

# **REVISITING POPULISM IN THE UK: THE 'LEAVE MEANS LEAVE' MOVEMENT**

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## Abstract

*This paper looks into the different subtypes of populism with a focus on the case study of the 'Leave Means Leave' movement in the UK. Populism has been on the rise in recent decades and since it is often treated as a thin centred ideology, there is a lot of literature on the different types of populism, each claiming to understand the political phenomenon better than the other. This paper takes explains broad categories of populism – ideology, discourse and political strategy, however, uses a combination of ideology and political strategy to explain 'how' the people as conceived by the populist actors have been mobilised against the elite in the UK. 'Leave Means Leave' is lobby group that claims to voice the will of the people towards a clean Brexit. They have used unconventional lobbying techniques in order to gain the attention of the elite. However, this voice has been unheard by the establishment and the objectives of the lobby group have been unfulfilled. Thus, this brings an important facet to the fore, that are the populist leaders of the 'Leave Means Leave' movement really interested in the delivering to the people their will, or do they mobilise the people only towards their own political gains. This paper explores how the lack of ideology has been replaced effectively by rhetoric towards mobilising people by the populist leaders of the 'Leave Means Leave' movement.*

**Key words:** Populism, 'Leave Means Leave', Political Strategy

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## Introduction

Populism has its peaks and falls but never really dies out of the political world. In the current political climate populism has been hugely debated and studied by academics. We have seen instances of populism across the world with the election of Trump in 2016, more recently the election of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a second term on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2019 and lastly the Brexit Party which was formed on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2019. However, the type of populism mobilised by each of the leaders was different from one another. While all three instances did use rhetoric as a basis to mobilise the people, the former two did rely on a core ideology stated in speeches, manifestos and other literature. However, the latter – the Brexit Party, is a newly formed party that is uses rhetoric in place of ideology as a political strategy.

In this paper we will look at the case study of the 'Leave Means Leave' movement which was a lobby group that in time for the European Parliament Elections, 2019 merged with the Brexit Party. 'Leave Means Leave' is a right-wing populist movement that was formed immediately after the Brexit Referendum to leave the EU in 2016. It has been cast as a single-issue movement that is not based on any ideology but solely on a mission of the UK to leave the EU – a clean Brexit. This paper will look into the significance of populism today from different theoretical perspectives. After discussing the literature on the types of populism prevalent today, we will analyse the case study through the lens of populism as an ideology and as a political strategy. Qualitative discourse analysis has been used to analyse the news articles available from the 'Media' section the 'Leave Means Leave' website. Videos from the movement's YouTube channel have also been included in the data analysed. The time limit for this analysis was set from November 2018, when the drafts of the withdrawal agreement were available to the MPs to 10<sup>th</sup> May 2019. Since the movement is based on a single issue and not

on an ideology, the primary unit of analysis was discourse used not only by the populist actors but also by the people and the elite. Discourse analysis was used due to the heavy usage of rhetoric and discourse by the populist leaders of ‘Leave Means Leave,’ in order to mobilise the people against the elite in Brussels as well as in Westminster.

Discourses are “systems of meaning-production that fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable actors to make sense of the world and to act within it.”<sup>1</sup> By using discourse analysis the researcher aims to understand the systems of meaning making with a specific focus on continuity, change or rupture within a discourse that is studied either in a historical context or comparatively.<sup>2</sup> Rather than examining the empirical facts, discourse analysis, analyses the conditions of possibility.<sup>3</sup> Discourse is most suited to understand ‘how’ a phenomenon can occur in its social form and studies the effects of said phenomenon rather than on the specific outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

The following paper is divided into four chapters. The first chapter will discuss and evaluate the existing literature on populism. This chapter is broadly divided into three subsections – populism as an ideology, as a discursive strategy and as a political strategy. The literature tries to understand the different perspectives to populism that although are not completely distinct from one another, look at different aspects of populism and use different techniques to mobilise the people. Having said that, the main tenants of all three subtypes remain the same, that is, ‘the people’ are seen as the holders of sovereignty who are being exploited by the self-serving

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Dunn and Iver Neumann, “Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences,” in *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research* (University Of Michigan Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Dunn and Neumann, 4 as referred to Mutlu and Salter (2013): 133-114.

<sup>3</sup> Dunn and Neumann, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Dunn and Neumann, 11.

‘elite’, and lastly that the ‘will of the people’ must be the basis of politics. The second chapter will provide a context to the case study for the research. It will elaborate on the history of populism in the UK, the Brexit Referendum and lastly, provide an overview of the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement.

The last two chapters will analyse the case study in point using the literature reviewed earlier. The third chapter will look at how the people have been ideologically categorised by ‘Leave Means Leave.’ It will focus on the what geographically constitutes the heartland, that is the 17.4 million people who voted to leave the EU in the Referendum of 2016. Secondly it will also look into the categorisation of the elite that though have been portrayed as a homogenous pathological collective have multiple layers within them serving different aspects in order to undermine the will of the people. The last chapter will analyse how ‘Leave Means Leave’ has employed a political strategy, that uses rhetoric in place of ideology in order to mobilise the people against the elite. It will look at the different campaign items and slogans used by ‘Leave Means Leave’ – towards highlighting the elite and their betrayal as well as how and why the movement sees a greater Britain outside of the EU. Secondly, it will analyse a mobilizational project – the ‘March to Leave’ that was organised from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2019 in protest against the possible extension of the departure date of Brexit.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

In recent years, there has been a re-emergence of populism in Europe. In Western Europe, populism has aligned itself with right wing politics whereas in Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism, the concept of populism has grown to include issues related to socio-economic distributional factors of left-wing politics as well as ideological and cultural issues of right-wing politics. Populism is seen as an extremely emotional and simplistic form of politics, one that is directed at the gut feeling of the people.<sup>5</sup> It is also used to describe policies that are opportunistic with the aim of pleasing people and ‘buying’ their support rather than basing their campaigns on rational choice.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to these misconceptions, populism aims at simplifying rather than complicating the political space. It replaces a complex set of differences by dichotomies whose distinctions albeit are blurred.<sup>7</sup> It is only in an impossible world in which politics is replaced by administration and where differences are sorted by piecemeal segregation can dichotomies be clear and precise.<sup>8</sup>

In the three types of populism reviewed here, the main concepts on which populism is based remains the same, i.e., the antagonism between the people and the elite and the importance of the will of the people. Freedden argues that thin centred ideologies are rarely seen independently but instead latch themselves onto the thick centred ideologies.<sup>9</sup> Thick centred ideologies, in order to understand the complex political world consist of core and periphery concepts.<sup>10</sup> Populism as a thin centred ideology on its own does not provide a comprehensive

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<sup>5</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 542.

<sup>6</sup> Mudde, 542.

<sup>7</sup> Ernesto Laclau, “Populism: Ambiguities and Paradoxes,” in *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2007), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Laclau, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Freedden (1996). As cited in Margaret Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* Eds Yves Mény and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Belén Fernández-García and Óscar Luengo, “Populist Parties in Western Europe. An Analysis of the Three Core Elements of Ppulism.,” *Communication and Society* 31, no. 3 (2018): 58.



understanding of the world but in relation to other concepts such as sovereignty, the common will of the people and majoritarian rule is able to form its own ideological core.<sup>11</sup> The main distinction between them is in the way they are used. Firstly, populism as an ideology focuses on the ‘who’ of populism. By distinguishing between the people and the elite on a normative basis they try to fill these empty signifiers with a separate section of society, one that cannot be blurred with the other. Secondly populism as a discursive strategy aims to understand ‘what’ the populists say in order to mobilise the people against the elite. Lastly, populism as a political strategy aims to understand ‘how’ populist actors are able to mobilise the people against the elite.

### 1.1. Populism as an Ideology

Mudde defines populism as a thin centred ideology. Populism has a “chameleonic quality”<sup>12</sup> unlike the larger philosophical ideologies such as socialism and liberalism. Thus, Mudde put forth a minimal definition of populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”<sup>13</sup> The key elements of this definition are that firstly, it treats populism as a set of ideas, that reduce complexities between different options and form a coherent argument.<sup>14</sup> Populism as an ideology is based on the binary distinction between the pure people who are seen as a homogenous and virtue collective and the corrupt elite who are viewed as a

<sup>11</sup> Fernández-García and Luengo, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* Eds Yves Mény and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 543.

<sup>14</sup> Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America,” *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 2 (2012): 150; Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” 30.

homogenous but unreasonable collective.<sup>15</sup> Lastly, the general will of the people is an important aspect of this thin definition of populism that promises political transparency by avoiding institutional niceties and provides an aura of republican utopia.<sup>16</sup>

#### 1.1.1. Characteristics of Populist Ideology

While the earlier argument was that the people and elite are two homogenous fixed collectives of people, Mudde and Kaltwasser argue that these two collectives must not be pre-determined and be viewed as “empty vessels, filled in different ways by different actors.”<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, the people are not essentially a homogenous group of people and are often part of a multiclass collective.<sup>18</sup> The people can be considered as the entire nation or as a minority or as the lay man.<sup>19</sup> In neither of the above categorization of the people are they homogenous as they include people from all social, economic political and cultural backgrounds. Taggart thus, defines the people as ‘the heartland.’<sup>20</sup> The heartland, a term coined by Paul Taggart represents an “idealised community” that the populists intend to serve. The populace that belong to this heartland is the object of populist politics.<sup>21</sup> In political discourse it can refer to “Middle America or Middle England.”<sup>22</sup> The heartland is an imagined community that does not represent a particular social class but the populace is made up of people from all classes and party orientations characterised by “ordinariness” and a shared belief in the values that the

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<sup>15</sup> Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America,” 151.

<sup>16</sup> Mudde and Kaltwasser, 151; Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” 34.

<sup>17</sup> Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America,” 151.

<sup>18</sup> Cas Mudde, “In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populisms in Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 2 (2000): 35.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Canovan, “People Politicians and Populism,” *Government and Opposition* 19, no. 3 (1984): 315.

<sup>20</sup> Taggart, “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics,” 67.

<sup>21</sup> Taggart, 67; Canovan, “People Politicians and Populism,” 326.

<sup>22</sup> Taggart, “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics,” 67.

heartland stands for.<sup>23</sup> This imagined community is one that has had a continued existence reaching back from the past and extending out into the future<sup>24</sup> with common interests and a common will.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the elite also do not always consist of only the political elite. This is in fact a feature only of right-wing populism.<sup>26</sup> Even in right wing populism, the elite can be subdivided into different categories such as economic elite, social elite and cultural elite, depending upon their style and discourse. Thus, as the grievances of the people change so does the categorization of elite against whom the people are mobilised.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.1.2. Right-wing versus Left-wing Populism

In recent times populism Western Europe has been associated exclusively with right wing politics.<sup>28</sup> Although traditionally extreme right wing parties are considered to have an aversion towards democracies, these right wing populist parties claim to restore power back to the people.<sup>29</sup> Thus, they do not challenge the ideal of democracy, just its institutional form.<sup>30</sup> Right-wing populists resist the elite political culture that is represented through neo liberal values of internationalism and multiculturalism.<sup>31</sup> They oppose the “back room deals, shady compromises, complicated procedures, secret treaties and technicalities” of the elite class and their institutions.<sup>32</sup> Along with a political element, right wing populism also has a cultural element where they focus not on the urban areas but concentrate on the rural areas. The

<sup>23</sup> Taggart, 67; Canovan, “People Politicians and Populism,” 324; Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” *Political Studies* 47, no. 1 (1999): 4.

<sup>24</sup> Canovan, “People Politicians and Populism,” 315.

<sup>25</sup> Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” 34; Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” 5.

<sup>26</sup> Mudde, “In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populisms in Eastern Europe,” 37.

<sup>27</sup> Naom Gidron and Bart Bonikowski, “Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda,” in *Weatherhead Center for International Affairs Harvard University*, vol. 13, 2013, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Yves Mény and Yves Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* Eds Yves Mény and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 4; Luke March, “From Vanguard of the Proletariat to Vox Populi: Left-Populism as a ‘Shadow’ of Contemporary Socialism,” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2007): 63.

<sup>29</sup> Mény and Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism,” 4.

<sup>30</sup> Mény and Surel, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” 4.

<sup>32</sup> Canovan, 6.

Agrarian movement of the nineteenth century that was present mostly in the United States and in Russia points towards this kind of cultural populism.<sup>33</sup> Agricultural life was seen not only as the foundation of society but also as the seat of the moral high ground.<sup>34</sup> The elites on the other hand were represented by the urban population who were biased towards ordering life on the basis of capitalism.<sup>35</sup> Right-wing populism does not classify the people in terms of the social or economic standing. The people that form ‘the heartland’ do not only represent the proletariat but represent people from all social and economic backgrounds against the corrupt elite both economic as well as political.

Left-wing populism on the other hand originated in Latin America in the 1920s and it gained resonance yet again in the 1970s.<sup>36</sup> Such populism is characterised by multiclass movement, charismatic leadership, “ad hoc reformist policies” and a rejection of revolution.<sup>37</sup> Left-wing populism spread to eastern Europe after the fall of Communism.<sup>38</sup> Left-wing populism highlights the socio-economic issues.<sup>39</sup> Mudde defines this populism as “trying to achieve the Third Way between capitalism and socialism.”<sup>40</sup> In Eastern Europe, it was initially triggered by the economic crises of 2008. In Latin America, between 1920 to 1960 the populist movement has focused on “growth” and “moderate redistribution” that was facilitated by policy of “import-substitution industrialisation.”<sup>41</sup> In the 70s, populist leaders like Perón combined economic populism with political nationalism which in turn blurred the lines

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<sup>33</sup> Mudde, “In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populisms in Eastern Europe,” 34–35.

<sup>34</sup> Mudde, 35.

<sup>35</sup> Mudde, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Mudde, 35.

<sup>37</sup> Mudde, 35.

<sup>38</sup> March, “From Vanguard of the Proletariat to Vox Populi: Left-Populism as a ‘Shadow’ of Contemporary Socialism,” 63.

<sup>39</sup> March, 74.

<sup>40</sup> Mudde, “In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populisms in Eastern Europe,” 36.

<sup>41</sup> F.H. Cardoso and E. Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). As cited in Mudde, 36.

between the traditional social and class divisions between people.<sup>42</sup> Left-wing populism claims that the business elite look only after their own interests without considering the interests of the common man.<sup>43</sup> Thus, their principle agenda is to correct this social and economic inequity of society.<sup>44</sup>

## 1.2. Populism as a Discursive Strategy

Bossetta argues that populism as a discursive strategy is not limited only to the communication of populist ideology. If that were the case, then political outsiders who use anti-establishment and anti-elitist discourse would be classified as being more populist.<sup>45</sup> Bossetta argues that by using this discursive repertoire acknowledges the strategic and the creative basis of any political argument and thus, is an alluring tool that is not only used by populists but also by other established politicians<sup>46</sup>. In his paper he studies the adoption of populist style by Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage in 2014 and found that while Nigel Farage, a known populist politician, stuck to his rhetoric in both the debates analysed.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, Nick Clegg, a LibDem politician adopted traits characteristic of the populist discursive repertoire after having lost the first debate against the populist challenger.<sup>48</sup> Thus, we see that the discursive strategy is not fixed like ideology and can be used by any politician, so as to appeal to the people. Therefore, we can say that the characteristics of populism such as people-centrism or anti-elitism is often

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<sup>42</sup> March, "From Vanguard of the Proletariat to Vox Populi: Left-Populism as a 'Shadow' of Contemporary Socialism," 65.

<sup>43</sup> Mudde, C, "Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe." (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) As cited in Simon Otjes and Tom Louwerse, "Populists in Parliament: Comparing Left-Wing and Right-Wing Populism in the Netherlands," *Political Studies* 63 (2015): 61–62.

<sup>44</sup> March, "From Vanguard of the Proletariat to Vox Populi: Left-Populism as a 'Shadow' of Contemporary Socialism," 66.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Bossetta, "Fighting Fire with Fire: Mainstream Adoption of the Populist Political Style in the 2014 Europe Debates between Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19, no. 4 (2017): 717.

<sup>46</sup> Bossetta, 718.

<sup>47</sup> Bossetta, 717.

<sup>48</sup> Bossetta, 717.

used by politicians in order to appeal to their constituencies. Hence, the employment of the individual features is not characteristic of populism. It is only when are three features – people-centrism, anti-elitism and the will of the people – are used together can a movement be characterised as a populist movement.

Hawkins on the other hand argues that populism as a discursive strategy draws on populism being innately cultural.<sup>49</sup> He argues that as a discursive strategy, populism draws on the Manichean distinction between the culturally rooted good people and the corrupt cosmopolitan elite.<sup>50</sup> The Manichean discourse implies a normative distinction between the two categories that was seen in Mudde’s definition as well.<sup>51</sup> The general will of the people is used as a symbol of the rooted culture of the silent majority of the people.<sup>52</sup> It draws on the traditions and values of the ordinary folk who have inhabited the land for centuries past. Yet, these are the people who have been ignored by the elite who are not in touch with their roots and thus have overthrown the will of the people.<sup>53</sup> Populism as a discursive strategy thus focuses on ‘what’ the populist actors say in order to deepen the gap between the people and the elite.

The conflict here is over the establishment and not over particular issues.<sup>54</sup> Hence an important aspect of populism as a discourse is the requirement of a revolution, one to bring down the establishment.<sup>55</sup> Hawkins argues that the second aspect of the discourse is the “anything goes

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<sup>49</sup> Kirk Hawkins, “Is Chávez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 8 (2009): 1043.

<sup>50</sup> Hawkins, 1042.

<sup>51</sup> Hawkins, 1043; Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America,” 151.

<sup>52</sup> Hawkins, “Is Chávez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective,” 1043.

<sup>53</sup> Hawkins, 1044.

<sup>54</sup> Hawkins, 1044.

<sup>55</sup> Hawkins, 1044.

attitude” of the populist actors that undermines the values of liberal democracy and minority rights.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Hawkins argues that unlike ideology, discursive populism is a latent set of ideas that lacks contrast to other discourses and does not give importance to policy specifics.<sup>57</sup>

Brubaker views populism as a ‘discursive and stylistic repertoire.’<sup>58</sup> Brubaker argues against the minimal definition of populism used by Mudde<sup>59</sup> as on the one hand the definition is too minimal and focuses only on the vertical opposition between the people and the elite and neglects the horizontal opposition between the people and other groups.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand he argues that the definition is not minimal enough, as ‘the people’ represented, though valorised are not termed as “pure.”<sup>61</sup> He argues that ‘the people’ should be understood in a two-dimensional social space at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal crossroads.<sup>62</sup> While this vertical antagonism is what Mudde refers to in his thin definition of populism as an ideology, the horizontal antagonism between the people ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ is often forgotten.<sup>63</sup>

Emphasising on this “tight discursive interweaving”<sup>64</sup> of the vertical opposition with the horizontal one, Brubaker describes populism as a discursive repertoire consisting of five elements other than the antagonism between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite.’ These are “Antagonistic re-politicization” against technocratic governance, “majoritarianism” that claims

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<sup>56</sup> Hawkins, 1044.

<sup>57</sup> Hawkins, 1045.

<sup>58</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Why Populism?,” *Theory and Society* 46, no. 5 (2017): 357–85.

<sup>59</sup> Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” 2004, 543.

<sup>60</sup> Brubaker, “Why Populism?,” 362.

<sup>61</sup> Brubaker, 362.

<sup>62</sup> Brubaker, 362.

<sup>63</sup> Brubaker, 363; Benjamin DeCleen, “Populism and Nationalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* Ed. Cristobel Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.

<sup>64</sup> Brubaker, “Why Populism?,” 365.

to speak on behalf of the silent majority, “anti-institutionalism,” “protectionism” and “political style.”<sup>65</sup> Using this repertoire, political actors are able to scan through a large range of topics without dwelling too deeply in the ideology of the movement. Liebes argues that in this age of social media, the people do not need “idols of production” but “idols of consumption.”<sup>66</sup> Provocation plays an important role in the use of discourse to substantiate an argument. Along with continuity, provocation helps to introduce new ideas within an argument.<sup>67</sup> Thus, we see that they refer broadly to the ‘who’ that is the focus of populism as an ideology and focus more on ‘what’ is being said.

### 1.3. Populism as a Political Strategy

Weyland argues that “populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers.”<sup>68</sup> Populism as a political strategy is not just about what is being said, it is how it is said.<sup>69</sup> In order to mobilise the people, the speaker must not only use language, but also emotion, body movements, gestures and personal authority.<sup>70</sup> These elements help make an argument rational as well as affective and has a greater impact on the people.<sup>71</sup> Through these techniques, ideas in an argument can be shaped in such a way that only aspects that are currently relevant are highlighted in order to rally the people against the elite.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Brubaker, 364–65.

<sup>66</sup> Tamar Liebes, “‘Look Me Straight in the Eye’ the Political Discourse of Authenticity, Spontaneity, and Sincerity,” *The Communication Review* 4, no. 4 (2001): 503.

<sup>67</sup> Liebes, 503.

<sup>68</sup> Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics,” *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 14.

<sup>69</sup> James Martin, “Situating Speech: A Rhetorical Approach to Political Strategy,” *Political Studies* 63 (2015): 29.

<sup>70</sup> Martin, 29.

<sup>71</sup> Martin, 29.

<sup>72</sup> Martin, 31, 33.



## Populist Mobilisation

Jansen defines populist mobilisation as “any sustained, large-scale political project that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action, while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorises ordinary people.”<sup>73</sup> Thus populism is seen as a mode of action and mobilisation rather than placid ideology or discourse. There is shift from the “social content of populism” to the means by which to achieve it.<sup>74</sup> Jansen redefines populism as a political project that consists of discursive as well as mobilizational activities<sup>75</sup> in order to fulfil the will of the people. Similarly, to Mudde and Kaltwasser, Jansen argues that the mobilising actors are not a pre-determined collective. The formation of this collective is the primary goal of populist mobilisation.<sup>76</sup> Once this collective is formed, through the process of mobilisation their interests and goals may also change.<sup>77</sup>

Anti-elitist and nationalistic discourse plays an important role in the mobilisation of the people.<sup>78</sup> Jansen states that he uses the term rhetoric broadly to include actions and expressions along with verbal speech.<sup>79</sup> In order to mobilise the people this rhetoric is often tied to some ideology or “principle” that justifies the political action.<sup>80</sup> In the process of mobilisation, the rhetoric also instils in ‘the heartland’ a sense of unity and virtuousness of ‘the people’ by highlighting the similarity among the people of the heartland and the leaders of the populist movement as well as ignoring the differences.<sup>81</sup> Populist mobilisation combines popular

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<sup>73</sup> Robert Jansen, “A New Theoretical Approach to Populism” 29, no. 2 (2011): 82.

<sup>74</sup> Jansen, 82.

<sup>75</sup> Jansen, 82.

<sup>76</sup> Jansen, 83.

<sup>77</sup> Jansen, 83.

<sup>78</sup> Jansen, 83.

<sup>79</sup> Jansen, 82.

<sup>80</sup> Jansen, 83–84.

<sup>81</sup> Jansen, 84.

mobilisation along with populist rhetoric.<sup>82</sup> Though these two concepts are analytically different from one another they have an inherent historical correlation.<sup>83</sup>

Populist mobilisation does not take the place of ideology or social and economic policies that are the basis of a political movement.<sup>84</sup> Instead, they are a set of ideas towards gathering popular support that are used to reinforce the ideology and the discourse.<sup>85</sup> By defining populist mobilisation as a political project and not an unorganised mass gathering, there emerges a necessity to specify the organisations and the actors involved in the mobilisation.<sup>86</sup> It thus reduces the significance of the singular charismatic leader who has an influence over an unspecified mass of people.<sup>87</sup> Secondly, it provides a spatial and temporal boundary to populism as mobilisation of the masses usually occurs at critical historical junctures “for limited durations and is subject to fluctuations in its character and intensity.”<sup>88</sup> Populism as a political strategy emphasises on ‘how’ the people are mobilised. Thus, it relies on discourse and ideology to lay the groundwork in order to legitimise the action taken.

## Conclusion

Discussed above are the sub-types of populism that are seen across the political scale. However, empirically, very rarely do we see the utilisation of only one type of populism. The ideological approach to populism sees it as rooted in policies based on the struggle between the people and the institutions. This approach focuses on the institutional and material aspects of populism,

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<sup>82</sup> Jansen, 85.

<sup>83</sup> Jansen, 85.

<sup>84</sup> Jansen, 85.

<sup>85</sup> Jansen, 85.

<sup>86</sup> Jansen, 85.

<sup>87</sup> Jansen, 85–86.

<sup>88</sup> Jansen, 85–86.

that is based on the support of a large number of supporters backed by a charismatic leader.<sup>89</sup> In order to gain such massive support, the populist movements have to do away with some aspect of their ideology. Thus, there is an inherent tension between ideology and strategy of populism. While the former focuses on keeping the ideology pure and therefore, cannot be mobilised across large sections of society. The latter is based on the ability of the populist movements to mobilise people in large numbers in order for the voice of the people to be heard. In this paper we will focus on the case study of the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement in the United Kingdom. Rather than sticking to only one aspect of populism, the movement will be studied by combining both the ideational and strategic aspects of populism. By using the ideational concept, we will first clearly distinguish between the two groups – the people and the elite. Following that, using populism as a political strategy, we will analyse how the people were mobilised against the elite using rhetoric in place of a core ideology.

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<sup>89</sup> Hawkins, “Is Chávez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective,” 1044.

## Chapter 2: Context

It has historically been witnessed in Britain an avoidance of the radical right wing populism that had affected the rest of Europe.<sup>90</sup> While in the 1930s the ‘Black Shirts’ headed by Moseley could be characterised as a right winged populist movement, they were not as well received as the fascists in Italy Spain or Germany.<sup>91</sup> Populist parties in the UK are limited to that of the British National Party, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)<sup>92</sup> and now the recently formed Brexit Party.

### 2.1. Brexit

On June 23, 2016, the United Kingdom voted by a majority of 51.9% to leave the European Union. The referendum was held in response to the growing Euroscepticism in the country. In 2013, then Prime Minister David Cameron promised to hold a referendum on whether the UK should stay in the EU or not.<sup>93</sup> Growing immigration was a major reason for the Referendum. As the United Kingdom is part of the Dublin Regulation since it was put into force in 1990,<sup>94</sup> it opened its doors to the asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa in 2014. However, at the same time they became uneasy with the increasing migrant workers from Central and Eastern Europe as a result of the EU’s open borders between Member States.<sup>95</sup> The financial crisis of 2008 further frustrated by the people as they believed that the UK had given up way too much of its sovereignty, that the EU was taking advantage of.<sup>96</sup> Cameron pledged that if he

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<sup>90</sup> Julian Baggini, *A Very British Populism* (Counterpoint, 2013), 5.

<sup>91</sup> Baggini, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Baggini, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Jeff Wallenfeldt, “U.K. Votes on ‘Brexit’ from EU,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica inc), accessed May 26, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/story/u.k.-votes-on-brexit-from-eu>.

<sup>94</sup> European Communities, “Convention Determining the State Responsible for Examining Applications for Asylum Lodged in One of the Member States of the European Communities (Deposited with the Government of Ireland)” (General secretariat of the Council of the European Union, 1997), [www.consilium.europa.eu](http://www.consilium.europa.eu).

<sup>95</sup> Wallenfeldt, “U.K. Votes on ‘Brexit’ from EU.”

<sup>96</sup> Wallenfeldt.

returned to office in 2015, he would hold that referendum by 2017.<sup>97</sup> After winning the election in 2015, Cameron met with the EU leaders and was able to put forth an agreement that much of the demands, put forth by the Eurosceptic party UKIP.<sup>98</sup> However, these concessions were not enough for the people and the leaders who propagated that the UK was better off outside the EU. Following the vote to 'Leave', Cameron resigned and was succeeded by Theresa May.<sup>99</sup>

In order for the UK to leave the EU it had to initiate the withdrawal process firstly by invoking Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU).<sup>100</sup> As per Article 50, any state has the right to withdraw from the European Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements.<sup>101</sup> The Member State that wishes to withdraw must notify the European Council of its intention. Post that, a withdrawal agreement must be concluded that determines the conditions of withdrawal keeping in mind the state's future relations with the EU. The TEU shall cease to apply to the withdrawing state from the date the withdrawal agreement is put into force or two years after the notification of intended withdrawal.<sup>102</sup> On 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017 May invoked Article 50 whereby the UK was to leave the EU by the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019.<sup>103</sup>

Following the procedure of invoking Article 50, Theresa May after constant negotiations with the EU in November 2018, put before the Parliament a Withdrawal Agreement.<sup>104</sup> The key

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<sup>97</sup> Wallenfeldt.

<sup>98</sup> Wallenfeldt.

<sup>99</sup> "Brexit: Your Simple Guide to the UK Leaving the EU," BBC News, March 21, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-46318565>.

<sup>100</sup> Eva-Maria Poptcheva, "Article 50 TEU: Withdrawal of a Member State from the EU" (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2016), 2, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/577971/EPRS\\_BRI\(2016\)577971\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/577971/EPRS_BRI(2016)577971_EN.pdf).

<sup>101</sup> Poptcheva, "Article 50 TEU: Withdrawal of a Member State from the EU."

<sup>102</sup> Poptcheva.

<sup>103</sup> "Brexit: Your Simple Guide to the UK Leaving the EU."

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

points covered by the withdrawal agreement were that in order to break their partnership, the UK would have to pay the EU £39 billion. It also negotiated the terms as to what would happen to UK citizens living in the EU and EU citizens living in the UK. Lastly, it negotiated on the Insurance Policy in order to avoid a hard border between the Northern Ireland and Ireland. According to this deal, Northern Ireland would be part of the EU Customs Union, but it would also be part of the new UK-EU Joint Customs arrangement.<sup>105</sup> While the deal was agreed by the UK and the EU in November 2018, it also had to be approved by the British MPs. This agreement was put to the vote in the British Parliament on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019. However, in the Parliament this particular withdrawal agreement was rejected by 432 votes to 202.<sup>106</sup> Following this defeat On 12<sup>th</sup> March 2019, May put to the vote an amended version of the agreement, which was rejected again. On 29<sup>th</sup> March – the original day of Brexit, the withdrawal agreement was rejected yet again. As the MPs did not agree on the terms of the withdrawal, May was forced to ask the EU to delay Brexit and the new departure date is set for 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019.<sup>107</sup>

## 2.2. History of Right-wing Populism in the UK

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, unlike its other European counterparts, there was a lack of extreme right-wing populism in Britain due to multiple reasons. Firstly, the two groups, the people and the elite have remained relatively homogeneous for most of the twentieth century.<sup>108</sup> The people mostly constituted of the working class that made up a vast majority of the population.<sup>109</sup> The elite on the other hand, constituted the upper class, land owning gentry and rich industrialists.<sup>110</sup> Secondly, the grievances of the people were genuine and just and not based on scare stories of

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Baggini, *A Very British Populism*, 17.

<sup>109</sup> Baggini, 17.

<sup>110</sup> Baggini, 17.

potential dangers.<sup>111</sup> The two party parliamentary system in the UK that is based on the ideals of democracy was established in 1867.<sup>112</sup> This system is rooted in the British history and has its own distinct customs and institutions.<sup>113</sup> The logic behind this two party system is that in struggle for power one party always wins and thus forms the government and the other party that loses, offers critical opposition to the ruling party.<sup>114</sup> Occasionally third parties have been made it into this system, especially during the interwar years,<sup>115</sup> but have not lasted the test of time. Traditionally the two parties were those of the Liberals and the Conservatives. However, after the First World War, the support for the pre-war Liberal party had weakened and was substituted by increasing support for the Labour party.<sup>116</sup> As both the parties were opposed to the conservative ideology, the parliamentary system became a three party struggle.<sup>117</sup> However by the mid-thirties the Labour Party replaced the Liberals as the second contender and restored the two party system.<sup>118</sup> The people had faith in the deliverance of the system, where their voice was first represented through the unions and then through the Labour Party.<sup>119</sup> The faith in the system emerged from a reverence in the ruling class of the country who although were judged to have governed the country unjustly, were not accused of being callous or violent.<sup>120</sup> The innate sense to maintain tradition, kept the faith of the people in maintaining the status quo.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Baggini, 17.

<sup>112</sup> Alexander Brady, "The British Two Party System," *Political Science* 8, no. 1 (1956): 3.

<sup>113</sup> Brady, 3.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Brady, "The British Two-Party System," 4.

<sup>119</sup> Baggini, *A Very British Populism*, 17.

<sup>120</sup> Baggini, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Baggini, 17.

### 2.3. UKIP as the Third Party

In the late 1970s Thatcher who due to her divisive policies was seen as the elite, used populist rhetoric to appeal to the common man. This blurred the clear distinction between the elite and the people.<sup>122</sup> This created conditions for the emergence of populist parties such as the British National Party. However, the people's faith was based on the tradition of the two-party system and thus, such third parties faded into history.<sup>123</sup>

UKIP was set up in 1993.<sup>124</sup> Initially it was more of a policy seeking than a vote seeking party. Unlike previous populist parties that failed, UKIP relied on three traditions to appeal to the masses. First the Eurosceptic tradition on which the party was based. UKIP was initially formed to oppose the Maastricht Treaty of 1992<sup>125</sup> that saw the transformation of the European Single Market to the political union of the European Union. The founder Alan Sked was a member of the Bruges Group that was founded in 1989 and named after Margaret Thatcher's famous Bruges Speech in 1988. The Speech is considered to be the foundation of Euroscepticism – *"We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them reimposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels."*<sup>126</sup> Second, the UKIP relies on its relation to the conservative tradition. Traditionally the left-wing political parties – the Labour party was considered to be anti-EU. However, with its reliance on Powellism and Thatcherism, UKIP can almost be considered as the anti-EU faction of the Conservative Party.<sup>127</sup> Third, UKIP positions itself as a populist party, separate

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<sup>122</sup> Baggini, 18.

<sup>123</sup> Baggini, 27.

<sup>124</sup> Robert Ford and Mathew Goodwin, "Understanding UKIP: Identity, Social Change and the Left Behind," *The Political Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2014): 283.

<sup>125</sup> Karine Tournier-Sol, "Reworking the Eurosceptic and Conservative Traditions into a Populist Narrative: UKIP's Winning Formula?," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 142.

<sup>126</sup> Thatcher, M. (1988) Speech to the College of Europe, 20 September. As cited in Tournier-Sol, 142.

<sup>127</sup> Tournier-Sol, 144–46.



from the two-party system, on the side of the people and against the “LibLabCon-sensus” establishment.<sup>128</sup>

UKIP under Nigel Farage was able to shed its single issue party conception as it incorporated an anti-immigrant policy along with its Euroscepticism.<sup>129</sup> UKIP claims that open-door immigration from Eastern European countries is the main cause of immigration in the UK.<sup>130</sup> UKIP tries to disassociate itself from racist colouring and thus is not against the increasing immigration from the Commonwealth, African and Middle Eastern countries. Instead it focuses on welfare and stresses on the fact that all immigrants irrespective of the colour or creed should be able to apply for benefits only after they have paid taxes in the UK for five years.<sup>131</sup> As stated earlier, in order to address the issues posited by UKIP, in 2016 then Prime Minister Cameron negotiated an agreement with the EU before the referendum on Brexit could be held. As per this agreement, the UK would be able to block the benefits of migrant workers for the first four years that they live in the UK. However, this “emergency brake” had a time limit of seven years.<sup>132</sup> Secondly, addressing the increasing Euroscepticism especially after the 2008 financial crisis, the UK would be exempt from the EU’s commitment for form an “ever-closer union,” it would keep its currency as Pound Sterling and would be reimbursed for the money spent on euro-zone bailouts.<sup>133</sup> However, the solutions offered were not accepted and at the referendum the UK decided to leave the EU by nearly 52% votes.

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<sup>128</sup> Tournier-Sol, 141.

<sup>129</sup> Tournier-Sol, 146.

<sup>130</sup> Tournier-Sol, 146.

<sup>131</sup> Tournier-Sol, 146.

<sup>132</sup> Wallenfeldt, “U.K. Votes on ‘Brexit’ from EU.”

<sup>133</sup> Wallenfeldt.

## 2.4. Leave Means Leave

The Leave Means Leave Movement was founded in July 2016 a month after the referendum. It was founded by John Longworth and Richard Tice, who also serve as Co-Chairmen. Nigel Farage serves as the Vice Chairman. The lobby group also has a Political Advisory Board of seven members and has around 51 supporters.<sup>134</sup> During the Brexit negotiations in 2017, the lobby group wrote a letter to Prime Minister May that highlighted their concerns over freedom of movement, free trade, the European court of Justice, the extension of the transition period and a no deal scenario.<sup>135</sup> The lobby group has constantly been sending out news and research articles through their website on how the UK has been used as a scape goat by the European Union.<sup>136</sup>

Instead of relying on traditional means of lobbying such as pressurising MPs from the two-party system, ‘Leave Means Leave’ has tried to include the lay man in order to pressurise the government to deliver on the will of the people. Since Theresa May’s deals have been rejected in Parliament and the possibility of a clean Brexit have become dull, the movement has been campaigning against the elite sitting in Westminster as well.<sup>137</sup> They have been constantly addressing the 17.4 million people who voted to leave the European Union as ‘the people’ that belong to a ‘Heartland’ that resides in the countryside.<sup>138</sup> The conception of the elite has shifted from initially being the European Union to now also including the political and economic elite

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<sup>134</sup> “Leave Means Leave,” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, April 26, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leave\\_Means\\_Leave](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leave_Means_Leave). Wikipedia was used as a primary source as [leavemeansleave.eu](https://leavemeansleave.eu), the official website of the lobby group as suspended its activities both on ground and online and therefore, organizational details were unavailable.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> “Leave Means Leave,” Leave Means Leave, July 2016, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/>.

<sup>137</sup> “Leave Means Leave.”

<sup>138</sup> Leave Means Leave, “March to Leave,” March to Leave, accessed June 5, 2019, <https://www.marchtoleave.com/>.

sitting in Westminster. An elite who are part of a mostly Remain government.<sup>139</sup> The organization protested against the extension of Article 50 by marching from Sunderland to Parliament Square in London.<sup>140</sup> This march was the last activity of this lobby group that has suspended all activities until the 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2019 as it would not be competing the European Parliament Elections. They have shifted their address back to 55 Tufton Street, London, phone lines have been made inactive and the website does not provide any organisational details.<sup>141</sup> Instead the founders of ‘Leave Means Leave’ formed a new political party, i.e. the ‘Brexit Party’ which is contested in the EU elections held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2019.

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<sup>139</sup> “Leave Means Leave,” July 2016.

<sup>140</sup> Leave Means Leave, “March to Leave.”

<sup>141</sup> “Leave Means Leave,” July 2016.

## Chapter 3: The People

The people are the basic unit of populism. Populists go against the establishments and institutions to fight for the will and the rights of the people. Mudde provides a thin definition of populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”<sup>142</sup> Populism as an ideology is a set of ideas,<sup>143</sup> mental frameworks that are used by the populist actors to draw a connection with the ‘common sense “ordinariness”’ of the people.<sup>144</sup>

### 3.1. The Heartland

In the case of the Brexit campaign the heartland that the populist actors claim to represent is not the entire nation. Although during the campaign, especially in 2016 it seemed as though the entire nation was troubled by the technocratic interference of the European Union. It is the countryside away from the metropolitan cities that the populist actors refer to as ‘the heartland.’ The ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement conducted rallies across the country in October and November, 2018 and found that “*once outside of the M25 bubble, there is steely determination and massive anger amongst the people of Britain at the way they and the referendum vote have been treated.*”<sup>145</sup> The heartland that voted to leave in 2016 by a majority of 50% and more included Stoke-on-Trent, Arun, Northampton, Derby, Wealden, Northumberland, Basingstoke

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<sup>142</sup> Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” 2004, 543.

<sup>143</sup> Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America,” 150; Gidron and Bonikowski, “Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda,” 6.

<sup>144</sup> Pankowski, Rafal. 2010. *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots*. London: Routledge. As cited in Gidron and Bonikowski, “Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda,” 6–7.

<sup>145</sup> John Longworth, “Brino Will Sink with Theresa May, Leaving Clean Brexit to Win the Day,” *The Daily Telegraph*, September 11, 2018, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

and Deane and Cherwell.<sup>146</sup> This British heartland did not just include the older generation who owned family run small and medium size enterprises and who were vary of a growing multi-ethnic society. It was composed of the younger generation of salaried men as well.

This imagined heartland strives to rearrange the world as it was previously<sup>147</sup> while rejecting the rules and restrictions imposed on them by the European Union. Within this heartland, Sunderland holds a place of importance for the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement because it was the first place from where the British heartland decided in a majority to leave the European Union. The ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement claims to return the country to the tried and tested good way of life before the intrusion of the European Union. Claims were made by the populist actors that tapped on their common roots and historical traditions of the country.

*“All of us who want Britain to be a great country once again accept that we must be prepared to stand up for what we believe in and fight for our independence.”*<sup>148</sup>

*“My mother went to St. Anthony’s school, my great aunt and uncle still live in Washington village and the Ryhope colliery was where a lot of my family made a living for many generations.”*<sup>149</sup>

*“Fortunately, we are a maritime nation of adventurers and merchants, and the deep blue sea has always been attractive to us”*<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> “EU Referendum Result; The UK Votes to Leave the EU,” *BBC News*, accessed February 5, 2019, [https://www.bbc.com/news/politics/eu\\_referendum/results](https://www.bbc.com/news/politics/eu_referendum/results).

<sup>147</sup> Taggart, “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics,” 68.

<sup>148</sup> “Nigel Farage to Lead 14-Day March to Protest against ‘Betrayal of Brexit,’” *London Evening Standard*, February 28, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>149</sup> “I’m a Sunderland Man and That Is Why I’ll Be on the March to Leave Campaign Organiser Says Why He Will Be Joining Nigel Farage on Brexit Crusade to London,” *The Sunderland Echo*, June 3, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>150</sup> “Telegraph: No Mr Tusk, ‘Hell’ Is Being Trapped in the Wretched European Union,” *The Telegraph*, June 2, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

The people were fed statements that theirs was “*the country that gave the world the concept of parliamentary democracy and freedom,*” where the “*Rule of Law, the free market and the WTO... originated.*”<sup>151</sup> This implied that the people were not against the neoliberal values as they, during the Empire spread these concepts to the rest of the world, much before the conception of the European Union. Such statements enabled a sense of unity in the people and their belonging to a great nation and put forth the ambition to return to that status yet again. The Brexiteers firmly believe that when they joined the European Economic Community in 1969 it was meant to be only a common market and not a political union that it has now become.

### Popularity over Ideology

There is a constant reference to the 17.4 million people who voted to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum. This number is used so as to suggest that a large majority of the people voted to leave the European Union. However, this claim cannot be substantiated, and the numbers post the referendum stated that 51.9% people voted to leave and 48.1% voted to Remain.<sup>152</sup> Though the Leavers won the referendum, it was by a small majority. The constant reference to the larger number suggests that the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement has fallen short of its ideology, in order to gather greater numbers of supporters. The leaders of the movement claim that they do not align themselves to any political party neither the Conservatives nor the Labour Party to deliver the will of the people. They claim, that they are both cross party and no party<sup>153</sup> and that the issue at hand is not between the “*Left or the Right*” but between what is “*Right or Wrong.*”<sup>154</sup> Not only the people who supported the heartland

<sup>151</sup> Leave Means Leave, *Iain Duncan Smith Speech at the LML Brexit Rally FULL 17 Jan 19* (YouTube, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hZCro-hOZM>.

<sup>152</sup> “EU Referendum Result; The UK Votes to Leave the EU.”

<sup>153</sup> Leave Means Leave, *29th March Leave Means Leave Rally to Save Brexit* (YouTube, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkSoAD1YQZE>.

<sup>154</sup> Brexit Party MEPs, *Nigel Farage: A Positive Political Movement - Brexit Party Rally, Durham, 11.05.2019* (YouTube, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdJ4rMcwguA>.

but also the members of the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement come from different political allegiances, some being Members of Parliament. Since the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement is based on a specific issue, there is no specific ideological core that the actors represent. Instead, they focus on the issue of leaving the European Union in order to attract people from across various political and social backgrounds. The populist actors are able to draw on the normative distinction between the people and the elite not as an ideological distinction but one that is between friend and foe, between good and evil.<sup>155</sup>

### 3.2. Us Versus Them

Populism as stated earlier is based on the distinction between the good people against the corrupt elite. Populists prey on the popular distrust of the people on the politicians and their evasive and bureaucratic ways and in contrast present themselves in an ordinary light similar to the people they wish to represent.<sup>156</sup> It is however, not only the appeal of the people against the elite class but also the institutions and values imbibed by them.<sup>157</sup> Populist movements are subject to the cultural context based on the type of elite and the prevalent political discourse.<sup>158</sup>

#### 3.2.1. ‘Us’ - The People

In respect to the ‘Leave Means Leave’ campaign in the United Kingdom, we see a clear right-wing stream of populism. There is a clear ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divide created.<sup>159</sup> The ‘us’ here

<sup>155</sup> Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” 2004, 544.

<sup>156</sup> Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” 5; Kevin Deegan-Krause and Tim Haughton, “Toward a More Useful Conceptualization of Populism: Types and Degrees of Populist Appeals in the Case of Slovakia,” *Politics & Policy* 37, no. 4 (2009): 821–41.

<sup>157</sup> Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” 4; Mény and Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism,” 12.

<sup>158</sup> Canovan, “People Politicians and Populism,” 323; Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” 4.

<sup>159</sup> Robert Barr, “Populist, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics,” *Party Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 31.

are the 17.4 million people who voted to leave the European Union. They are the people who run the small businesses, the university students and those disenchanted by the establishment and who live in the countryside away from London. The people are signified by the statements below that were available on the ‘Leave Means Leave’ website was exploited by the populist actors in such a way that from the outset it seemed like all of the nation came together as one. It depicted the people as the ultimate seat of political power and wish to take back control from the European Union.<sup>160</sup>

*“it is the privately-owned British companies, alongside the risk-taking, innovative entrepreneurs and the multitude of small businesses who most want to leave.”<sup>161</sup>*

*“Family-owned or -run businesses make up the vast majority of the UK economy from sole traders to large companies. They trade around the world and domestically. They are the backbone of the economy. They are the innovators and risk takers. They are the future.”<sup>162</sup>*

*“To be 19 and believe in Brexit is deemed wholly unfashionable – I have been called an ‘age traitor’, a ‘fat nosed c\*\*\*’ and been trolled online, just for my political stance.”<sup>163</sup>*

*“I think there is a growing sense of anger and that would likely manifest itself if MPs try to deal it or stop it. However, coming closer to London, where more voted to remain, our presence may be less welcome.”<sup>164</sup>*

*“I’m a Sunderland man through and through and even though I now live in London my heart will always be on the Wear.”<sup>165</sup>*

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<sup>160</sup> Leave Means Leave, *Kate Hoey Speaks at the Let’s Go WTO Rally* (YouTube, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSCgND7D2KY>.

<sup>161</sup> John Longworth, “Telegraph: Multinationals May Seek to Preserve the Status Quo after Brexit but Britain’s Small Businesses Want Change,” *The Telegraph*, January 18, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>162</sup> John Longworth, “The Pro-EU Establishment Are Sadly Continuing to Dismiss the ‘Little People,’” *Brexit Central*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>163</sup> Steven Edginton, “We Marched against the Iraq War and Tuition Fees – Now We Need to March FOR Brexit,” *The Sun*, June 3, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>164</sup> “Leave Means Leave’s Richard Tice: MPs ‘Should Be Working Harder’ to Get Brexit Done” (Talk Radio, January 21, 2019), <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>165</sup> “I’m a Sunderland Man and That Is Why I’ll Be on the March to Leave Campaign Organiser Says Why He Will Be Joining Nigel Farage on Brexit Crusade to London.”



The will of the people that was the main element of ‘Leave Means Leave’ has been reiterated constantly by the populist actors by reaching out to the people and asking their opinion on the withdrawal agreements and the other deals put forth by the May government.

*“I’m a Sunderland man and that is why I’ll be on the March to Leave, because we are not getting what we were promised. I respect democracy too much to let the Westminster elite tell me they will not respect the result.”*<sup>166</sup>

*“Pushing on with May’s current deal would betray not only of the 17.4 million people who voted to leave the EU”*<sup>167</sup>

There is also a latent reference to the rooted history and culture of the people that portrays the people as better suited to govern their own country than the technocratic elite.<sup>168</sup> However, this distinction is not highlighted in the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement. A probable reason for this may be that these actors themselves, do not form part of the so called ‘heartland.’ The Members of Parliament that support the movement went to the same schools and had a similar career trajectory to those of the other MPs who are in favour of the UK remaining in the European Union. Thus, this distinction though mentioned at times is kept in the background and the focus of the people is kept on the single issue of leaving the European Union, irrespective of where the people come from. Despite the attempt of the populist leaders of ‘Leave Means Leave’ to portray the people as a collective with a common goal to leave the

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Richard Tice, “May’s Deal Is the Worst Deal in History,” *Conservative Home*, November 16, 2018, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>168</sup> Leave Means Leave, *Iain Duncan Smith Speech at the LML Brexit Rally FULL 17 Jan 19*.

EU, the way that the people have been mobilised leans more towards a cultural mobilisation rather than a political mobilisation.

### 3.2.2. ‘Them’ – The Political Elite

On the other hand, the definition of the ‘them’ in the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement has evolved since 2016. While the original elite were the technocrats of the European Union sitting in Brussels, today this ‘them’ are also represented by the elite class in the UK.

*“Since the referendum MPs and Peers of all hues have been rightly proclaiming the sovereignty of Parliament, albeit that they rarely bothered to protect it from the pernicious erosion of our freedoms perpetrated by the Brussels machine during our forty-year membership of the EU.”*<sup>169</sup>

*“It’s time to rebel. It’s the time for my generation to rise up against the establishment in Brussels and Westminster and call for a truly global Britain.”*<sup>170</sup>

This elite includes both the political elite as well as the economic elite. Firstly, from the beginning of the Brexit campaign the European Union was cast as *“an undemocratic, illiberal, deplorable institution”*<sup>171</sup> who worked only in their interest and were taking over British administration, borders, trade and justice. The corrupt politicians were those who wished a *“special place in hell”* for the Brexiteers.<sup>172</sup> This rhetoric was used by populist actors in the sense of sour grapes as Article 50 was invoked and preparations of the UK’s exit from the EU were being made.

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<sup>169</sup> Longworth, John, “In a Parliament Full of Remainers, Brexit Is Now in the Gift of Jeremy Corbyn,” *The Telegraph*, January 14, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>170</sup> Edginton, “We Marched against the Iraq War and Tuition Fees – Now We Need to March FOR Brexit.”

<sup>171</sup> Leave Means Leave, *29th March Leave Means Leave Rally to Save Brexit*.

<sup>172</sup> “Telegraph: No Mr Tusk, ‘Hell’ Is Being Trapped in the Wretched European Union.”

However, this conception of the elite over the past two years has grown to include the political class in the UK, specifically the ‘Remain’ Parliament. Since 2018 with the Chequer’s deal and the subsequent withdrawal agreements and other Brexit deals put forth by Theresa May’s government, the political class was portrayed as the betrayers who did not fulfil the will of the people but instead, mocked them as an ignorant class of people who did not know what they were voting for.<sup>173</sup> Westminster is seen as the seat of this betrayal and the people from the suburban heartland are pitted against this city of the political elite who are obstructing the will of the people.

*“The Westminster elite are in the process of betraying the British people over Brexit.”<sup>174</sup>*

*“The Westminster elite has had over two years to implement Brexit and instead has done everything in its power to prevent it.”<sup>175</sup>*

*“I respect democracy too much to let the Westminster elite tell me they will not respect the result.”<sup>176</sup>*

This feeling of betrayal has now become the single issue that the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement is focused on and is not only limited to the Tory government. It was also extended to the Labour opposition that once shared the same Euroscepticism as some of the leaders at the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement,<sup>177</sup> but today work towards arriving at a Customs Union with the European Union. This so-called betrayal is capitalised by the populist actors to argue that the political elite at Westminster, irrespective of their earlier discourse, at the end work towards their own interests even if it in coalition with the original foe, i.e. the European Union.

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<sup>173</sup> Leave Means Leave, *29th March Leave Means Leave Rally to Save Brexit*.

<sup>174</sup> “Nigel Farage to Lead 14-Day March to Protest against ‘Betrayal of Brexit.’”

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> “I’m a Sunderland Man and That Is Why I’ll Be on the March to Leave Campaign Organiser Says Why He Will Be Joining Nigel Farage on Brexit Crusade to London.”

<sup>177</sup> Longworth, John, “In a Parliament Full of Remainers, Brexit Is Now in the Gift of Jeremy Corbyn.”

Such rhetoric, is used by populist actors, in place of ideology so as to further broaden the gap between the good people and the evil elite.<sup>178</sup>

### 3.2.3. 'Them' - The Economic Elite

Traditionally the economic elite are targeted by left wing populist parties who work towards policies of redistribution. However, the 'Leave Means Leave' movement has also projected the economic elite as the source of dissatisfaction. Primarily during the 2016 referendum, these economic elite were restricted to the larger corporations of the European Union who were seen as *"rent-seeking, protectionist and anti-competitive multinationals."*<sup>179</sup> As increasing surveys about how Brexit will negatively affect the UK's trade flows were being released from within the country, the economic elite of the UK were also included. This inclusion of the economic elite in the 'them' category is an interesting inclusion as many of the leaders of the 'Leave Means Leave' movement including their Co-Chairman John Longworth was formerly associated with the same economic elite he now stands against. Longworth had served as the director general of the British Chambers of Commerce from September 2011 to March 2016.<sup>180</sup> He also served chaired the CBI's distributive trade panel and served as the organization's economic spokesman for several years.<sup>181</sup>

Despite this blurred line between the 'us' and the 'them' the leaders of the 'Leave Means Leave' movement were able to attract supporters on the basis that they were once associated with these economic elite and so they understand how they work. They were able to distinguish

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<sup>178</sup> Hawkins, "Is Chávez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective," 1044.

<sup>179</sup> Longworth, "Telegraph: Multinationals May Seek to Preserve the Status Quo after Brexit but Britain's Small Businesses Want Change."

<sup>180</sup> Longworth, "The Pro-EU Establishment Are Sadly Continuing to Dismiss the 'Little People.'"

<sup>181</sup> Longworth, "Telegraph: Multinationals May Seek to Preserve the Status Quo after Brexit but Britain's Small Businesses Want Change."

themselves by pitting the small and medium size enterprises against the larger corporations who the populist leaders claimed looked after their own interests and not that of the country. They even claimed that organization's like the CBI that was dominated by multinationals that aimed to segment markets and create barriers that keep out the smaller family run British businesses.<sup>182</sup>

While these statements of the populist movement created a unity of the people, the arguments stated to retaliate against the economic elite were based on half-truths. Like the scare mongering that the populist leaders allege of the 'Remainers', the possible solutions offered are all oversimplified for the lay man who wouldn't understand the complexities. Thus, we see a technocratic behaviour imbibed by the leaders of the 'Leave Means Leave' movement. The same type of behaviour that they accused the European Union of.

### *Trade on WTO Terms*

The economic elite argued that the UK did not have to be dependent on a Customs Union with the EU as they could trade more freely with the 93% of the world that was not in the EU.”<sup>183</sup> What the populists did not mention was that at present they do not pay any tariffs for trade within the EU. Secondly, once the UK leaves the EU, it will also lose its free trade agreements with countries outside of the EU such as South Korea and Canada.<sup>184</sup> Also, these leaders who advocate falling back on WTO terms neglect the fact that very few countries in the world trade only on WTO terms without any free trade agreement at all.<sup>185</sup> Even if the UK was able to

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<sup>182</sup> Longworth.

<sup>183</sup> Leave Means Leave, *Tim Martin Speech at the LML "Brexit: Let's Go WTO" Rally* (YouTube, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7hrEFMmT80>.

<sup>184</sup> Catherine Barnard and Anand Menon, "What Would 'Trading on WTO Terms' Mean for the UK?," *The UK in a Changing Europe*, n.d., 10.

<sup>185</sup> Barnard and Menon, 11.

establish free trade agreements with other countries, with emphasis on the Commonwealth countries, they underestimate the administrative costs they would incur in order to negotiate more than a hundred tariff quotas in the WTO.<sup>186</sup>

### *Reliance on the United States*

The leaders of the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement have also been reiterating the convenience of trade with countries of the Commonwealth and especially with the United States. The populist leaders have been stating that without the hassles of the complex tariff quotas imposed by the EU, there would be greater foreign direct investment<sup>187</sup> that would not only benefit the larger corporations but also the small-scale industries. This convenience is especially targeted towards trade with the US. This is probably based on the fact that the US and the EU have failed to establish a free trade agreement and instead have multiple bilateral treaties in place.<sup>188</sup> However, if the UK wants to keep the benefits of the bilateral agreements such as those on technical standards, the terms of those agreements will have to be renegotiated. A crucial issue that is not mentioned with regard to trade of food is that the EU and the UK have strict regulation on food safety to avoid risks whereas the US has more relaxed regulations and is limited to what is known scientifically.<sup>189</sup> Thus, despite the rhetoric used by the populist leaders, if the two countries cannot agree on the safety and technical standards, then the agreements may come to a standstill. Brexit on WTO terms would then not be easy to achieve as propagated by the elite of the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement.

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<sup>186</sup> Barnard and Menon, 11.

<sup>187</sup> Leave Means Leave, *Tim Martin Speech at the LML “Brexit: Let’s Go WTO” Rally*.

<sup>188</sup> Barnard and Menon, “What Would ‘Trading on WTO Terms’ Mean for the UK?,” 14.

<sup>189</sup> Barnard and Menon, 14.

## Conclusion

We see that in the absence of ideology, there has been a focus on a single issue by the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement. However, ideological techniques are used in order to gather popular support. The leaders of the movement have used the same normative binary distinction between the people and the elite, even though at times the distinction has been far from clear. In order to make up for this blurred divisions, they have relied on generalizations and half-truths to portray themselves as the good people who look out for the wellbeing of the heartland. Despite the fact that many of the leaders come from the same socio-economic background as the ‘evil’ elite, the populists have portrayed themselves as those who are not in it for their own benefits unlike the elite sitting in Brussels and in Westminster. Though the antagonism was initially between the UK and the EU, at the time of the referendum, the issues that constituted the referendum, pertaining to the EU exclusively started fading into the background and the incompetence of the British Parliament was slowly being highlighted. The Tory and Labour MPs were seen as the foe who were obstructing the voice of the people. It was no longer the UK versus the EU, but it became the “*Parliament vs the people.*”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> “No-Deal Brexit Would Be ‘Very Good for the Many, Not the Few’, Says Leave Means Leave Chairman” (Talk Radio, June 2, 2019), <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

## Chapter 4: Populism as a Political Strategy

The definition of populism that was used by Mudde is a thin definition that considers populism to be an ideology. However, this definition has often been criticised as one that includes core as well as peripheral ideas to form a coherent understanding of the complex political world.<sup>191</sup> Populism has a ‘chameleonic quality’ whereby it changes as per the context in which it is applied to.<sup>192</sup> Weyland states that “populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers.”<sup>193</sup> Thus, populism must not be studied only in respect to ideologies and manifestos. In the present case study of the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement that focuses on a single issue, rhetoric has replaced ideology as a form of political mobilisation in the interest of the people and not only those of the elite.<sup>194</sup>

Political mobilisation is a means by which the people can challenge the elite towards social and political change.<sup>195</sup> Thus, instead of restricting populism to ideology, it should be seen as a flexible way of gathering and expressing political support.<sup>196</sup> Populism is a relationship between the people and the leaders. It is not only about the people or about the single charismatic leader that they are dependent on.<sup>197</sup> Populist mobilisation suggests to move away from the means of the populist movement, i.e. the charismatic leaders, their party regime and

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<sup>191</sup> Belén Fernández-García and Óscar Luengo, “Populist Parties in Western Europe. An Analysis of the Three Core Elements of Populism,” *Communication and Society* 31, no. 3 (2018): 58.

<sup>192</sup> Taggart, P, “Populism.” (Buckingham, Open University Press, 2000):4. As cited in Mény and Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism,” 6.

<sup>193</sup> Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics,” *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 14.

<sup>194</sup> Mény and Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism,” 13.

<sup>195</sup> Jansen, “A New Theoretical Approach to Populism,” 77.

<sup>196</sup> Jansen, 77.

<sup>197</sup> Jansen, 79.



ideology. Instead they focus on the actions of both the leaders and the people of the populist movement.<sup>198</sup> Jansen argues that the first step to understand populist mobilisation is to think of it as a political project, one with a package of mobilizational and discursive strategies.<sup>199</sup> By combining the rhetoric of the populist leaders with the mobilisation activities of the people, populist mobilisation converts the people of the heartland from passive onlookers to active participants.<sup>200</sup>

The ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement is one such form of political mobilisation. The movement claims to be “*a cross-party campaign lobbying group and is neither a political party nor a members association.*”<sup>201</sup> In place of a concrete ideology, the movement is based on the use of rhetoric by the populist leaders to mobilise the people of the heartland against the corrupt elite. The goal of the movement has shifted ever so slightly from just wanting to leave the plutocratic rule of the European Union in 2016 to condemning the UK Parliament and elite who could not deliver an exit from the European Union irrespective of a deal. The movement thus, has capitalised on slogans that catch the gist of their political strategy.

#### 4.1. Use of Rhetoric

Rhetoric was used by ‘Leave Means leave’ not only to portray a better UK out of the EU but also to critique the elite in Brussels and especially in Westminster. Flexible rhetoric was used in place of rigid ideology to mobilise the people in favour of the ‘Leave Means Leave’

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<sup>198</sup> Jansen, 82.

<sup>199</sup> Jansen, 82.

<sup>200</sup> Jansen, 83.

<sup>201</sup> John Longworth, “Brexiters Will Win in the End,” *Leave Means Leave*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/brexiters-will-win-in-the-end/>.

movement as a whole, but this was used more and more as the 29<sup>th</sup> of March drew near – the original date of Brexit, that was not delivered. The slogans used by the populist leaders tapped not only on the incapability of the EU but also on possible solutions as well as the betrayal of the elite in the UK and the loss of belief of the people in the current government.

#### 4.1.1. Incapability of the Elite

Once the withdrawal agreement put forth by Theresa May was rejected by a majority in the House of Commons, the populist leaders have targeted the elite as an “*infighting, weak leadership*”<sup>202</sup> that favours the European Union. This allegation made sense when the agreement was rejected, followed by a ‘no confidence’ vote in the government that was also rejected. Thus, the message that was sent to the European Union was that they could twist and turn the negotiation process as per their interests. The populist leaders accused the Prime Minister of being able to only negotiate a “*a mere promise to discuss all this stuff in the future, but only if we [the UK] behave[s] well over the next couple of years.*”<sup>203</sup> All the subsequent deals up to the 29<sup>th</sup> of March that were put forth by the Prime Minister were termed as “*Remain minus*”<sup>204</sup> rather than one favouring ‘Leave.’ This was a powerful rhetoric used by ‘Leave Means Leave’ that not only broadened the gap between the people and the elite but also was able to make the people sceptical of their own government as well. Such a rhetoric without any challenge that could be offered by the Remain group grew stronger among the Leave campaign and was used as the basis for further rhetoric about the betrayal of the government and was also portrayed as the reason for the increasing disbelief of the people in the government.

<sup>202</sup> Edginton, “We Marched against the Iraq War and Tuition Fees – Now We Need to March FOR Brexit.”

<sup>203</sup> Richard Tice, “Why Leave Means Leave Have Launched a New Campaign Opposing ‘the Worst Deal in History,’” *Brexit Central*, November 27, 2018, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>204</sup> Leave Means Leave, *29th March Leave Means Leave Rally to Save Brexit*.

*“Britain has suffered almost three humiliating years of infighting, weak leadership and giving away constant concession to the EU.”*<sup>205</sup>

*“Instead she has won, after thousands of hours of negotiating, a mere promise to discuss all this stuff in the future, but only if we behave well over the next couple of years.”*<sup>206</sup>

#### 4.1.2. Disbelief in the Government

Not entirely based on the rhetoric used by the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement, but there was a growing dissatisfaction and disbelief among the people towards the government. Drawing on the earlier theme of the incapability of the UK elite, the government was portrayed as an institution that would rather serve its own interests than *“stand up for those who voted to leave genuinely, not stupidly, not because they hated people but because they wanted something to change they wanted to take back control of their country,”*<sup>207</sup> A lack of trust is reciprocated through this rhetoric that if the establishment does not believe in the people<sup>208</sup> the people should also not believe in the establishment. Yet again we see a clear binary demarcation between the people and the elite. Rhetoric is used to mobilise the people against the establishment based on the will of 51.9% of the nation.

*“As I have made clear many times, I do not support Mrs May. She is our leader, however, and seeing her being ridiculed by foreign bureaucrats insults the British nation.”*<sup>209</sup>

*“It is ironic that the Parliament that allowed this to happen without any real resistance from the majority of MPs has kicked up such a fuss about leaving – perhaps this is as good a sign as any of a renewed democratic vigour!”*<sup>210</sup>

<sup>205</sup> Edginton, “We Marched against the Iraq War and Tuition Fees – Now We Need to March FOR Brexit.”

<sup>206</sup> Tice, “Why Leave Means Leave Have Launched a New Campaign Opposing ‘the Worst Deal in History.’”

<sup>207</sup> Leave Means Leave, *Iain Duncan Smith Speech at the LML Brexit Rally FULL 17 Jan 19.*

<sup>208</sup> Leave Means Leave.

<sup>209</sup> Nigel Farage, “British Fury at the Arrogant, High-Handed EU Could Unite the Country to Back a WTO Deal,” *The Telegraph*, January 31, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>210</sup> Longworth, “The Pro-EU Establishment Are Sadly Continuing to Dismiss the ‘Little People.’”

*“This just about sums up the whole fraudulent situation. As Mrs May voted to Remain in 2016, perhaps we shouldn’t be too surprised”*<sup>211</sup>

It is yet again an oversimplification of the issue at hand and plays in a feedback loop that the elite have betrayed the people of the UK and thus cannot be trusted. The same rhetoric has also been twisted, that on account that the elite cannot be trusted, they will inevitable betray the people. This double ended sword has been used to mobilise the people to march against the establishment in the ‘March to Leave’ but has also fed in another issue for the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement, one to replace the existing government. The populist leaders then cannot be trusted and appear to be mobilising the people towards their own agenda not unlike the elite in the so called ‘establishment.’

#### 4.1.3. Elite Betrayal

The core of the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement is based on the betrayal of the elite. The movement became much more vocal on its stance only in 2018 as the negotiation on the Brexit deals took shape. The rhetoric that the populist leaders have been using is that any prospect put forth by the establishment other than a clean exit, is a betrayal of the people. Popular statements were those alleging the Prime Minister going back on the manifesto based on which she was voted in. The populist leaders claimed that they believed the Prime Minister back in 2016 when she said, *“Brexit means Brexit”* and that *“No deal was better than a bad deal,”*<sup>212</sup> however she was accused of not standing true to either her words or the will of the people. The populist leaders argue that this was the first step of the betrayal. The elite at Westminster who had promised to deliver on the will of the people were instead accused of doing everything their

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<sup>211</sup> Nigel Farage, “Nothing Could Be Worse than the Brexit Deal Struck by Mrs May, the Most Duplicitous Prime Minister in My Lifetime,” *The Telegraph*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>212</sup> Leave Means Leave, *Kate Hoey Speaks at the Let’s Go WTO Rally*.

power to prevent it.<sup>213</sup> The populist leaders used metaphors to portray the elite in the UK as gullible people who would rather lock themselves in jail and give the key to the European Union.<sup>214</sup> But they also used metaphors to argue that the elite were conniving creatures who would rather “*sup with the devil*”<sup>215</sup> than work towards the interests of the people.

*“Let us be clear, what the government have done: the withdrawal agreement, offering to take no deal off the table and countenancing an extension to Article 50, is a betrayal of democracy, Brexit and of the British people.”*<sup>216</sup>

*“Brexit is the opportunity of a lifetime. But May is determined to rob us of those opportunities by handcuffing parts of our country to the EU Internal Market and chaining us to the EU Customs Union.”*<sup>217</sup>

Thus, on the one hand the leaders of ‘Leave Means Leave’ accused the elite both in Westminster and in Brussels of scare mongering the people over the costs and negative effects of leaving the European Union. On the other hand, they were using the same scare mongering techniques towards their cause and mobilised the people against the establishment.

#### 4.1.4. A Great Nation

The ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement focused not only on the negative attributes of the elite but also highlighted a simpler time before the European Union and when the UK was a pioneer nation. They argued that once they leave the European Union they would be able to achieve that same status yet again. In the global and multicultural world, this rhetoric was claimed to

<sup>213</sup> “Nigel Farage to Lead 14-Day March to Protest against ‘Betrayal of Brexit.’”

<sup>214</sup> Leave Means Leave, *LML Rally: Hotelier Sir Rocco Forte* (YouTube, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJupcbrk5jg>.

<sup>215</sup> “Telegraph: No Mr Tusk, ‘Hell’ Is Being Trapped in the Wretched European Union.”

<sup>216</sup> Longworth, “Brexiters Will Win in the End.”

<sup>217</sup> Tice, “May’s Deal Is the Worst Deal in History.”

appeal most to a senior generation who lived in the suburbs and were vary of the increasing number of foreigners in their neighbourhood. The populist leaders made constant references to their fore fathers who gave “*life and limb*” in the Second World War against the Germans.<sup>218</sup> They argued that if their great nation was now to succumb to the German led EU, their fore fathers would turn in their grave.<sup>219</sup> This rhetoric was used to unify the people as well as to mobilise them against the corrupt multicultural elite in Brussels and towards a tried and tested way of life. The people that they referred to as those who were vary of the growing multiculturalism are people from the countryside, the heartland of the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement.

*“All of us who want Britain to be a great country once again accept that we must be prepared to stand up for what we believe in and fight for our independence.”*<sup>220</sup>

*“It is in Britain where we are outwards-looking and ready to engage with developing economies and not bound by the EU commission making decisions for us.”*<sup>221</sup>

By tapping into this sense of pride in one’s nation, the populist leaders referred back to a sense of rootedness, that was not explicitly part of their political strategy, but was used strategically in order to appeal to the people on a one to one basis and not one based entirely on antagonism.

#### 4.1.5. Let’s Go WTO!

This slogan was one that was widely used against the economic elite sitting in London. By using this rhetoric, ‘Leave Means Leave’ tried to curry the support of the small scale and family

<sup>218</sup> Brexit Party MEPs, *Nigel Farage: A Positive Political Movement - Brexit Party Rally, Durham, 11.05.2019.*

<sup>219</sup> John Longworth, “Our Establishment Is Selling Out The Country For A Brexit Deal Britain Does Not Need,” *Huffington Post*, January 17, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>220</sup> “Nigel Farage to Lead 14-Day March to Protest against ‘Betrayal of Brexit.’”

<sup>221</sup> Edginton, “We Marched against the Iraq War and Tuition Fees – Now We Need to March FOR Brexit.”

run business, who would lose more in trade and incur greater tariffs than the larger corporations. This fact was quite easily overshadowed by the promise of trade with the rest of the world outside of the EU.<sup>222</sup> These populist leaders who came from the business backgrounds argued that trade on WTO terms would include their *“own version of heaven, of low taxes, low tariffs, global trade.”*<sup>223</sup> This rhetoric also reiterated the fact that the UK did not want to leave the EU because it was being protectionist. But just that it wanted to be rid of the protectionist policies such as the Common Agricultural Pact that favoured French agriculture, from being imposed any longer on the UK.

*“We are committed to pushing the case for a WTO Brexit, believing that Britain’s best days lie ahead of us as an independent, globally–trading nation.”*<sup>224</sup>

Conveniently, the administrative costs, the renegotiation of the existing bilateral deals, loss of free trade agreements with countries outside the EU were not stated and there was a heavy reliance put on the trade with the US and the Commonwealth countries. The businesses were fed the rosy story of a better trading world outside of the EU that would allow the businesses and the UK economy to prosper. The populist leaders argued that *“Businesses are not institutions to be preserved, our prosperity lies in innovation and change, not being tied to a chronically protectionist and failing zone which is the EU.”*<sup>225</sup> By constantly portraying on the EU as the interest driven, *“illiberal and deplorable institution”*<sup>226</sup>, the populist leaders neglected the fact that even while being in the European Union, they were free to conduct

<sup>222</sup> Leave Means Leave, *Tim Martin Speech at the LML “Brexit: Let’s Go WTO” Rally*; Leave Means Leave, *LML Rally: Hotelier Sir Rocco Forte*.

<sup>223</sup> “Telegraph: No Mr Tusk, ‘Hell’ Is Being Trapped in the Wretched European Union.”

<sup>224</sup> Longworth, “Brexiters Will Win in the End.”

<sup>225</sup> Longworth, “Telegraph: Multinationals May Seek to Preserve the Status Quo after Brexit but Britain’s Small Businesses Want Change.”

<sup>226</sup> Leave Means Leave, *29th March Leave Means Leave Rally to Save Brexit*.

bilateral trade agreements with other countries on WTO terms. Thus, leaving the EU would not greatly benefit the already existing situation.

## 4.2. March to Leave

*“If politicians think they can walk all over us, then we're going to march back and tell them they can't.”*<sup>227</sup>

*“On a wet and windy morning two weeks ago, Brexiters assembled on a clifftop outside Sunderland and set a course for Westminster.”*<sup>228</sup>

### 4.2.1. Historical Significance

The March to leave that was organised by the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement has a long-rooted history not only in the UK but also in the world. Marching on the Capital has often been a sign of protest against the establishment and its policies. Famous marches include the March on Rome in October 1922.<sup>229</sup> As a result of the meagre gains Italy received in the aftermath of the First World War, the fascist party leaders planned a March on Rome by the fascist armed squads that captured strategic local places throughout Italy.<sup>230</sup> This March on Rome brought Mussolini to power and was the beginning of the fascist rule in Italy.<sup>231</sup> This March resulted in the parliamentary regimes of socialism and liberalism to be replaced by the authoritarian rule of a fascist leader.<sup>232</sup> Another famous March on the capital is that of the Civil Rights March - The March on Washington of 1963 organized by civil rights protesters who led a peaceful

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<sup>227</sup> “Brexit ‘Leave Means Leave’ March Sets off from Sunderland,” *BBC News*, March 16, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tyne-47595598>.

<sup>228</sup> Barney Thompson, “March to Leave Reaches London, Footsore and Angry,” *The Financial Times*, March 30, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/f146c8e8-525b-11e9-9c76-bf4a0ce37d49>.

<sup>229</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “March on Rome,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed May 22, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/March-on-Rome>.

<sup>230</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica.

<sup>231</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica.

<sup>232</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica.



march to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, against racial discrimination.<sup>233</sup> This civil rights agitation resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>234</sup> This march like the 'March to Leave' was issue based and did not involve overthrowing the establishment. 'March to leave' was an unconventional lobbying method employed by 'Leave Means Leave.' The march aimed at mobilising the people in order to appeal to the establishment that the will of the people must be respected. The March on the capital also signified that the people were marching to the deaf elite where they can no longer ignore the people. The 'March to Leave' seems to draw inspiration not only from these marches from other corners of the world, but also from the long history of the United Kingdom to march and protest, be it for universal suffrage, against poverty, labour disputes, taxation or protest against the UK's contribution in the Iraq War and in Afghanistan.<sup>235</sup>

#### 4.2.2. The March

The 'March to Leave' that commenced on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2018 started from Sunderland, that was the first place that voted in a majority to leave the EU in the referendum of 2016, according to the 'Leave Means Leave' movement. The March was headed to gather in the Parliament Square in Westminster to Protest against the "*Brexit Betrayal*."<sup>236</sup> The March was undertaken to demonstrate "*the depth and breadth of popular discontent with the way Brexit has been handled*."<sup>237</sup> The reason for the March was simple. It was the single issue that had been repeatedly stated by the populist leaders of the 'Leave Means Leave' movement. It was that the establishment failed to deliver a true Brexit despite the 'Leave' vote receiving the

<sup>233</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "March on Washington," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., March 13, 2019), <https://www.britannica.com/event/March-on-Washington>.

<sup>234</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica.

<sup>235</sup> "List of Protests in the United Kingdom," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, January 5, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_protests\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom#Suffrage\\_and\\_democracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_protests_in_the_United_Kingdom#Suffrage_and_democracy).

<sup>236</sup> Leave Means Leave, "March to Leave."

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

*“highest turnout in British history.”*<sup>238</sup> The March was organised against both an extension to Article 50 and a bad deal that would be Brexit in name only.<sup>239</sup> The leaders of ‘Leave means Leave’ mobilised the people to march against the policies of the establishment to the slogan *“Let’s Just Leave.”*<sup>240</sup> However, an important aspect is what ‘Leave Means Leave’ considered to be ‘the people.’ The people mostly came from England and some from Wales. While the March tried to portray that the entire nation was being betrayed by the elite in Westminster but in reality it focused only on Middle England. While there were some token supporters from Northern Ireland like Kate Hoey, the March did not include anyone from Scotland.

The leaders tried to bridge the gap between themselves and the people with statements such as *“Join me as we walk across the nation braving the rain, wind and snow to take our simple message to Parliament that Leave Means Leave.”*<sup>241</sup> Such rhetoric implied that the leaders of the movement will be walking side by side the lay man throughout the two-hundred-and-seventy-mile journey. However, this wasn’t the case as prominent leaders like Nigel Farage who were pictured in the campaign posters as one of the marchers walked only short distances on particular days and made the rest of the journey by private transport.<sup>242</sup> The exact number of the core marchers is not available but there were only a handful as seen on the day of the rally at Parliament Square.<sup>243</sup> These core marchers had to pay a ticket price of £50 in return for which they were given accommodation, breakfast and dinner for the entire march.<sup>244</sup> The website also stated that if some interested Brexiteers were unable to pay for the ticket, they would be sponsored by the movement. Other marchers were welcome to join for the day, that

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> “Join the March To Leave and Help Show Westminster We Mean Business,” *Brexit Central*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.leavemeansleave.eu/media/>.

<sup>242</sup> Hannah Jane Parkinson, “Farage’s Brexit March: The Theatre of the Absurd Meets Storm-Hit Minion,” *The Guardian*, March 18, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/18/march-to-leave-sorm-hit-minion-nigel-farage-brexit-protest>.

<sup>243</sup> Leave Means Leave, *29th March Leave Means Leave Rally to Save Brexit*.

<sup>244</sup> Leave Means Leave, “March to Leave.”

was free of charge but the marchers would have to organise their own food and accommodation.<sup>245</sup> Thus, ‘Leave Means Leave’ tried to walk the fine balance between avoiding freeloaders who did not have any affiliation to their movement while at the same time being able to gather enough support so as to have a substantial impact on the establishment. However, the latter was not possible as towards the end of the March it seemed like the government had decided to ask for an extension to the departure date and on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March, this was confirmed to the people at Parliament Square as May’s deal was rejected for the third time.

Rhetoric played an important role in mobilising the people for the March. The leaders of ‘Leave Means Leave’ used discourse such as “*either those at Westminster let Britain leave or we make them leave,*”<sup>246</sup> “*if the Tories and the Labour Party won’t act upon the wishes of the electorate, then our job is to make them leave,*”<sup>247</sup> to gather popular support and large numbers of people for the march and the rally on March 29. As stated earlier, the exact number of the people of the rally are unavailable but reports state that there were a couple thousand.<sup>248</sup> However, at the rally itself, Nigel Farage looking at the crowds stated that the newspapers would be able to make a correct estimate of the number of people at Parliament Square, but he knew that it was the 17.4 million people who voted to leave that were gathered there on the day.<sup>249</sup> Such rhetoric at the end of the march was used to reiterate the unity of the people who voted to leave, as the decision to extend Article 50 had already been made by then, thus, making the objective of the March unfruitful.

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<sup>245</sup> Leave Means Leave.

<sup>246</sup> Brexit Party MEPs, *Nigel Farage: A Positive Political Movement - Brexit Party Rally, Durham, 11.05.2019.*

<sup>247</sup> Brexit Party MEPs.

<sup>248</sup> Thompson, “March to Leave Reaches London, Footsore and Angry.”

<sup>249</sup> Leave Means Leave, *29th March Leave Means Leave Rally to Save Brexit.*

## Conclusion

Thus, we see that rhetoric played an important role in the populist strategy applied by the 'Leave Means Leave' movement in the absence of a fixed ideology. The rhetoric that was used was much more fluid and flexible in order to appeal to any section of people. In order to gain popular support, the heartland was not restricted only to the suburbs but extended across the nation irrespective of class, status or political allegiance. The inherent tension that is seen between ideology and strategy was still present. The populist leaders despite their efforts could not make a clear distinction between the people and the elite, as they themselves were part of the elite. They formed a separate class of actors that were neither a part of the people nor a part of the elite. They were a group of people who wouldn't be negatively impacted if the UK left or stayed in the EU. They had nothing to lose. Yet by mobilising the resentments of the layman they were able to push forth their or political agenda. This project thus was as interest driven as some of the policies and deals of the elite of the establishment, the elite that they distinguish themselves against and mobilised the people against. 'Leave Means Leave' focused solely on rhetoric not only in place of ideology but, rhetoric that was in turn treated as the ideology of the movement and was able to surpass most of the tension between populism as an ideology and populism as a political strategy.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have studied the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement as a right-wing populist movement that has employed a combination of rhetoric-based ideology and populist strategy in order to mobilise the people against the elite. The central tenant of ‘Leave Means Leave’ has been a ‘clean Brexit’ that it alleged the elite and establishment are conspiring against in collaboration with the European Union. The ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ have been discussed in detail in order to distinguish them on an ideational basis rather than just tools of mobilisation. The people have been assigned a particular heartland that refers largely to Middle England and has only token representations from Wales and Northern Ireland, and none whatsoever from Scotland. The movement has tried to portray a homogenous collective of the people but, the differences and the multiple layers have been downplayed. For instance, while nearly 52% of the people voted to leave the European Union in 2016, not all of them were actually aware of the costs and negative impacts of such an exit. The people that were first said to belong to the leave camp were mostly considered to be of an older generation who were vary of the growing immigrants in their neighbourhood. However, as the ‘Leave Means Leave’ movement expanded it included people from all ages, class and creed as those wanting a greater Britain outside of the EU irrespective of the withdrawal agreement that the people state was not what the referendum was about.

Similarly, the elite were also portrayed as a single homogenous self-serving group of people who wanted to remain as a colony to the EU. However, through the campaign itself, the populist actors of the movement, especially Longworth and Tice were able to segregate the economic elite from the political elite, still but with a common aim to stay in the EU irrespective of the will of the people. The elite here have also been categorised as those in Brussels against whom

the initial leave campaign was started. Those who over the past forty years have taken away the UK's sovereignty piece by piece. On the other hand, as the agreements put forth by the government were rejected continuously, the 'Leave Means Leave' actors shifted their classification from the elite in Brussels, to those in Westminster. These populist actors accused the predominantly 'Remain' government of being unable to deliver a clean Brexit without any conditions or room for future negotiations and of betraying the will of the people.

Thus, while the people were categorised as the virtuous against the evil elite, this was not enough to mobilise the people to demand for action. 'Leave Means Leave' used unconventional methods of lobbying by including the people in their protests and campaigns. The people were not just a passive audience but were an integral part of the 'Leave Means Leave' political strategy. A prominent example of this was the 'March to Leave' that started from Sunderland up to the Parliament Square in London. The march was started in order to protest against the extension of Article 50 whereby the departure date would be pushed further. Despite their efforts and constant lobbying the populist leaders had come to the realisation that their voice was being drowned and in order for the elite in Westminster to wake up from their sleep, the people needed to barge on their door in the thousands. However, the number of people who undertook the whole of the 270-mile journey were just a handful of number despite the movements best efforts to increase the numbers by providing food and accommodation to the marchers.

This of course raises the question that did the people not really believe in a UK outside of the EU or was it that everyday lives took precedence over involving oneself in dirty politics. If the latter is the case that is an important facet in this right-wing populist movement. Since populism

is not just based on the voice of the people being heard, populism as a political strategy emphasises on the importance of giving back the control not to the elected representative but to the people. But if the people do not want to get involved in the movement, then the question arises as to the true intentions of the 'Leave Means Leave' movement and its leaders. Whether the original intention to fight for the will of the people still stands true or have these leaders been manipulating the people towards their own political gain.

By describing populism as a combinational of ideology and political strategy, we can bring out this facet of the intentions of the populist leaders and their motives towards the people. While initially it started out as a movement to deliver the will of the people, however with the formation of the Brexit Party that was joined by many of the MPs who resigned from the Conservative Party, it appears that the people have been mobilised only towards the political gains of the populist actors. Populism as a thin centred ideology is like a parasite that latches on to a host ideology and then preys on the hosts itself. Discarding it as merely as either an ideology or a discourse in today's political climate is not enough to explain the sudden rise in populist leaders across the world. The case of 'Leave Means Leave' is not a single case that can be studied by using this theoretical framework, but a similar type of people mobilisation can also be seen in the recent Indian elections as well..

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