Brexit deal that Boris Johnson has already delivered.

After making their call to action—urging people to vote for the Conservatives since they will deliver a swift and quick Brexit—they focus on what Britain can be like post-Brexit. Each idea that the Conservatives present in their general election manifesto includes photos of people from the industry their vision is about. They highlight the domains that need change: NHS, investing in schools, supporting working families, the country’s safety, and the immigration system (*Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain’s Potential*, 2019, p. 9-20).

The manifesto is about the future of Britain—internally and externally. They focus on the people of Britain and their needs. As one of their slogans says, “We Will Put You First” (*Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain’s Potential*, 2019, p. 59). The manifesto uses a firm tone of voice—once Brexit is done, we can move forward with our people’s vision of Britain. The manifesto’s layout is reader-friendly and has photos of the British people who work in the domains mentioned above and photos of Boris Johnson interacting with people and taking part in activities.

5.2.2. The Labour Party Manifesto 2019

- In the case of the Labour Party, the mention of Brexit is concentrated in their 2019 manifesto. The word Brexit is mentioned 21 times in the 107-page manifesto. The Labour Party focused on Brexit in 2 chapters out of the five they have.
- The Labour Party does not solely focus on the topic of Brexit; however, they propose a new negotiation phase that would end with the public voting for or against it as well as the option of remaining in the EU.

The party's manifesto for 2019 is called “It’s Time for Real Change” It starts with a foreword from Jeremy Corbyn, the party leader in 2019. Corbyn emphasises the transformative potential of the upcoming election, highlighting Labour’s commitment to delivering real change that benefits all citizens. He rejects the notion of this solely being a “Brexit election”, asserting that it encompasses

a wide array of issues such as climate, investment, healthcare, education, and poverty. Corbyn criticises the Conservative government's failures across various sectors and pledges Labour's dedication to rewriting economic rules, investing in public services, and kick-starting a Green Industrial Revolution. He promises to prioritise the needs of the many over the privileged few, advocating for policies that tackle inequality, climate change, and social justice (*It's Time for Real Change*, 2019, p. 6-8).

Since Jeremy Corbyn emphasised in the foreword that this is not a "Brexit election", the Labour Party focused one out of the five on Brexit. It's called "The Final Say on Brexit". In this chapter, Labour presents the idea that after coming to power, a Labour government will secure a sensible deal within three months and within six months, they will put the deal to a public vote alongside the option to remain. Labour will not accept a no-deal Brexit and will oppose the deal negotiated by Boris Johnson. Their idea is to negotiate a deal that would protect jobs, rights and the environment while avoiding a hard border in Northern Ireland, protecting the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process. Furthermore, there would be no change in Gibraltar's status or sovereignty (*It's Time for Real Change*, 2019, p. 89-92).

They aim to negotiate a permanent and comprehensive UK-wide customs union with the EU, emphasising its importance in safeguarding the manufacturing industry and enabling joint trade deals. Labour pledges close alignment with the Single Market to support UK businesses and ensure a strong economic relationship with the EU (*It's Time for Real Change*, 2019, p. 89-92). Additionally, they advocate for dynamic alignment on workers' rights, consumer rights, and environmental protections to maintain standards in line with those of Europe. Labour vows to have clear commitments on future security arrangements. Furthermore, Labour commits to continued participation in EU agencies and funding programs, particularly in areas of cooperation such as the environment, scientific research, and culture (*It's Time for Real Change*, 2019, p. 89-92).

If the potential future referendum by the British people decides to remain in the EU, Labour proposes a radical reform of the EU. They suggest that the EU needs a new political direction and support for more vulnerable members of society who have been suffering while the super-rich continue to be rewarded by a system that allows them to thrive at the expenses of the many (*It's*

Time for Real Change, 2019, p. 92). On the other hand, if the British people decide not to remain in the EU, the Labour Party would “work constructively with the EU on vital issues of mutual interest and to the mutual benefit of the UK and EU” (*It’s Time for Real Change*, 2019, p. 92). The general election emphasised that the British people would get the “final say on Brexit”.

5.2.3. The Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2019

- In the case of the Liberal Democrats, the mention of Brexit in their 2019 manifesto is dispersed. The word Brexit is mentioned 49 times in the 98-page manifesto. The Liberal Democrats focused on Brexit in 6 chapters out of the 10 they have.
- Under its new leadership, the Liberal Democrat Party manifesto is built around the concept of reversing Brexit and remaining in the EU.

The party's manifesto for 2019 is called “Stop Brexit Build a Brighter Future” It starts with a foreword from Jo Swinson, who was the party leader in 2019. Jo Swinson highlights the opportunity to break the Brexit deadlock and create a bright future for the UK. She emphasises the party’s ambitious vision for a society where everyone can thrive, and the planet is protected for future generations. Swinson stresses the Liberal Democrats’ momentum, citing record membership numbers and electoral successes (*Stop Brexit Build a Brighter Future*, 2019, p. 5-6). She positions the party as a viable alternative to the traditional choices of the Conservatives and Labour, advocating for politics based on hope and collaboration (*Stop Brexit Build a Brighter Future*, 2019, p. 5-6). Swinson asserts that stopping Brexit and implementing the Liberal Democrat plan is crucial for building a better future for all.

In the chapter “Stop Brexit”, they state that the Conservatives’ vision to “get Brexit done” is a lie—giving one vote to the Conservatives means more years of deliberations over the UK’s trade deal with the EU. It is important to stay in the EU. With the rising danger from an aggressive Russia and the US turning away from its old alliances to global problems like climate change, human trafficking, the arms trade, the power of multinationals, global poverty, and inequality, it is vital for Britain to remain a member of the EU (*Stop Brexit Build a Brighter Future*, 2019, p. 11-13).

Since the general election manifesto is built on the idea of stopping Brexit, the Liberal Democrats offer a bright future vision of Britain because the UK opted to stay in the EU.

5.2.4. The Scottish National Party Manifesto 2019

- In the case of the SNP, the mention of Brexit in their 2019 manifesto is dispersed. The word Brexit is mentioned 68 times in the 52-page manifesto. The SNP does not have chapters in their manifesto - they have sections with titles and subheadings. Twelve sections mention Brexit at least once out of the 14 bigger sections, even though it is difficult to section the topics because some sections are thematically divided even further.
- The SNP is adamant about having another referendum on Brexit. SNP sees Brexit as a huge change to the UK constitution and, therefore, warrants another vote on Scottish independence.

The party's manifesto for 2019 is called "Stronger for Scotland". It starts with a foreword from Nicola Sturgeon, the party leader in 2019. Nicola Sturgeon's introduction to the SNP general election manifesto emphasises building a better Scotland for current and future generations. She asserts that its people should make decisions about Scotland's future and outlines the manifesto's focus on protecting Scotland's interests. Sturgeon highlights the importance of escaping Brexit chaos by voting for the SNP and, therefore, putting Scotland's future in their own hands. The idea is to keep Scotland in the EU, protect the NHS, reverse budget cuts, and address various social and environmental issues. Sturgeon calls for support for the SNP to strengthen Scotland's voice and ensure its right to determine its future (*Stronger for Scotland*, 2019, p. 2).

They argue that Brexit "chaos" will continue for years. The SNP highlights Westminster's broken promises to further ensure their argument against Brexit. They bring out 11 key promises that were made but have not been delivered in the last few years (*Stronger for Scotland*, 2019, p. 4-7). The SNP believes that Scotland should be independent because, while in the UK, Scotland's future is not in Scotland's hands. With their vision of Scotland being an independent country, they promise to (1) get the government that people vote for, (2) be part of the EU, (3) Scotland will put together its own economic and migration policy, (4) Scottish Parliament will have complete control on tac

and social security policy, (5) the government won't "waste" money on things like nuclear weapons and Brexit, (6) NHS will be safe (*Stronger for Scotland*, 2019, p. 8).

6. COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE MANIFESTOS OF THE PARTIES OF NATIONAL RELEVANCE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

The general election manifestos illustrate notable shifts in party approaches in 2019 compared to 2017. Brexit remained a pivotal issue, but each party displayed distinct changes in their priorities. From the empirical research, the language used in the manifestos in 2017 and 2019 portrays an increased urgency to move to the next steps of Britain's politics, and there may have been some frustration and fatigue amongst the parties and the UK public as a result of the difficult Brexit negotiations that had been taking place for more than three years. The general election dynamics illustrate a significant polarisation among the UK's population in the 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2017 snap election. However, it could be argued that the 2019 election results expressed public fatigue with the prolonged Brexit negotiations and the need for tangible results.

When examining the approach of the Conservatives, it can be argued that while in 2017, their manifesto was idealistic, in 2019, they were able to show the results of their Brexit negotiations to the public. In 2017, the manifesto titled "Forward Together. Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and Prosperous Future" paints an idealistic view of Britain in a post-Brexit world. Their 2019 manifesto title, "Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain's Potential", is a clear call to action with a clear end goal. The Conservatives focused on making Brexit happen and negotiating a deal that would favour Britain, making it known that they supported the current status quo. To them, Brexit was a policy issue that needed to be fixed in order to move on with Britain's development. The Conservatives had chosen a new party leader and Prime Minister in the summer of 2019. Boris Johnson, the new Prime Minister, campaigned on the pro-Brexit side during the 2016 referendum and has been adamant on getting Brexit done since then. In the 2019 general election manifesto, the Conservatives stressed that they had already negotiated a deal under the leadership of Boris Johnson. The only thing left to do was to finalise the deal and move on without the EU. While in the 2017 manifesto, the topic of Brexit was concentrated, in 2019, the manifesto was about getting Brexit done and winning a majority Conservative government.

While the Conservatives emphasise negotiating a deal or settling for a no-deal as quickly as possible to get Brexit done, the other parties focused on changing the status quo and not really accepting the result of the 2016 referendum. The Labour Party (the biggest opposition party and the biggest competitor for the Conservatives), the Liberal Democrats and the SNP were more reluctant to accept the new status quo.

In the 2017 general elections, the Labour Party, led by Jeremy Corby, adopted a pragmatic stance and accepted the results of the Brexit referendum while prioritising jobs and economic stability and continuing to reap the benefits of remaining in a close relationship with the EU and the benefits of the Single Market. For the Labour Party, in 2017, Brexit was a cross-policy issue that would influence jobs, living standards, workers' rights and immigration. However, in 2019, the Party manifesto advocated for a second referendum, putting a new deal on vote again and therefore giving the public the option to remain in the EU. They, however, also took a stance that the 2019 election was not just a Brexit election. They touched on the topic of Brexit in one chapter called "Finalising Brexit" but otherwise steered clear of it. The Labour Party, as the Liberal Democrats had proposed in 2017, would negotiate a deal and give the final say to the people with the option of also reversing the Brexit referendum and remaining in the EU if the deal is not satisfying them. The Labour Party, as well as the Liberal Democrats and the SNP, criticised the Conservative Party in their manifestos. The Labour Party was critical of the current status quo and wished to change it; however, while the other parties focused mainly on Brexit, the Labour Party did not. In their foreword, they named the 2019 election "the change election", stating that "some people say this is the Brexit election. But it's also the climate election, the investment election, the NHS election, the living standards election, the education election, the poverty election, the fair taxes election. Above all, it's the change election" (*It's Time for Real Change*, 2019, p. 6).

Contrary to the Labour Party's stance in 2017, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP did not accept the idea of a post-Brexit world in 2017 or 2019. Their focus was on why Brexit was a bad idea even though the referendum had already taken place and the citizens of Britain made their choice. The Liberal Democrats and the SNP both positioned themselves as anti-Brexit parties, advocating for a second referendum and remaining in the EU.

The SNP's first and most important order of business is to always stand up for Scotland's best interests. Around 72% of people living in Scotland voted in favour of staying in the EU, the SNP positioned itself to be anti-Brexit and challenged the current status quo. For example, they highlighted the fact that the Single Market is extremely important for Scotland. In 2017, the SNP attached importance to being able to propose their own ideas during the negotiations and those ideas not to be rejected. In the foreword, Nicola Sturgeon also highlighted that the 2017 election won't decide whether Scotland will become independent; however, a vote for the SNP will reinforce the right of the Scottish Parliament to determine when a referendum should happen. So, while the SNP did not propose to fully reverse the status quo, they wanted to challenge it.

While the SNP took an anti-Brexit stance in 2017, in 2019, their stance hardened further. They put their focus on talking about how if Brexit happens, then Scotland wants a new independence referendum. There are two options - either Britain stays in the EU, or Scotland gets its independence and stays in the EU. The Brexit referendum awoke a new strong wave of Scotland's government wanting to have full control, awaking a strong sense of its sovereignty. While the Liberal Democrats wanted to reverse Brexit for the benefit of the whole nation, the SNP wanted it for the benefit of Scotland. They stated in their general election manifest that they will support a second EU referendum with Remain on the ballot paper. If that doesn't happen, they won't support a no-deal Brexit and will start to plan for an independence referendum. The SNP wishes to stay as close to the EU as possible.

The Liberal Democrats have always been anti-Brexit, like the SNP. Their vision in 2017 was to fully reverse the status quo and call for another referendum that could overturn the 2016 Brexit referendum results. They wanted to challenge the Conservatives and Theresa May's government. Next, they wanted to put the final deal to a vote and give the British people another referendum where they could either vote for the final deal or choose the alternative which is to stay in the EU. Therefore, the Liberal Democrats wanted to fully challenge the status quo and not only challenge it but reverse it. They saw it as a cross-policy issue that influenced every part of Britain. Their manifesto discussed the influence of Brexit / potential outcomes / their vision of Brexit in each chapter. They intertwined Brexit with their whole manifesto. In 2019, they took a stronger and more aggressive stance against Brexit and emphasised their wish to stay in the EU. In their

manifesto, they attacked both the Labour Party and the Conservatives, stating that Labour wants to reopen the Withdrawal Agreement but has not said whether it wants Britain to remain in the EU or leave, and the Conservatives campaign for a definite Brexit. The Liberal Democrats stressed that Brexit is a cross-policy issue, and the country would be much better off in the EU.

One thing the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, and the SNP have in common is that they all highlight in their manifestos how they are against a new majority Conservative government. The Conservatives said that a no-deal Brexit is better than a deal Brexit, which Britain wouldn't really benefit from. All the other parties are against a no-deal Brexit.

The general election manifestos from 2017 and 2019 reveal the shifts in party positions. While Brexit remains a central theme, all parties exhibit varying degrees of continuity and change in their approaches and priorities. The Conservative Party's manifesto evolved from focusing on stability and continuity in 2017 to prioritising getting Brexit done in 2019. The Labour Party maintained its emphasis on social justice and public ownership while keeping the future of Brexit open to either negotiating a new deal or having a new referendum. The Liberal Democrats doubled down on their anti-Brexit stance, promising to revoke Article 50 altogether. The SNP reiterated Scotland's opposition to Brexit and its demand for independence to retain EU membership.

Table 1.

The Parties Names of the Manifestos, Brexit Focus, Key Themes and Manifesto Visions

	2017	2019
The Conservative and Unionist Party	<p>Name of the Manifesto: "Forward, Together. Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future"</p> <p>Brexit Focus: Centred Brexit as a fundamental challenge and opportunity for the UK's future prosperity.</p> <p>Key Themes: Strong leadership,</p>	<p>Name of the Manifesto: "Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain's Potential"</p> <p>Brexit Focus: The title "Get Brexit Done. Unleash Britain's Potential" reflects the party's focus on quickly concluding the withdrawal process and moving forward with the party's domestic agenda.</p>

	<p>stable government, a vision for a stronger and fairer Britain, investment in public services, addressing social division and managing Brexit challenges.</p> <p>Manifesto Vision: To secure the best possible Brexit deal for Britain, maintain a strong economy, control laws and immigration, ensure a frictionless border with Ireland, pursue free trade agreements and empower the UK Parliament post-Brexit.</p>	<p>Key Priorities: Getting Brexit done, focusing on domestic priorities, investing in public services, strengthening Britain’s position in the world, and putting the British people first.</p> <p>Manifesto Vision: To secure Brexit by January, focus on domestic issues like healthcare and education, and unleash Britain’s potential post-Brexit.</p>
<p>Labour Party</p>	<p>Name of the Manifesto: “For the Many Not the Few”</p> <p>Brexit Focus: Accepted the referendum results and pledged to prioritise jobs and living standards, negotiate a close new relationship with the EU, and provide certainty to EU nationals.</p> <p>Key Themes: Jobs-first Brexit, protecting workers’ rights, maintaining close ties with the EU, ensuring parliamentary scrutiny, and challenging the Conservatives’ vision of Brexit.</p> <p>Manifesto Vision: To deliver a Brexit deal that protects jobs and living standards, maintains</p>	<p>Name of the Manifesto: “It’s Time for Real Change”</p> <p>Brexit Focus: Prioritised securing a sensible Brexit deal and putting it to a public vote with an option to remain.</p> <p>Key Themes: Negotiating a close relationship with the EU, protecting workers’ rights and environmental standards, and addressing social and economic inequality.</p> <p>Manifesto Vision: To deliver a Brexit deal that protects jobs and living standards, gives the public the final say on Brexit, and implements transformative policies to address societal challenges.</p>

	<p>cooperation with the EU on various issues, and provides a meaningful role for Parliament throughout negotiations.</p>	
<p>Liberal Democrats</p>	<p>Name of the Manifesto: “Change Britain’s Future”</p> <p>Brexit Focus: Challenging the Conservative Party’s hard Brexit stance and proposing giving the British people the final say on the Brexit deal, with the option to remain in the EU.</p> <p>Key Themes: Opposing hard Brexit, protecting EU citizens’ rights, maintaining close ties with the EU, and giving the public a vote on the final Brexit deal.</p> <p>Manifesto Vision: To stop a hard Brexit, protect the UK’s place in Europe, and give the British people the opportunity to reconsider Brexit through a second referendum.</p>	<p>Name of the Manifesto: “Stop Brexit Build a Brighter Future”</p> <p>Brexit Focus: Centred around stopping Brexit altogether and remaining in the EU.</p> <p>Key Themes: Opposing Brexit, stopping no-deal Brexit, promoting EU membership, and investing in public services and climate action.</p> <p>Manifesto Vision: To revoke Article 50, stop Brexit, and build a brighter future for the UK within the EU, focusing on investing in public services, fighting climate change, and promoting social justice.</p>
<p>Scottish National Party</p>	<p>Name of the Manifesto: “Stronger for Scotland”</p> <p>Brexit Focus: Emphasised the importance of Scotland’s voice in Brexit negotiations and protecting Scotland’s interests.</p> <p>Key Themes: Giving Scotland a say</p>	<p>Name of the Manifesto: “Stronger for Scotland”</p> <p>Brexit Focus: Highlighted the SNP’s opposition to Brexit and called for another independence referendum in the event of Brexit against Scotland’s wishes.</p>

	<p>in Brexit negotiations, protecting Scotland's place in the Single Market, opposing a hard Brexit, and advocating for Scotland's right to choose its future.</p> <p>Manifesto Vision: To strengthen Scotland's position in Brexit negotiations, protect Scotland's interests, and ensure Scotland's voice is heard in the process.</p>	<p>Key Themes: Protecting Scotland's interests in Brexit negotiations, opposing Brexit chaos, and advocating for Scotland's right to determine its future.</p> <p>Manifesto Vision: To strengthen Scotland's position in Brexit negotiations, protect Scotland's interests, and advocate for Scotland's right to choose its future, potentially through independence.</p>
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7. DISCUSSION: EUROSCEPTICISM, BREXIT, AND THE WIDER CONTEXT

The aftermath of Brexit saw a resurgence of Eurosceptic sentiment in the UK, with debates on national identity and the future of British-European relations dominating discourse (Henley, 2020). However, the full impact of Brexit on public opinion and politics remains unclear. As the comparative study shows above, in the early aftermath of the Brexit referendum, Euroscepticism had already been prominent in British politics, with parties taking varying positions. Euroscepticism was at the forefront of discourse before and during the referendum. It is a multifaceted phenomenon in Britain, with different parties adopting varying positions ranging from outright opposition to cautious support for EU membership.

The Conservatives are the biggest Eurosceptics in the UK and are willing to accept and implement the referendum results. In their manifestos, it was clear that they wanted to focus on getting Brexit done and presenting their idea of a post-Brexit world. They believe that Britain can be strong on its own. While the other parties are not known as being Eurosceptic, they are stuck in a vision of Britain needing the EU. The Liberal Democrats lack a true vision of Britain without any connections to the EU - including a hard-deal or a no-deal Brexit. The Labour Party tried to say in 2017 that it was time to move on but backed down on their word in 2019. They are not considered as Eurosceptic as the Conservatives are; however, they may have wanted to reform the EU if they had stayed. The SNP wished that the country would stay in the EU, and in 2019, they stated that they wanted to leave the UK in order to stay in the EU.

While the Conservative Party has maintained its stance of being described as the most Eurosceptic party in the UK, the Labour Party shifted from being accepting of the Brexit referendum result in 2017 to being mildly Eurosceptic in 2019 and suggesting that Britain should stay in the EU while reforming the union. The Liberal Democrats and the SNP did not position themselves as Eurosceptics in both elections - they wished to either fight a hard deal or have a new referendum.

With Brexit, the SNP and Scottish people's desire for independence has increased. Even though they had a Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014, the SNP has started to talk more and more

about Scotland's sovereignty. They want to obtain their independence from Britain and do not see joining the EU as a threat to their sovereignty.

From the empirical research, it can be seen that in 2017, the Eurosceptic Conservative Party wanted to get Brexit done while the other parties were trying to find their stance on Brexit and what the election focus points should be. By 2019, when the Brexit negotiations had been going on for three years already, and people had realised that Brexit had already turned out to be a bigger mess than anyone expected, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP started to fight against Brexit harder. Their 2019 vision of Britain was stuck in the past because they desired to challenge and/or reverse the status quo. They did not focus on what Britain's future vision could be in the case of a no-deal or hard-deal Brexit. It confirms that nobody really had a clear vision of Brexit before the referendum and even three years after the referendum had happened. The only party that fit Brexit into their agenda and future vision was the Conservative Party, and that is because they are a Eurosceptic party.

While some of Britain campaigned for the Brexit referendum, the rest of the European countries were also discussing exiting the EU. Each country had its own x_exit name. Euroscepticism gained popularity, and populist parties considered it. However, after seeing how Brexit turned out to be a bigger political mess than anyone imagined, other EU member-states have stopped talking about wanting to exit the EU (McPartland, 2024). Brexit was a contentious political move that nobody expected to be as difficult as it turned out to be.

It could be argued that the Euroscepticism mindset in the UK reached its peak in 2016 when the Brexit referendum took place. Since then, the country has experienced major inflation, labour shortages, COVID-19 crisis (Ziady, 2023). To understand how the country's stance on Euroscepticism has changed after Brexit, we need to see the results of the next general election. The current Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, said that Britain will have its next general election in the second half of 2024 (Clarke, 2024). When the parties publish their new general election manifestos, it can be seen whether they will discuss topics concerning the EU and Britain's post-Brexit relationship with the EU. It remains to be seen whether Euroscepticism will continue to shape British politics or if new developments will emerge.

According to Politico's latest poll, it is predicted that the Labour Party will win the 2024 general election. The 2019 general election outcome showed that the British were tired of Brexit. The Conservative Party was the only one that campaigned for getting Brexit done to swiftly move on to a post-Brexit world. Since the Conservatives won a majority of the seats in the 2019 election, it shows that the public was also tired of the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP wanting to challenge the status quo. However, looking at the latest poll results, it is possible that the next Prime Minister may be from the Labour Party (Politico, n.d.). Does this mean that the citizens are not content with the way the Conservatives have governed a post-Brexit country, or have the effects of leaving the EU made people question again whether leaving the EU was the right decision?

Euroscepticism in the UK is a complex phenomenon that has significantly shaped British politics. From its origins in the Conservative Party to its impacts on the Brexit referendum and beyond, Euroscepticism continues to influence political discourse. As the UK navigates its post-Brexit future, the role of Euroscepticism in shaping attitudes towards the EU remains a topic of ongoing debate. Looking at the larger picture, the political decisions made in Britain have also influenced the way EU member-states view Europe. Brexit has shifted the Eurosceptic discourse away from other countries desiring to leave the EU.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper analysed the Conservative Party's, Labour Party's, Liberal Democrats', and SNP's general election manifestos from 2017 and 2019. It looked at how the manifestos changed regarding Brexit during these key Brexit years and how the parties' stances have changed. The paper concludes that the Brexit referendum marked a crucial moment in British politics, fundamentally reshaping party manifestos and political discourse between 2017 and 2019. Furthermore, as a result of Brexit, the parties positioned themselves on a spectrum of Euroscepticism and their ideas of how to either move forward with the status quo or challenge or maybe reverse it.

In both of their general election manifestos, the Conservatives focused on "getting Brexit done" and moving on to a post-Brexit world where the UK could be seen as a key leader in the world's politics and international relations. This is reflected in their manifesto titles - in 2017, the manifesto was called "Forward, Together. Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future", while in 2019, it was called "Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain's Potential". The other parties are all less Eurosceptic and condemn the views of the Conservative Party. They wish to either challenge the status quo so that a no-deal or hard-deal Brexit would not be an option at all, or they want to reverse the status quo completely and stay in the EU. This is also reflected in the manifesto titles. The Labour Party did not want to challenge the status quo in 2017 and focused on other issues, naming their manifesto "For the Many Not the Few", and in 2019 when they took the stance of challenging the status quo, they named their manifesto "It's Time For Real Change". The Liberal Democrats have always been against Brexit. In 2017, they named their manifesto "Change Britain's Future", and in 2019, they chose a more aggressive approach by naming their manifesto "Stop Brexit Build a Brighter Future". The SNP chose the same manifesto name in 2017 and 2019 - "Stronger for Scotland", which reflects their task of standing up for Scotland and its challenges. The SNP's general election manifestos show that their desire to gain independence from the UK increased from 2017 to 2019. In Scotland, the majority of the people voted to remain in the EU. The wish to advocate for Scotland's future independently grew. Therefore, in the foreseeable future, we can expect the SNP to promote another Scottish independence referendum and become even more critical of Westminster.

Brexit turned out to be a contentious political move that influenced every party. The Brexit referendum and the 2017 and 2019 general elections showed the other member states how leaving the EU can cause chaos in home affairs and international relations. It also proved to Eurosceptics, who were considering leaving the EU, how messy and difficult activating Article 50 can be. Brexit showed how Euroscepticism can influence a country's politics, and even after making the decision to leave the EU, it impacts home affairs via discourse, new policies, and framing the ideologies of parties. If the country and its political parties do not have a clear vision of life after leaving the EU, then it is highly unlikely that another member state is going to leave the union any time soon. The 2024 general election in Britain will show the world if the citizens and the parties have accepted a post-Brexit world or if they wish to see a change in their government and steer Britain towards a different future that was not envisioned by the Conservatives.

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