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**Hanna, J. & Busher, J.**

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## **UKIP and the UK's radical right: A tale of movement party success?**

Jeanne Hanna (American University, Washington, DC, USA)

Joel Busher, (Coventry University, UK)

### **Introduction**

Among the political upsets laid at the feet of right wing groups in recent years, the United Kingdom's vote to exit the European Union (EU) in June 2016 was perhaps the most unexpected and among those with the most far-reaching implications. While the 'Brexit' vote was driven by a variety of actors (Clarke, Goodwin & Whiteley 2017), few if any were as important as the UK Independence Party (UKIP) who, over the twenty years preceding the referendum, had become one of the most forthright and prominent proponents of Euroscepticism in the UK and beyond (Ford & Goodwin 2014; Goodwin & Milazzo 2015). UKIP's role as an impetus of the EU referendum and as active, grassroots campaigners for the Leave vote represent the group's pinnacle triumph and the (at least partial) fulfilment of its founding purpose. Analysis of this victory, however, also throws light on the struggles of UKIP's members to mobilize around other issues and reveals the disorder in UKIP's ranks both before and since the referendum.

In this chapter, we show how the concept of movement parties (Kitschelt 2006) provides a useful lens through which to surface and interpret the hybrid nature of political actors such as UKIP, and argue that UKIP's role in British politics – as both a political party and, at times, as a constituent part of a wider movement – provides a salient case through which to understand the opportunities and perils that organising as a hybrid movement party might pose for actors on the right of the political spectrum. In developing this argument, we also invite reflection on three

issues that require careful consideration if the concept of movement party is to help us to better comprehend right-wing politics at its more radical fringes. The first concerns the question of for which movement UKIP functions as a vehicle. As we describe below, while UKIP was founded as a result of particular political and constitutional concerns, over time it has been a vehicle for a range of different and at times competing movements with distinct and occasionally conflicting interests and ideas. This raises an intriguing possibility: is it possible that a movement party can serve simultaneously as a vehicle for the interests of more than one movement, or for a series of movements over time?

The second issue concerns the non-linearity of UKIP's organisational journey. Unlike the broadly left-wing groups that Kitschelt initially analysed as movement parties, which emerged initially as social movements and later adopted a more party-like form in order to operate in new arenas (2006, 281-2), UKIP has in practice wavered between functioning and organising as a party, a movement party and a movement throughout the past twenty-five years, sometimes functioning and organising simultaneously as all three – at times a source of considerable intra-group tension. This raises important questions about whether such non-linearity might be typical of 'movement parties' on the right, and if so what implications it might have for how the concept is deployed.

The third issue concerns the slipperiness of notions of organisational 'success', whether in the analyses of external actors (academics, journalists, other political parties, etc.) or internal actors (activists, leaders, members). Given that the success of political parties is usually assessed primarily in terms of numbers of votes and representatives, it is unsurprising that such measures

have been prominent in discussions about UKIP's fortunes, particularly among external actors. Yet attention to internal actors' perspectives reveals more hybrid and fluid notions of success. As discussed below, UKIP's leaders have frequently focused more on moving the political debate and pressuring rival parties, rather than replacing them. At the same time, however, UKIP has always participated in, at a minimum, national elections, and when its polling numbers have been favourable, touted its success on those terms. Arguably, such diverse and flexible definitions of success have comprised an asset for UKIP, enabling leaders and activists alike to sustain movement morale and media attention by claiming victories or dismissing losses even when the facts on the ground appeared to suggest otherwise. Yet they have also provided a point of potential rupture as different definitions of success have revealed different and sometimes conflicting aims: something brought home most starkly in the fallout from the EU referendum. As one long-time UKIP member opined at a branch meeting in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, less than a year after the EU referendum, 'In many ways we would have been better off if we *just* lost the referendum, rather than *just* won it.'

We explore these issues by tracing UKIP's history across four periods: 1) from its founding in 1993 to 2010, when UKIP operated largely as a fringe party; 2) from 2010 to 2015, when UKIP began to gain significant electoral support and eventually achieved the promise of an EU referendum; 3) the year-long referendum campaign and its impact on UKIP's understanding of its own purpose; and 4) UKIP's trajectory after the EU referendum and what it means for a movement party to potentially have its greatest accomplishment behind it.

The chapter draws on a combination of the academic literature regarding UKIP, media reporting, and primary ethnographic research, carried out among UKIP activists and supporters before, during, and after the UK's referendum on EU membership in June 2016. Overt ethnographic observation was conducted by the lead author at over sixty UKIP meetings, campaigns, conferences, electoral events, and social gatherings, both formal and informal, across South Yorkshire between May 2015 and May 2017. Forty-five semi-structured interviews were carried out with UKIP activists, local party leaders, councillors, and activists working with anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations, as well as countless informal interviews and conversations with people connected directly or peripherally with UKIP. The fieldwork was undertaken with ethical approval from the American University in Washington, DC, the lead author's host institution.

### **1993 – 2010: Survival on the political fringe**

UKIP was founded as a political party in 1993 by Alan Sked, a London School of Economics historian, in response to the failure of the Anti-Federalist League, an earlier cross-party organisation also led by Sked, to gain significant support in their efforts to prevent the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. As has been well documented (most notably Ford & Goodwin 2014, 20-106) in its early years UKIP experienced more lows than highs, particularly in electoral terms. In its earliest election contests UKIP was outstripped at times even by the Monster Raving Loony Party, and while UKIP enjoyed notable success in the European Parliament (EP) elections of 2004 and 2009, coming third and second with 15.6% and 16% of the national vote respectively, such successes took a long time to arrive and did not translate into other electoral arenas. UKIP did not enjoy a significant breakthrough in local elections until 2013 and had to wait until 2014 to win their first seat in the UK Parliament. Furthermore, these

victories were always swiftly followed by an eruption of internal divisions that threatened to pull the organisation apart (Ford & Goodwin 2014, 20-106).

Indeed, the 2004 EP elections aside, it was only towards the end of 2008 that UKIP emerged clearly as the leading party committed to Euroscepticism in the UK.<sup>1</sup> During the mid-1990s Sir James Goldsmith's Referendum Party, founded in 1994 to advocate for a nation-wide referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, was better funded than UKIP, able to field more candidates and more adept at garnering recognition with the press and public (Carter, Evans, Alderman & Gorham 1998). The Referendum Party collapsed after the death of Goldsmith in 1997, leading many supporters to switch their allegiances to UKIP. This, along with a shift to proportional representation in EP elections as of 1999 and the fact that as a 'second order election' (Reif and Schmitt 1980) the EP elections favoured UKIP due to lower voter turnout and voters' propensity to use such elections to evince dissatisfaction with the larger parties, all contributed to UKIP's first relative electoral success, coming fourth and achieving three seats. From this point on EP elections would prove both an electoral and financial boon for UKIP due to the financial resources granted to UKIP by the EP as a function of their EP representatives – although as discussed below these resources would eventually also become a source of internal conflict. However, in local and national elections UKIP still found itself trailing the extreme right British National Party (BNP), which promoted a longstanding nativist and anti-immigrant platform and was also thoroughly hostile to the UK's membership in the transnational EU. UKIP was beaten by the BNP in 80% of the constituencies in which both parties stood candidates in

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<sup>1</sup> While the Conservative Party has become increasingly dominated by Eurosceptic positions, particularly since William Hague's leadership (1997-2001), it has never as a party been dedicated to Euroscepticism.

2005 and the BNP won two to three times as many votes as UKIP in a series of local elections between 2006 and 2008 (Ford and Goodwin 2014).

So how did UKIP operate during this period? In some respects at least, in this period UKIP resembles most closely what Kitschelt describes as a movement party. As described above, UKIP emerged out of the conviction of Sked and colleagues that a fully-fledged political party was required to advance Eurosceptic positions that they believed were not represented by the main parties. Yet despite registering as a political party, analysis of UKIP's policy platform, mode of organising and strategic aims make clear that it functioned throughout much of its early years essentially as a single-issue pressure group.

As early as the 1997 General Election, UKIP's policy platform begins to expand beyond withdrawal from the EU to include positions on healthcare, education, defence, and other policy areas. However, both the 1997 and 2001 manifestos were ultimately framed around the perceived financial and regulatory burdens of UK membership of the EU. Indeed, during elections through the early 2000s, UKIP's leaders resisted internal pressure to further expand the party's platform or emphasise issues beyond withdrawal from the EU. They instead encouraged supporters to use elections and election hustings to discuss the perils of the EU and focused their energies on pressuring mainstream parties to support EU withdrawal (Ford and Goodwin 2014). What broadening of their policy platform did take place appears largely to have been instrumental: driven by party leaders' recognition of the difficulty of folding together tenuous support from a wide swath of British politics on the sole basis of shared antipathy to the EU (Lynch and Whitaker 2013). As discussed further below, there was an emerging view among party

leadership, particularly Nigel Farage, one of their first MEPs and a media savvy campaigner who would become one of their longest serving and, arguably, most successful leaders, that that they would only be able to compete with parties such as the BNP by expanding their policy base (Ford and Goodwin 2014: 89-92).

During this period, UKIP's mode of organising also resembled what Kitschelt describes as that of a movement party. While UKIP quickly developed a cohort of activists operating primarily at the national level, there was little investment in developing the type of party infrastructure, particularly at the local level, required to build lasting electoral support at all levels of representation. In fact, the contrast between their failure to do so and the BNP's Liberal Democrat-inspired strategy of building local pockets of support through community politics (Copsey 2007; John and Margetts 2009; Goodwin 2011) is likely to be one of the reasons why the BNP, despite significant stigma, was able to outperform UKIP at local and national elections for as long as it did.

Crucially, the narrow policy focus on opposition to the EU also shaped UKIP's strategic aims during this period. While UKIP entered the electoral arena from the outset, electoral contests were seen primarily as an opportunity to fan pervasive anxieties over the EU and, later, the new Euro currency, driving this issue into greater public prominence. Even within electoral contexts their aim, at least initially, was not to replace the Conservative Party, itself internally divided on the issue of the EU, but to pressure more Conservative MPs into adopting Eurosceptic positions by undermining their ability to compete against other main party candidates (Ford and Goodwin 2014: 32-38) – arguably a more realistic aim within the UK's first-past-the-post system. During



UKIP's first nationwide electoral campaigns they specifically targeted seats in the south of England held by pro-EU Conservative MPs, a strategy that remained largely unchanged over the next decade.

By 2007 a new strategic direction appeared to be emerging. Party staffers, including Liverpool-born future party leader Paul Nuttall, urged leaders to expand UKIP's focus to Labour-leaning constituencies in the north of England (Ford and Goodwin 2014: 108-109). Heeding Nuttall's advice, in the run-up to the 2009 EP elections then-leader, Nigel Farage, committed to contesting every seat in the upcoming race, including those in working class constituencies in the Midlands and North of England where the BNP had previously been more successful at challenging Labour's dominance in local elections (John and Margetts 2009). This strategic shift was not uncontroversial, particularly among UKIP's more single-minded Eurosceptics. However, it was deemed successful when UKIP not only gained one further MEP, bringing the party's total to thirteen, but also narrowly defeated the Labour Party to place second for the first time, securing more than twice as many votes as the BNP (Ford and Goodwin 2014: 76-78).

Yet even after such spectacular electoral success, the single-issue focus of some within UKIP would soon shape party strategy again. Farage, to the surprise of many, resigned as leader after the 2009 EP elections. No sooner in post, the new incumbent, Lord Pearson, attempted to form an electoral alliance with the Conservatives for the upcoming 2010 general election (Ford and Goodwin 2014: 80-81). In a seemingly bizarre move as the leader of a political party, Pearson offered to disband UKIP entirely if David Cameron would pledge to hold a referendum on British membership of the EU as part of the Conservative Party's election platform (Hough and

Prince 2009). Although the proposal was rejected, news of it undermined UKIP's fledgling position as a genuine and independent political contender and reinforced public perception that UKIP was essentially a single-issue party.

The events that followed help to illustrate how, even at this relatively early stage, UKIP had become a vehicle for different movements with sometimes competing interests and aspirations. Pearson's offer of a deal with the Conservative Party made sense within a conceptualisation of UKIP as a single-issue protest group broadly aligned with the Eurosceptic wing of the Conservative Party and that defined success primarily in terms of UK withdrawal from the EU. Many of UKIP's supporters and activists, however, had latched onto a wider set of political ideas and aspirations that were only realistically attainable if they could achieve a more direct role in policy and governance. As such, while Pearson was trying, and failing, to strike an electoral deal with the Conservative Party, another increasingly influential faction now favoured a more radical anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic agenda which, they believed, would appeal to disaffected working class voters in the Labour heartlands of deindustrializing northern towns (Ford and Goodwin 2014: 83-85). The result was one of the most wide-ranging manifestos published by UKIP to date. For the first time, UKIP's campaign literature openly opposed 'multiculturalism' and referred to tackling 'extremist Islam,' implying that Islam was antithetical to 'Britishness' and advocated policies targeting Muslims, including bans on face veils, 'radical preachers' and 'sharia courts' (UKIP 2010). This manifesto also contained statements challenging climate science and related policies as well as proposals to decentralize the NHS and implement an opt-out voucher system for patients. Yet such radical proposals and language unnerved some of UKIP's more moderate supporters.

UKIP went into the May 2010 election in a state of disarray. While Pearson continued to make open attempts to strike deals with Eurosceptic Conservative candidates, some UKIP candidates in Conservative constituencies who opposed such moves refused party orders to stand down against their Eurosceptic rivals (Ford and Goodwin 2014: 84-86). Yet even with such confusion, the electoral fruits of broadening their policy platform and expanding their ambitions were evident. While the total votes cast for UKIP dropped from almost 2.5 million in the EP election in 2009 to under one million in the 2010 General Election, something important had happened in terms of the distribution of their support: they had begun to make inroads in Labour heartlands in the North and Midlands (Ford and Goodwin 2010: (80-85).

### **2010 – 2015: UKIP as a serious electoral challenger**

Two developments dominate this period: a drive to build local and national structures in order to professionalise UKIP as a political party; and the growing prominence of opposition to ‘mass immigration’ as a focus of policy attention.

Recognising that UKIP could not compete meaningfully as a political party without developing its infrastructure, Farage, who reassumed leadership after the 2010 election, ensured that UKIP hired regional organizers and began to make substantial investments in local campaigning. In some respects the move was a resounding success. Party membership more than doubled between 2010 and 2013 – providing a significant increase both in human and financial resources – and UKIP made significant electoral gains at a series of local elections, becoming the official

opposition or even gaining control of several local authorities (Ford and Goodwin 2014: 92-93). Then in 2014, an ascendant UKIP won an historic victory over both the Labour and Conservative Parties in the EP elections with 26.6% of the vote.

This formalization of party infrastructure could be read as a sign of UKIP's transition from being a movement party to a fully-fledged political party. Yet in other ways UKIP continued to resemble a movement party. While UKIP developed local and national structures across the country, party leaders, including Farage, still did relatively little to meaningfully incorporate the new members within the party or to reconcile the different political interests and ideas driving UKIP support in different parts of the country and across different sections of the electorate.

UKIP's traditional support-base in the South of England was more middle class than their new supporters. They were concerned with lowering taxes and mitigating perceived economic ill-effects of immigration. Many of UKIP's new supporters in the North and Midlands, however, had more in common with the BNP's traditional base (Ford et al. 2012; Cutts et al. 2011). They were more likely to have grown up in working class, Labour supporting families (Ford et al. 2012) and their concerns about immigration, while not divorced from economic circumstances, were more frequently articulated in terms of cultural difference and integration (Ford and Goodwin 2014: 117-126). In South Yorkshire for example, where the fieldwork underpinning this study took place, UKIP supporters' explanations of what had motivated them to join the party were often framed in terms of the supposed effects of immigrants on British culture. Furthermore, northern UKIP activists were typically more concerned about dwindling public safety nets, the closure of local care homes for elderly or disabled family members, the de-

funding of home-based care services and the perceived vulnerabilities of the National Health Service (NHS) than they were about levels of taxation.

The balancing of such different interests was never going to be easy, but was made more difficult by the fact that, whatever Farage's intentions, the growth of UKIP's party infrastructure neither kept pace with nor evolved to represent the growing diversity of interests and local realities in which activists were operating. Some grassroots members, particularly in the North, complained that the national leadership was 'parachuting in' organizers and candidates from other areas of the country, often one of the party's growing list of MEPs, rather than recruiting and training local activists – a practice that many believed reflected a growing dominance of the party by its MEPs as a result of the EP funding they brought in.

UKIP supporters in South Yorkshire also evinced frustration with the management style of the still largely southern-based party leadership, frequently citing the lack of adequate support for local council elections. Even while local leaders in Rotherham celebrated winning fourteen council seats in 2014, they simultaneously bemoaned the scant financial or logistical they received from party headquarters. Local supporters complained that when a senior party figure did come to Yorkshire to speak on behalf of UKIP's national interests, the newcomer would inevitably commit a regionally-specific political faux pas, whether it was praising Margaret Thatcher, still much reviled in this former mining and industrial region, or proposing further cuts to social services, including the NHS, which many northern UKIP activists were committed to protecting and even expanding.

Meanwhile, the party also became increasingly riven by debates about the adoption of a more radical populist and anti-immigrant agenda. While antipathy towards the EU provided a unifying policy theme, those who wanted the withdrawal from the EU to remain the party's primary focus clashed with those pushing for the party to give greater policy focus to issues related to Islam, immigration, and multiculturalism. These clashes would intensify in 2014 when Raheem Kassam, editor-in-chief of the right-wing news outlet Breitbart London, was hired as a senior advisor to Nigel Farage, further unsettling those who wanted to retain withdrawal from the EU as UKIP's primary focus. Some prominent party figures, including deputy leader Suzanne Evans, openly expressed concern that Kassam was pushing Farage, and therefore the party, towards a radical right agenda as well as encouraging increasingly personal attacks against Farage's rivals, both in and outside the party (Mason 2015).

By this stage however such tension had arguably become inherent to the party: inscribed in the political logics shaping UKIP's strategy. Electoral success, and therefore a greater role in shaping debates around the EU, required an expanded policy platform to attract and capitalize on greater support. At the same time, emphasising UKIP's expanded policy positions risked highlighting fault lines within the support base that could be exploited by their opponents.

In order to retain a modicum of control over the party, UKIP's leaders continued to foreground the issue of the EU while deflecting critical examinations of their own ideological and political disunity with attacks on their main political competitors. This balancing act brought the party notable success, at least in the short term – generating a sense of considerable momentum among party activists and supporters and alarm among their political opponents. In 2014 there was

UKIP's historic win in the EP elections. This was followed by two defections from Conservative Party MPs, Douglas Carswell and Mike Reckless, who won successive by-elections and helped to further expand UKIP's professional political organisation. After standing candidates in four separate national elections for seats in Westminster, and failing each time, UKIP had two seats and expected to take more. With a national profile, expanded issue base, and voters willing to support them in both the North and South, UKIP was at the height of its influence in the lead-up to the 2015 general election. Rumours and polling data hinted at a hung parliament, with the prospect of a coalition government between a further handful of UKIP MPs and the Conservative Party seemingly a realistic prospect (Neather 2015).

As such, with tensions between UKIP's various factions and local branches simmering just beneath the surface, UKIP, arguably aided by heightened media and public interest in the so-called 'refugee crisis' that reached a peak in 2015 (Poushter 2016), nonetheless played a major role in shaping the political debate in the run-up to the 2015 general election. The Labour Party, wary of the threat to its seats in northern England, placed uncharacteristic emphasis on promises to control immigration (Helm 2015). Yet it was the Conservative Party's response to the perceived UKIP threat that would have the most dramatic effects. UKIP, acting more like a pressure-group while under the control of Lord Pearson, had failed just a few years earlier to extract the promise of an EU referendum from David Cameron. However, in 2015, with the burgeoning electoral organization of a serious political party, UKIP was a key player in pressuring Cameron to pledge a nation-wide referendum on the UK's membership of the EU.

Despite winning more than twelve percent (3.9 million) of votes cast that year, the UK's first-past-the-post voting system left UKIP with just one MP, Douglas Carswell – a bitter pill when the Liberal Democrats achieved eight seats with less than eight percent of the vote and the Scottish National Party fifty-six seats with less than five percent of the vote (Electoral Commission 2015). Despite UKIP achieving close second place losses behind Conservative and Labour Party rivals in more than ninety constituencies, UKIP was, by many traditional definitions, still a minor political party, with just one MP and control of just one local council. Yet 2015 was also a success for UKIP – certainly as a movement. They had shaped the debate, securing a campaign promise on their central political cause. They had followed an unconventional path to an unconventional success, but had nevertheless helped to generate enough anti-EU pressure to persuade the now-ruling Conservative Party to take one of the biggest gambles in recent British history.

### **UKIP during the EU referendum: The shift into movement politics**

As we have argued, in its early years UKIP closely resembled what Kitschelt describes as a movement party, gradually becoming more like a full-fledged political party as they sought to build and sustain public support and exercise policy influence. UKIP's strategies during the referendum, however, shifted again and became more similar to those of a political or social movement (see Diani 1992). UKIP's key organisers, and eventually the party's very identity, were subsumed into a more pluralistic network of groups with a shared ambition for UK withdrawal from the EU. While UKIP formally remained a distinct political party, and UKIP supporters were key activists in the Leave campaign, the group's tactics changed significantly



during the referendum. The ideological and organisational conflicts that UKIP's leaders had struggled to control during the lead up to the 2015 election, persisted and threatened to collapse the fragile sense of party unity engendered by their limited successes. However, the singular and imminent goal of the larger Leave movement provided its own political infrastructure and allowed UKIP's leaders and supporters greater latitude for containing their differences than did the more multifaceted demands of operating as a political party.

The potential for internal division was present from the outset as UKIP's key figures aligned themselves with three different campaigns for leaving the EU. While Nigel Farage, along with Conservative, Labour, and Northern Irish DUP Eurosceptic MPs, founded Grassroots Out (GO!) (Harris 2016), Arron Banks, a major UKIP donor, founded Leave.EU in the summer of 2015<sup>2</sup> (BBC 2015), and finally, Vote Leave was launched in October 2015 by Conservative Party activists with the support of UKIP's only MP, Douglas Carswell and UKIP's deputy chair, Suzanne Evans (Carswell 2015). The rivalries between these Leave-supporting groups echoed many of the differences that had divided UKIP in the past. Grassroots Out and Leave.EU advocated for a campaign more overtly focused on immigration and cultural values, while Vote Leave claimed to focus more on economic arguments against EU membership (Sparrow 2016). Though Vote Leave did, in April 2016, win the Electoral Commission mandate to officially represent the leave campaign, the other groups did not disappear, nor did the ideas that they represented. However, these differences did not in practice stop activists from the various campaigns collaborating with one another. Where similar conflicts had stymied UKIP's growth

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<sup>2</sup> Leave.EU was originally called Vote Know, but changed when the referendum wording 'Leave/Remain' was chosen over 'Yes/No' (BBC 2015).

as a party, as part of the Leave movement, with its clearly defined common purpose, they were absorbed more successfully.

This dynamic was apparent among local UKIP activists. In early June 2016, two middle-aged women, Nicole<sup>3</sup> and Wendy, distributed Vote Leave leaflets as part of a large group of UKIP supporters in the Sheffield city centre. Both were well versed in the Vote Leave literature's talking points, but they had also donned lime green, high vis jackets that loudly declared 'Grassroots OUT!'. When asked about this discrepancy, Nicole said she and Wendy, had supported 'Nigel's group', and while they used and largely agreed with the Vote Leave materials, they still thought GO! had a more persuasive message. Like Grassroots Out, Nicole and Wendy frequently framed their arguments against the EU around immigration, despite the fact this was not a focus of the Vote Leave literature they distributed. Late in the afternoon, Wendy struck up a conversation with a younger woman who looked around furtively before saying in a confessional tone, 'I don't want to sound racist...' Wendy interrupted her emphatically, 'You're not racist!' The woman continued, 'But if Turkey get in, we're all dead. Because we'll be a Muslim country.' Wendy nodded enthusiastically as the woman spoke and told her that 'control' over borders and immigration would be returned to the UK outside the European Union. While such issues were not a focus of the Vote Leave literature they handed out, Nicole and Wendy felt free to frame their appeals to voters around issues about which they were obviously more personally passionate.

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<sup>3</sup> All names used in this chapter in the descriptions of primary data are pseudonyms.

Some of UKIP's supporters went even further off script in attempts to persuade people to vote Leave, even if it meant endorsing views antithetical to their general political positions as UKIP members. For example, at another UKIP-organized campaign event in South Yorkshire, one man, Dean, brought a pamphlet that a local branch of the Communist Party had delivered throughout his neighbourhood, setting out the left-wing arguments to vote Leave. Despite agreeing with little of what the pamphlet said, apart from the headline message of voting Leave, Dean had committed its key points to memory and attempted to use them when speaking to people he thought may have a more leftist political worldview.

The most striking example of how participation in the wider Leave movement shaped UKIP's own strategy was the party's own branding policy during the referendum campaign. UKIP-organized Leave events mainly made use of official Vote Leave literature, with GO! and Leave.EU materials used less frequently. Furthermore, in March 2016 UKIP leaders advised all local branches to avoid wearing, using, or even speaking about UKIP's name or logo when campaigning on the EU referendum for fear of tainting Vote Leave and the other groups with any stigma associated with UKIP (Bennett 2016). These orders were not uncontroversial. Many UKIP activists were reluctant at first to relegate their political affiliation in favour of the movement campaign against the EU. Over time, however, some UKIP supporters began to think differently. Andrew, a late-middle-age man on the board of a local UKIP branch in Doncaster, said he had initially disagreed with the branding decision. He was proud to be a member of UKIP and saw no need to hide that fact. However, as the referendum campaign progressed, he accepted the 'wisdom' of this tactic. Fewer people were shouting at him or shutting doors in his face,

leading him to marvel at how much more positively people responded to the Vote Leave name as compared with that of UKIP.

Where UKIP, alone, had only ever been able to persuade four million or so voters to back their cause, as part of the Leave movement, UKIP was a central player in a campaign that gained the support of more than four times that number. UKIP's abdication of its political autonomy, identity, name, and logo in favour of the wider Leave-supporting movement had contributed to one of the biggest political upsets in a generation. Few people were more surprised by the Vote Leave's success than UKIP's own activists. It was a shock for which they and their party were thoroughly unprepared.

### **The price of success: UKIP fractures after the 'Brexit' vote**

It took a while for the shock and disbelief among UKIP's supporters in South Yorkshire to fade. It was replaced, at first, by optimistic determination. UKIP, they thought, was in a prime position. The party's supporters had played a crucial role in providing the opportunity for more than 17 million people to vote to leave the EU. Local activists and branch leaders were determined to turn every one of them into a UKIP voter. Not only did this prove to be unrealistic, but UKIP was soon struggling to simply hold onto the base of support it had developed in the years leading up to the referendum. Neither did UKIP's success erase the discord within its ranks. Indeed, it is in the fallout from this apparent victory that competing interests, aspirations and interpretations of success are laid particularly bare. No longer subsumed under the Leave movement, UKIP was once again a small political party divided amongst itself, but now without

its unifying purpose.

When Farage announced his intention to resign as UKIP's leader less than two weeks after the referendum, the reaction among the party faithful was mixed. Despite the barely disguised tensions within the national leadership, Farage was still considered by many to have acted as a unifying force for the party and he was generally popular among grassroots members of every stripe. However, a change in party leadership was seen, at first, as an opportunity to successfully refresh the party's message and prepare their organisational infrastructure for the new political landscape wrought by the referendum. The desire for a new message and updated party structures were common refrains as the campaign for UKIP's next leader began. Activists were aware that outsiders in the media and other parties expected UKIP to vanish now that its founding goal had been achieved. They were desperate to prove them wrong and demonstrate they were, as one long-time activist put it, 'a real political party... not a one trick pony'.

Defining UKIP's post-referendum purpose would, however, turn out to be more challenging than most activists had imagined. As we now discuss, Leaders and supporters alike were divided. Discussions of UKIP's new political focus, beyond the EU, were highly contentious, as were deliberations over the level of significance the ongoing Brexit negotiations should play in future UKIP policy and campaigning. As UKIP's leaders and members struggled to resolve these disputes, it became clear that UKIP had become a vehicle for two different movements: a straightforward Eurosceptic movement and a radical right, anti-Islam movement. Following the referendum and the loss of the unifying forces of both the EU and Farage's leadership, the precarious alliance between these factions quickly unravelled. Their competing visions of

UKIP's future would dominate the party for at least the next fifteen months, shaping not one but three leadership elections as the party lurched through a series of public relations disasters and electoral failures.

During the first of these leadership elections the eventual winner, Diane James, sought to address the issue of UKIP's future political focus by proposing a consultation with the party's members. James' proposal deflected potential conflict and helped catapult her, however briefly, to the top role in UKIP. These conflicts could not be held at bay for long, however, as UKIP's supporters began clamouring for a cohesive new party platform, the basis of which remained unclear. James resigned just eighteen days after being elected leader, citing concerns that she did not have 'sufficient authority' or 'the full support of all my MEP colleagues and party officers' (Wilkinson 2016). Her departure was swiftly followed by a physical altercation between two UKIP MEPs that left one popular candidate for James' successor briefly hospitalized. UKIP's more EU-focused leaders, including Douglas Carswell and Suzanne Evans, both former Conservative Party politicians, advocated restoring focus and order within the party by prioritising the government's negotiations with the EU, positioning themselves, and by extension UKIP, as the stewards of Brexit. This position, reminiscent of UKIP's earlier behaviour as a single-issue pressure group, was swiftly challenged by other leaders and party members who believed UKIP should capitalise on its role in the referendum victory by expanding, not narrowing, its political aims.

When a new leadership race was called following James' resignation, Raheem Kassam, former advisor to Nigel Farage, became a contentious candidate both inside and outside the party when

he announced his intention to run for leader under the Donald Trump-inspired slogan ‘Make UKIP Great Again’ (Mason 2016). His rivals in the leadership race raised concerns that moves such as Kassam’s verbal attacks on Muslim schools and call for a national referendum on Muslim women’s clothing would lead the party toward the far right (Merrick 2016); part of wider concerns about the increasing closeness between Kassam, UKIP, and Breitbart (Kirchgaessner and Hopkins 2017). While anxieties about the supposed threats from Islam had begun to appear in UKIP’s longlist of political concerns in 2010, it was never a central point of organization or agreement across the party. Yet this shift clearly resonated with some elements of UKIP’s grassroots. Certainly, Breitbart was often referenced by UKIP supporters in South Yorkshire, with some citing discussions on the website’s comment section as a major influence in their decision to join UKIP. Although Kassam withdrew from the leadership race, debates over the adoption of anti-Islam positions and the potential for UKIP to lurch toward the right continued as long-time UKIP organiser Paul Nuttall, positioning himself as the party unity candidate, was elected leader in November 2016.

Nuttall’s spell as leader began poorly and never really improved. He suffered an embarrassing by-election defeat in a pro-Brexit Stoke-on-Trent constituency in February 2017. That same month, nearly half of UKIP’s MEPs were reported to be under investigation by EU financial regulators for misuse of EU funding to support national level political campaigning, giving credence to rumours that had previously been a source of resentment among the party’s grassroots members (Rankin 2017). Less than two months later, in April 2017, UKIP lost 145 local council seats. Fending off calls for his resignation, Nuttall debuted a controversial ‘Integration Agenda’ in April 2017 that proposed, among other things, burqa bans, annual and

compulsory genital mutilation exams, and a moratorium on Muslim faith schools (UKIP 2017). While UKIP supporters who favoured a more radical policy platform welcomed the announcement, others, including Tariq Mahmood, one of the party's few, high-profile Muslims members, denounced the agenda as too extreme, setting off a wave of resignations among senior party figures (Maguire 2017; Hope 2017).

The divide between UKIP's more EU-focused members and the anti-Islam faction was soon further compounded. After UKIP was resoundingly defeated in the June 2017 snap general election, returning its worst national election performance since 2001, Johnathan Arnott, a UKIP MEP was among those who criticised UKIP's recent 'anti-Islam messages' (Heffer 2017). Paul Nuttall resigned as UKIP leader, yet there remained support within the party for his 'Integration Agenda'; support that Anne Marie Waters sought to expand and deepen as she looked to replace Nuttall as leader. Breaking with UKIP's history of seeking to clearly distinguish itself from the far right, Waters, the co-founder of anti-Islam social movement Pegida UK and chair of Sharia Watch, controversially welcomed support from both the BNP and activists affiliated with the anti-Muslim English Defence League. She was the first UKIP leadership candidate to openly propose rebuilding their political platform primarily around anti-Islam positions rather than opposition to UK membership of the EU, prompting former UKIP leaders, including Farage and Nuttall, to caution that such a myopic focus on Islam would render UKIP unelectable (Bloodworth 2017).

Waters was narrowly defeated by Henry Bolton, a former Army captain, police officer, and Liberal Democrat, who had warned during the campaign that UKIP could become the 'UK Nazi



Party' should they choose the wrong candidate to replace Nuttall (Walker 2017). Bolton, who had campaigned on a platform that appealed to the party's more moderate Eurosceptic members, used his acceptance speech to declare, 'Brexit is our core task' (Mance 2017). Waters promptly left UKIP, apparently with the intention of forming a new party. Meanwhile, rumours continue to circulate that Aaron Banks might launch a new political movement. UKIP's future is uncertain.

## **Conclusion**

UKIP's journey is often told like a political Cinderella story. The UKIP of this fairy-tale was once a small, single-minded, largely unsuccessful party, whose obsession with the EU was easily mocked and dismissed. Until it suddenly burst upon the scene as a force in British politics, with a base of voters pulled from both the traditional right and left of the political spectrum, and helped to create one of the biggest political upsets in British history. As we have shown here, UKIP's journey was not nearly so simple. Persistently torn between the strategic logics of a single-issue movement and a fully-fledged political party, even at the moment of what arguably comprised its greatest triumph, UKIP was riven with discordant understandings of the party's fundamental purpose.

UKIP was founded as a political party, yet operated for much of its history without strong organizational infrastructure or a broad policy platform. While these apparent deficiencies as a political party often inhibited UKIP's growth and its ability to achieve electoral success, its ideological ambiguity also created opportunities for the party to draw support from diverse sections of British society, in turn enabling it to generate far greater policy pressure on both the

Conservative and Labour parties. In doing so, however, the party itself became increasingly fractured, a process exacerbated by the failure of the party leadership to ever fully incorporate new members and supporters within the party's ideological and organisational structures.

By 2015, UKIP had become a vehicle for at least two distinct movements, each with their own understandings of success, pulling the party in different, often contradictory directions. For UKIP's more straightforward Eurosceptics, often drawn from primarily Conservative-dominated regions of southern England, success entailed removing the UK from the EU by any means necessary, even if it meant sacrificing UKIP's political autonomy and survival. For this faction, elections were a means of raising the profile of their criticisms of EU membership and pressuring political competitors to adopt positions more hostile to the EU. They were wary of association with groups perceived as more politically extreme and of policies that might distract from the European issue. For supporters of UKIP's more radical and anti-Islam faction, the EU was also important, but was far from their sole political focus. Members of this faction aspired to make UKIP a competitive political party in order to advocate more wide-sweeping reforms to UK immigration law and a refocusing of policy priorities onto the supposed threats posed to the UK by Islam and Muslims. United by little more than their common antipathy to the EU, these factions within UKIP were tenuously united while the EU remained a central focus of the party's platform. Tensions between them were largely set aside as attention centred on the imminent cause of achieving victory in the 2016 referendum. In the wake of the Leave movement's victory, however, these divisions soon re-surfaced and the delicate balance between diverse interests and strategic logics unravelled.

Examining UKIP as a movement party can help us articulate a more complicated and less linear understanding of UKIP's history: one that can help reveal the possibilities and liabilities facing movement parties on the right. As we have sought to demonstrate, of particular salience in this regard are issues about how the hybrid nature of movement parties can fuel and, at least temporarily, accommodate diverse interpretations of success and, related to this, the way movement parties can become vehicles for the interests of more than one movement, sometimes at the same time.

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