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In Place of Labour: The Increased Localisation of Electoral Geographies in Competition Between UKIP and Labour

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In Place of Labour: The Increased Localisation of Electoral Geographies in Competition Between UKIP and Labour

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1. Introduction

From "*fruit cakes, loonies and closet racists*" (Cameron 2006) to "*the most significant new party in politics*" (Ford and Goodwin 2014: i), UKIP's emergence from the fringes to the mainstream of the political arena has had profound effects on the shape of British politics. The most successful party in modern times in challenging the dominance of the UK's traditional parties, UKIP, while under the leadership of Nigel Farage, managed to completely alter political discourse in the UK in their favour including successfully campaigning for a referendum on Britain's membership in the European Union. Equally notable about their rise has been the party's ability to challenge both of the main political parties in the UK making advances with Eurosceptic Conservatives while also challenging Labour's dominance in the formerly industrial towns of the North. It is this latter aspect of UKIP's rise which will be the primary focus of this paper.

This study aims to challenge the sociological models which currently direct our understanding of the electoral force of UKIP in relation to Labour. Rooted in post-industrial social change, these authors emphasise voters who have been "left-behind" by the modern economy and abandoned by the political establishment especially the Labour Party resulting in them embracing the anti-elite rhetoric of UKIP. Nevertheless, such studies – which argue that structural factors such as class, education and ethnicity are the most effective explanatory variables for UKIP's encroachment in Labour heartlands – can be seen to have major deficiencies. Using local election data from the regions of the North West and South Yorkshire, this paper will demonstrate that areas with high levels of the variables stressed by studies such as that by Ford and Goodwin (2014) do not all uniformly vote for UKIP and the spread of support for the party is far too varied for us to be declaring the current models as the single authoritative source required to explain the rise of UKIP in the North. The ability to explain why some people vote UKIP while others remain loyal to the traditional party of the workers is a

gap in our understanding and, as such, further research is required to compliment these current models.

This paper will argue that geography is extremely important in helping to explain these divergent responses to UKIP in the region. That is to say that variations occurred, predominantly, on a town by town basis indicating that the local contexts of each place, and how they relate to broader structures, should be seen as vital to our full understanding of the UKIP phenomenon. In this way, this essay will emphasise the need to integrate the practices of electoral geography into current methods of modelling UKIP support.

From such a conclusion, the remainder of the paper's findings covered three case studies undertaken in Liverpool, Rotherham and Manchester to begin the process of lifting these local contexts to explain why these areas have very different relationships to UKIP despite similar structural characteristics. These studies, exploratory rather than definitive in nature, were based on interviews with prominent figures in local branches of both parties and are used to point to a varied array of factors which can be seen to have a significant impact on the nature of the UKIP/Labour battle in each respective place. Such factors lifted from those interviewed include the extent of political competition, the importance of local cultural norms, as well as spatial economic imbalances within a city.

In this way, therefore, it should be seen that geography plays a key role in explaining why some towns in the North West and South Yorkshire exhibit patterns which align with the "left-behind" thesis while others defy such logic. However, the implications of the findings of this paper are seen to be much broader than this. Beyond this UKIP/Labour dimension, it will argue that politics as a whole in Britain is becoming increasingly localised. We can no longer refer to the industrial towns of the North-West as one conflated geographical region with uniform characteristics and relatively uniform electoral behaviours. Instead, we show that there is great diversity within these regions indicating that competition is determined on a much more local scale than previously recognised.

The paper will be ordered as follows: beginning with a brief narrative on the rise of UKIP, it will proceed with an assessment of the current literature on the rise of UKIP in relation to the Labour party as well as on British electoral geography. From

this the paper moves to a discussion of the methodological processes of the research, before progressing onto the key findings from the research. After showing the results of the initial aggregate regressions of UKIP support against so-called "left-behind" structural factors, it will present the findings from each of the case studies considered. The paper will finally conclude with a discussion of the increased localisation of politics observed from this research as well as indicate the implications of such findings.

2. Context

While existing as a political force for over twenty-five years, UKIP has only affirmed a position of any significance in the British political arena within the last decade. As shown in *Figure 1*, the party stagnated in political wastelands for a considerable amount of time following its conception at the London School of Economics in 1993. Plagued by internecine conflict and failing to progress from a single-issue group, early media assessments were derisive placing them alongside the Monster Raving Loony Party, where they were "doomed to spend their lives in the fringes of politics" (Daily Record 1997). It is these dreadful beginnings which makes the party's later breakthrough even more notable. Electorally, the party made its initial breakthroughs in the European Parliament elections – second tier elections where their anti-EU message held some relevance among voters. However, these strides into the double figures were isolated and short-lived moments in the sun. It was not until 2013 that UKIP enjoyed domestic successes after a series of local election victories and unprecedented by-election results - including two victories in Thanet South and Clacton-on-Sea – propelled them into the centre of British politics where they would completely re-direct public debate towards immigration and the EU including forcing David Cameron to hold a referendum on the nation's membership of the Union.
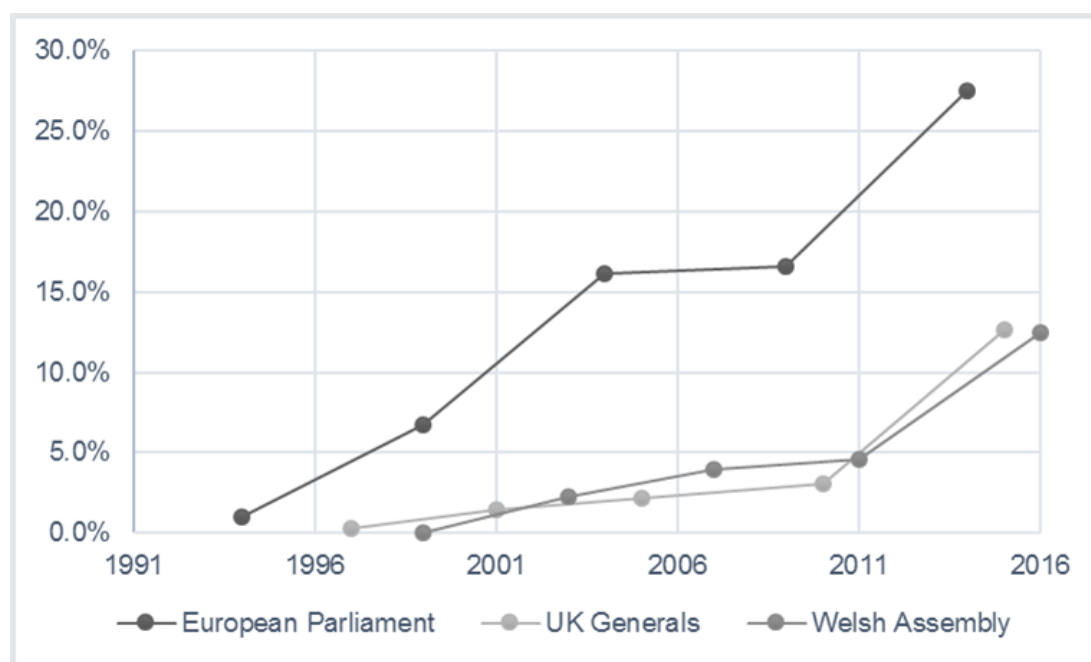
Figure 1 *UKIP vote share in European Parliament Elections, General Elections and Welsh Assembly Elections, 1991-2016*
Source: Electoral Commission

What is also very notable about UKIP's very sudden invasion of the political mainstream has been their geographic expansion away from coastal suburbs in Southern England where they would collect the votes of Conservatives exasperated by their party's persistent shifts towards the centre and into the industrial towns of the North of England where they would directly contest elections with the Labour Party. Indeed, the new threat which UKIP poses for the Labour Party can be seen in *Tables 1* and *2*. Though the first-past-the-post electoral system has inhibited them from ousting Labour candidates from their seats, the growing number of UKIP second-places in seats won by Labour demonstrates their new-found ability to take votes from them in their own heartlands. This encroachment into the poorer, industrialised Labour core is even more pronounced if you isolate the cases of the North-West and Yorkshire – the focus of this paper – in which UKIP were able to claim second in nearly three-tenths of Labour's victories in 2015. As such, it can be seen that these former heartlands of the Labour Party are quickly becoming intense battlegrounds where they must fend off the appeals of UKIP; a development which demands further enquiry.

	2010		2015	
	Seats	%	Seats	%
Conservative	148	57.8	170	73.3
UK Independence Party	0	0	44	19.0
Liberal Democrats	73	28.5	8	3.4
Others	35	13.7	10	4.3

Table 1 Second place positions in constituencies won by the Labour Party in the 2010 & 2015 General Elections by party
Source: Electoral Commission

	North West		Yorkshire/Humber		Overall	
	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%
Conservative	37	72.5	16	48.5	53	63.1
UK Independence Party	10	19.6	14	42.4	24	28.6
Others	4	7.8	3	9.1	7	8.3

Table 2 Second place positions in constituencies in the North West and South Yorkshire won by the Labour Party in the 2010 & 2015 General Elections by party
Source: Electoral Commission

3. Literature Review

Given this very recent emergence from the peripheries, literature surrounding the ideology, narratives and electoral strength of UKIP is fast-growing but ultimately nascent. Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus arguing that one primary reason to explain the rise of UKIP voters in low socio-economic areas lies in a major dilemma which has faced the Labour Party – along with all social democratic parties in Western Europe – since the 1970s. Seminally introduced in their work *Paper Stones* (1986), Przeworski and Sprague argue that the ultimate difficulty of electoral socialism lies in the fact that it cannot be successful as merely a party of the workers – its ideological bedrock – as their size as a proportion of the population has never been large enough to gain a majority solely off their backs. As such, social democratic parties, including Labour, have been forced to compete for votes within the middle classes. Nevertheless, this new broad spectrum which adds to industrial workers white collar professionals, public sector employees, students and the petit bourgeois – estimated to reach out to nearly 80 percent of a developed nation's population (Wright 1976) – provides more problems than solutions (Kitschelt 1994). Such breadth generates so many divergent needs and interests within its support bases that it becomes impossible to sustain the

support of both classes. That is to say that by positioning themselves to appeal to the middle masses, social democratic parties neglect the interests of their original support networks and, over time, workers lose faith and cease their support. Herein lies the major electoral dilemma for the Labour Party in the UK according to Przeworski and Sprague; they cannot win elections without the middle classes but by appealing to them they trade away the support of the workers. It is from this electoral trade-off for the Labour Party that UKIP's potential in the North has been seen to have emerged.

The initial, albeit limited, electoral successes of UKIP from its conception to the early 2010s consisted primarily of disaffected middle-class, eurosceptic Conservative voters who became concerned by the prominent liberal wing of the party – represented by Cameron and Osborne – who were seen to be steering their party too far towards the centre (Bush 2016). While such voters continue to be a significant target population– as well as being very well represented in much of the party machinery – it is extremely difficult to sustain that UKIP remains merely a party of *Purple Tories*, as some commentators have attempted to maintain (Oborne 2011; Montgomerie 2012). Instead, it now more commonly argued that what has been central to UKIP's exponential growth in recent years has been its ability to gain mass backing among lower socioeconomic voters.

Such a move in the literature towards underlining the importance of the working-class vote was triggered by Ford and Goodwin's pivotal work *Revolt on the Right* (2014). The first substantial analysis of UKIP and its electoral appeals, the writers emphasise the role of "left-behind" voters in explaining support for the radical right party. As they see it, as the proportion of working classes in the British population collapsed – from nearly half in the mid-1960s to less than a third by the mid-1990s (Heath and Macdonald 1987; Crewe 1991) – it became increasingly imperative that the Labour Party expanded its bases and appealed to middle-class voters. Returning to the *Paper Stones* argument, therefore, as Labour, predominantly under Blair, did this, they moved themselves further and further away from the needs and interests of the workers ignoring concerns over immigration and threats to British cultural traditions as well as apparently failing to protect working class groups as they faced the harsh costs of economic restructuring on their communities. The consequences of this, Ford and Goodwin argue, are the creation of a significant constituency in British society who

feel completely disenchanted not only by the Labour Party but by the political system in general. While such a group of "left-behind" voters posed little threat for New Labour in the short-run such an abandonment of blue-collar workers and lower-level employees offered an unprecedented opportunity for a radical right party in the United Kingdom in the years to come. Using the European Union as a symbol of the ills of modern society, UKIP were able to use its anti-elite, anti-immigration rhetoric in order to place itself in the vacuum in working-class groups created by the Labour Party (Harrison and Bruter 2012).

In this way, therefore, UKIP are argued to have shifted from merely a party of revolting Conservative voters to one which is a stalwart among working class votes and, in doing so, placing themselves firmly on one side of what political scientists see as a new cleavage in European party systems: that between the beneficiaries and champions of globalisation and those – especially former industrial workers – attempting to resist such pressures (Ignazi 2004). Such a transition also mirrors that of many of the most successful radical right parties in Continental Europe. Hans-Georg Betz (1993) noted how many insurgent parties in the 1980s were becoming serious contenders as a direct result of being flooded by poorer, working class voters who had once been loyal social democrats. The Freedom Party of Austria was able to grow in twenty years from 4 percent of the vote share to 49 after pivoting itself into a party of the workers, while the Progress Parties of Denmark and Norway can both track their notable ascents to the point where they shifted from campaigning to rural conservatives to broadening their base and beginning anti-immigration, anti-Islam rhetoric (Oesch 2008; Evans 2005; Andersen and Bjørkland 1990). Thirty years on, Betz and Susi Meret now describe these well-entrenched radical right parties as being "the new parties of the working class" (2013: 108).

Therefore, fundamental to Ford and Goodwin's "left-behind" thesis and later works such as that by Evans and Tilley (2017) which are inspired by their findings, is a vehement belief that structural characteristics – namely class, ethnicity, education levels, occupation type, age, gender – are the most successful variables when modelling UKIP support. So assured in their variables are they, they introduce the reader to what they see as the archetypal, yet fictitious, UKIP voter who embodies these most vital factors determining UKIP support. Indeed, *John* left school at 15 to

become an industrial worker but then became unemployed when his workplace closed and failed to adjust to the post-industrial economy. He now feels forsaken by the political establishment, concentrating much of his anger towards uncontrolled immigration. It is the structural characteristics which John embodies and which underpin all of the arguments Ford and Goodwin make which this paper seeks to somewhat challenge.

The greatest point of contestation with the models provided by Ford & Goodwin (2014) and Evans & Tilley (2017), however, is their apparent ignorance of the disparity within the fundamental structures they use to explain UKIP-voting in recent years. Structural characteristics, such as education and class, alone cannot be expected to present an accurate picture of the success of UKIP. That is to say, to return to their own narrative, while Ford & Goodwin can use their model to demonstrate that a significant number of them have shifted to UKIP, they cannot show how, or why, some *Johns* have made such a switch while others have remained loyal to the Labour Party. It should be argued that the largest gap in the literature surrounding the nascent political power of UKIP is the ability to identify and explain these variations between those voters within these structural characteristics. Current studies, with the use of large-N aggregate data studies, have, to great avail, exposed the structural mechanisms which have created a meta-narrative of UKIP voting patterns, namely of low educated manual workers vulnerable to globalising pressures who feel abandoned by traditional party politics. However, such sociological frameworks then fail to address the forces below their theories which mean that the structural characteristics they identify will not have a constant and universal outcome across the country. It is the intention of this paper to begin to address this deficiency in the literature in starting to describe and then explain these variations.

This paper aims to consider these variations through the paradigm of political geography. Indeed, its core argument is that incorporating the concept of place into models commonly used to explain voting behaviour is central to a more developed understanding especially with regard to the competition for votes between Labour and UKIP. As differentiated by Thrift (1983), the models currently adopted rely on a *compositional* approach, arguing that a voter's decision is predominantly dictated by their societal status or their personal evaluation of their political-economic situation.

Such an approach leads them to conclusions based on sociological structures which, as discussed above, are extremely useful but have their limitations (Agnew & Duncan 1989; Muir 1975). Political geography seeks to complement such studies with a more *contextual* approach, "according to which, people making voting decisions are influenced by elements of the milieu within which their daily lives are engaged" (Johnston & Pattie 2006: 40). National categories cannot explain individual choices and as such, we must consider the contexts within which each individual voter finds themselves in and the local social mechanisms which determine how different geographies relate to notions such as class (Agnew 1987). Electoral geography argues that compositional models for voting behaviour are extremely important but they must be implemented alongside a consideration of the contextual factors which translate national structures into individual actions. (Agnew 1990). As they see it, local contexts count but are too often ignored as spatial variations which are *explained away* with non-spatial factors (Agnew 1996). As such, this paper proposes conflating the ideas currently accepted within the literature on UKIP with aspects of electoral geography in identifying localised trends and then placing emphasis on the contextual over the structural in its explanations for such a localisation of political competition.

Current studies on electoral geographies stress the importance of *regional* divisions in the UK. For instance, the seminal work by Johnston, Pattie & Allsopp (1988) on Thatcherite Britain not only identifies a very distinct North/South divide in Britain, but also points to regional strongholds such as the industrial towns of the North of England – the focus of this paper – for Labour. However, due to lack of access to data, their methodologies have limited them to such broad patterns and have not been able to fully study the most local of factors, with the smallest spatial divisions which they have been able to use being constituencies (Muir 1985). It should be said that there are aspects of electoral geography which require revision in order for it to be an appropriate tool to improve our current voting behaviour models. To properly account for the true impact of local contexts, electoral geographies need to boil down to the smallest denominations possible, namely political wards, data for which is now more readily available paving the way for a new wave of electoral geography. While recent studies have been able to utilise this increasingly detailed data, with a growing literature being able to point to factors such as the impact of a local candidate (Evans et

al 2017; Arzheimer and Evans 2014), perceptions of the local economy (Auberger and Dubois 2005; Auberger 2012) and the role of familial conversations about politics (Schaffer 2014), these studies are still few and far between. It is the intention of this paper, thus, to take advantage of ward-level data and contribute to this new wave of electoral geographies in order to begin fulfilling the absences currently within the literature on the rise of UKIP among the working classes.

4. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore variations in levels of UKIP voting among communities with the archetypal characteristics of the "left-behind" thesis. In turn, it sought to understand whether place and local context played any substantial role in explaining any such disparities in responses to UKIP in the polling stations. Such research could then speak of the localisation of political competition in the United Kingdom, rejecting broad political geographies and demonstrating the declining value of national and regional election strategies for parties. The section which follows specifies the methodologies undertaken to explore this with detailed descriptions of the research design as well as justifications for the selected approaches.

Before detailing the methodological processes behind this paper, it is important to explain the delimitations of this research, namely the choice of region and the choice of election. Geographically, both regions – the North West and South Yorkshire, as defined by the Electoral Commission – act as possibly strong examples for the phenomenon discussed by Ford and Goodwin in representing some of the most predominant areas of the Labour heartlands of the last forty years yet are largely poor, formerly industrialised towns which have struggled to transition to a modern economy. The potential for swathes of disenchanted, "left-behind" voters resulting from this can be seen to be high in these areas making them fertile ground for the narrative of UKIP brought forward by Ford and Goodwin and hence, makes them excellent cases to illustrate the apparent variation in electoral support for UKIP among these "left-behind" voters.

Local council elections were chosen to be the proxy to represent support for either political party as they show levels of such support in the smallest geographic units possible. As discussed earlier, this is vital to properly account for the impact of

local place. Meanwhile, the near-annual occurrences of these elections allowed the most detailed tracking of local trends in political support. While local elections are more likely to be captured by local issues than general elections, the work on the use of local elections to predict the outcome of the 2015 General Election by Rallings et al (2016) suggests that the swings in local elections do tend to then translate into similar swings in national elections. This suggests that the local factors emphasised by the paper can be used in relation to preferences for national as well as local government.

The initial stages of this research lay in exploring whether it was the case that there existed major variations in support for UKIP among low socioeconomic groups in order to challenge the current sociological models as being insufficient to fully explain why a person chooses to vote for UKIP or otherwise. The vote shares for UKIP and the Labour Party in elections held in the last ten years in every ward of the selected regions were collated from data from the Local Election Archive Project. These election results were then mapped against Census data on the sociological makeup of each ward. The variables selected were education levels, class and occupation as all were argued by Ford and Goodwin (2014: 172) as being core factors to explain the UKIP vote. As they see it, the "left-behind" voters, and, in turn, those voting UKIP, were to be found among those with low level (if any) qualifications, those in classes DE on the NRS scale and those who hold (or used to hold) elementary, skilled manual or industrial jobs.

Given the very sharp ethnic divisions between levels of UKIP support – according to British Electoral Study's Continuous Monitoring Studies between 2004 and 2013, 99.6% of their voters were white – adjustments to the dataset were made. Inclusion of these ethnic minorities who often live in the poorest wards within a council would artificially inflate the degree of variation by placing a substantial number of wards, who do not represent the "left-behind" voter, far below the line of regression. As such, wards which were less than 70% white were removed from the dataset. Regressions between the vote share and each independent variable were then conducted to ascertain whether wards with high levels of these x variables consistently voted for UKIP or whether there was enough variation to suggest that these characteristics, alone, are not suitable models.

Driven by the results of this exercise, the second half of this research focused on attempting to explain any variations discovered by exploring the role of local contexts. At this point, it was decided to move to a more qualitative approach, with the remainder of the study centring around interviews conducted with local party activists – councillors, election candidates and board members of local party branches – in selected case studies to understand what they perceive to be helping or hindering their party locally and, crucially, whether this was specific to their own experiences or was shared by other areas. The interviews were semi-structured, with the participants directing the conversations, which was important given that they were much better equipped to discuss what was important about their home towns.

Much of the reasoning behind the selection of methods for this research was driven by the existing literature and the methodological reasons behind the gaps which currently exist within it. If current studies have successfully drawn out the larger national patterns of UKIP voting – the evolution from Conservative Euroscepticism to a broader class base encompassing the "left-behind" voters – then, as discussed above, where the current literature is left lacking is in exploring the more localised nature of the growth of UKIP. It can be argued that the inability to capture such local variations can be explained by the methodological paradigms which have been chosen to study UKIP voting patterns thus far, namely, the use of quantitative data. Large-N data studies have successfully extracted the key structural factors required to discuss the electoral success of UKIP but these are clearly not enough.

Where such quantitative studies fall short is in exposing the context-contingent factors which are driving the localised nature of UKIP support. This rationale leant authority to the integration of qualitative methods into this paper. Alongside this assessment of the existing literature, the logic of the enquiry was also key in determining the research methods used. The inductive nature of this research supported the use of qualitative research methods. Rather than trying to test existing theories, this paper sought to explain previously unconsidered phenomena;such a discovery-focused form of research leant itself well to the use of qualitative research methods (Brannon 2005).

Within this framework of a qualitative approach, a case study design was deemed to be most appropriate for the research. As a methodological genre, case

studies act as tools for intensive analysis of a phenomenon bounded by time and space where, "the interest is […] in context rather than specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (Mariam 1998: 19). Given the ambition of this research lies in trying to identify such contexts of each specific town, the employment of case studies appeared extremely suitable. The case study approach however, means that the generalisability of the findings of this paper are limited. This is, however, the exact intention of this research; to stress the importance of the local and the unique. The case studies used are not aimed at identifying uniform local factors which can be applied elsewhere but instead seek to demonstrate the significance of each town's specific set of local factors in explaining the voting behaviour of their own community.

The case studies used in this paper were selected with a strategy of "off-the-line" criterion (Lieberman 2005). That is to say that the cases selected were councils which consistently went against the model provided by Ford and Goodwin, whose wards had high levels of the explanatory variables yet consistently fell either significantly above or below the expected levels of the dependent variables in the initial research. The rationale behind such a sampling procedure is relatively straight-forward: an attempt to explain deviance from an existing model requires consideration of those cases which deviate. The generalisability of conclusions from such extremes-based samples is challenged in the methodological literatures (Geddes 1990). While, as stated previously, the intention of this paper is to demonstrate the importance of local contexts over universal structures, reducing the need for generalisability, the selected case studies were areas where groups of wards showed consistently similar patterns rather than concentrating on apparent one-off wards. This was done as an attempt to broaden conclusions to town-level rather than produce extremely narrow results on very particular, if not anomalous, wards.

5.   Findings and Analysis

5.1   Variation Patterns

Figures 2-4 display the results of the preliminary aggregate studies mapping UKIP support in the local elections of 2015 against the key structural factors eulogised by the current models in the literature. Fundamentally, they signify that there is enough consistent variation in the y variable – UKIP support in the 2015 local elections – as the

independent variables increase to suggest that such sociological factors are insufficient to properly explain defections (or lack thereof) from traditional parties towards UKIP. Such variations also indicate the potential relevance of local contexts to compliment these current studies.

The first thing to note from these results is the lack of evidence of a parabolic-shaped regression with the data portraying, instead, a very linear pattern. There is extremely little support for UKIP in wards at the lower end of the x-axes and thus little backing from wealthier voters. In the regions of the country covered in this study, UKIP has clearly been very successful in its transition from Conservative Euroscepticism and these results imply that they are now able to predominantly make electoral gains off the backs of working class citizens. Such findings add further evidence to show that Labour and UKIP are, therefore, in direct competition in these regions for the same working class share of the electorate.
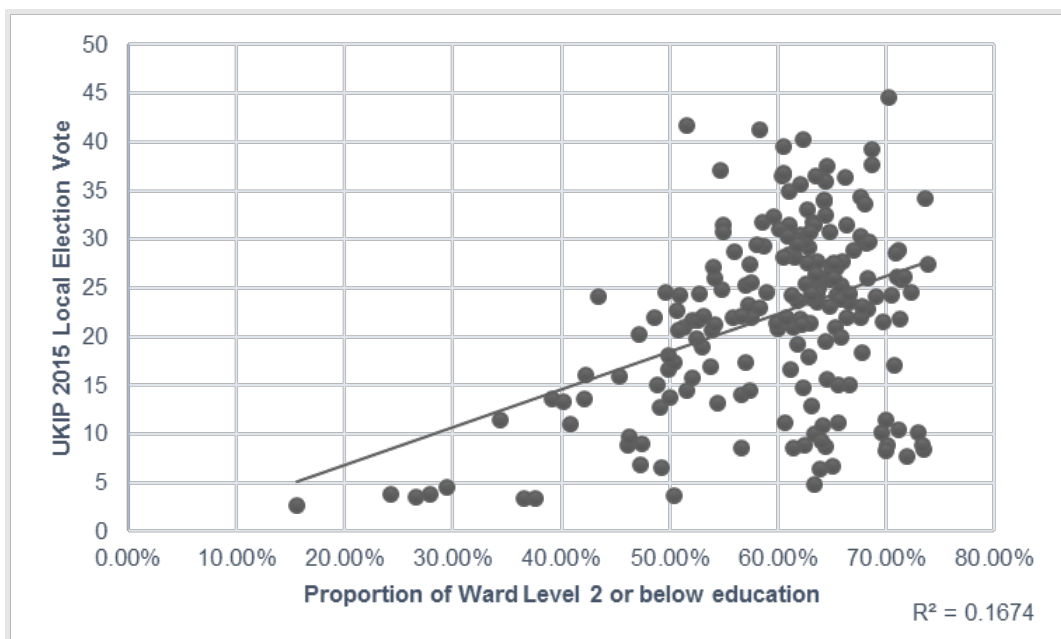

Figure 2 *UKIP vote share in 2015 Local Elections against proportion of ward of C2/DE class*
Source: Local Election Archive Project; UK Census (2011)
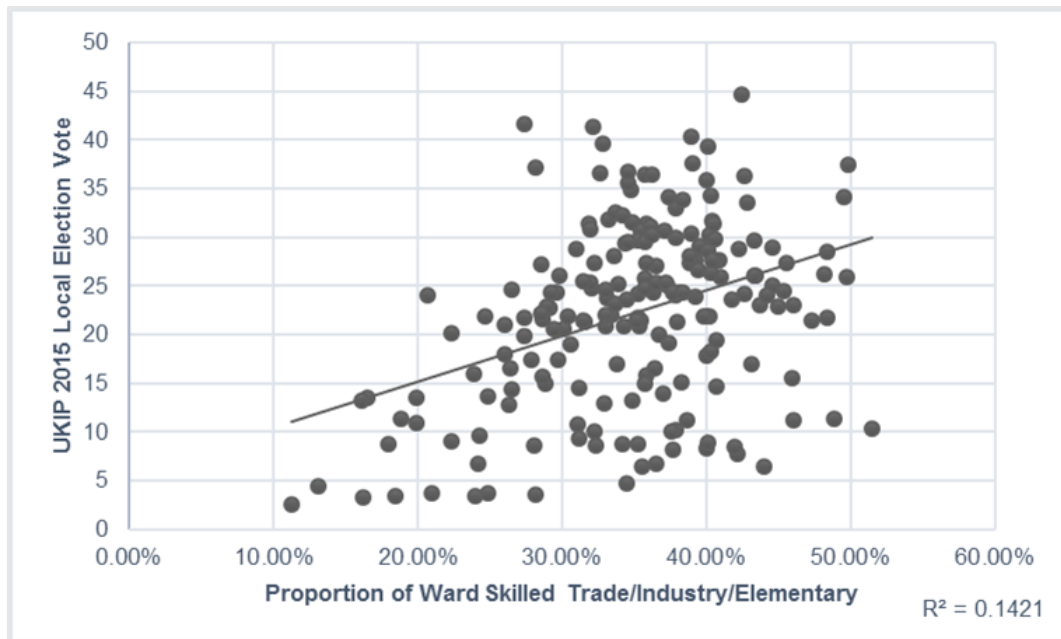
Figure 3 *UKIP vote share in 2015 Local Elections against proportion of ward with employment in Skilled trades occupations, Process plant and machine operatives or Elementary occupations*
Source: Local Election Archive Project; UK Census (2011)

Figure 4 *UKIP vote share in 2015 Local Elections against proportion of ward with Level 2 or below qualifications*
Source: Local Election Archive Project; UK Census (2011)

However, what is far more interesting than such a confirmation of what is already recognised in the literature is what can be found at the other end of the x-axes.

These points can be seen to expose the deficiencies in the sociological models which currently direct our understanding of UKIP. There is an evident linear trend between these structural characteristics and voting for UKIP – as indicated by the strong R2 values between 0.11 and 0.17 – showing that these structures play a significant role in our understanding and by no means ought we dismiss their relevance. Nevertheless, the variation in dependant variable outcomes at the upper bounds of these independent variables is extremely significant. They show that while the statement, "*if a ward votes UKIP, then it has a high proportion of working class citizens* (or equally high proportion of low-educated or elementary skilled workers)" clearly holds to a great degree, the reverse statement that, "*if a ward has a high proportion of working class citizens, then it votes UKIP*" does not. There are a substantial number of wards on all three *Figures* who exhibit very high levels of the independent variables yet do not vote UKIP to any noteworthy extent. Instead, some of these very low socioeconomic wards are continuing to vote along traditional cleavage lines, having stuck with Labour.

These findings demonstrate that the current voting models seeking to explain why people vote UKIP thatlay heavy emphasis on the role of structural properties are very much imperfect. While telling a very important meta-narrative of the rise of UKIP in the country as a whole, these works fall short when you try to apply them to more focused geography. As shown by the regions of the North-West and South Yorkshire, the variation found in this paper demonstrate that on a more local scale, structural factors, such as class or education, alone, certainly do not instruct whether someone will vote for UKIP or not. Indeed, they have a role to play but they must be complimented by other theories and models which are able to explain why some working class, low-educated, manual workers will vote UKIP while others will not.

The second intention of this paper, after showing the need for additional non-sociological models, was to investigate whether the variations shown in *Figures 2-4* can be explained with use of the principles of electoral geography, namely the importance of place and context. To do this, councils and towns were considered in isolation to observe whether their constituent wards responded similarly to the independent variables or whether they were heavily dispersed across the y-axis. *Figure 5* take the wards with the highest levels of the "left-behind" characteristics in selected towns and councils in the regions and highlights them in comparison to the spread of

the entire dataset. What can be noted from these results is that, in the large majority of cases, wards of the same council had very similar levels of UKIP support and towns were certainly situated in around one point on the y-axis.

What this suggests, first of all, is that there appear to be fundamental characteristics about these towns which mean that their wards behave similarly. This lends great authority to the notion that geography plays an important factor in explaining these voting behaviours. Rather than just variation between wards, we are actually looking at distinct variation between towns suggesting that their own particular contexts explain why they find themselves in a different location in the original *Figures 2-4* than their neighbouring towns. That is to say that there is something particular about a town like Oldham, which when controlling for class, education or occupation type, has a significantly higher degree of UKIP voters than a town like Wigan and needs to be uncovered. As such, it is vital to ascertain a thorough grip on the geographies and contextual factors of these towns and councils if we are to properly understand why some of them have seen their constituents flock in their masses to support UKIP while others have witnessed very little evidence of the "left-behind" thesis.
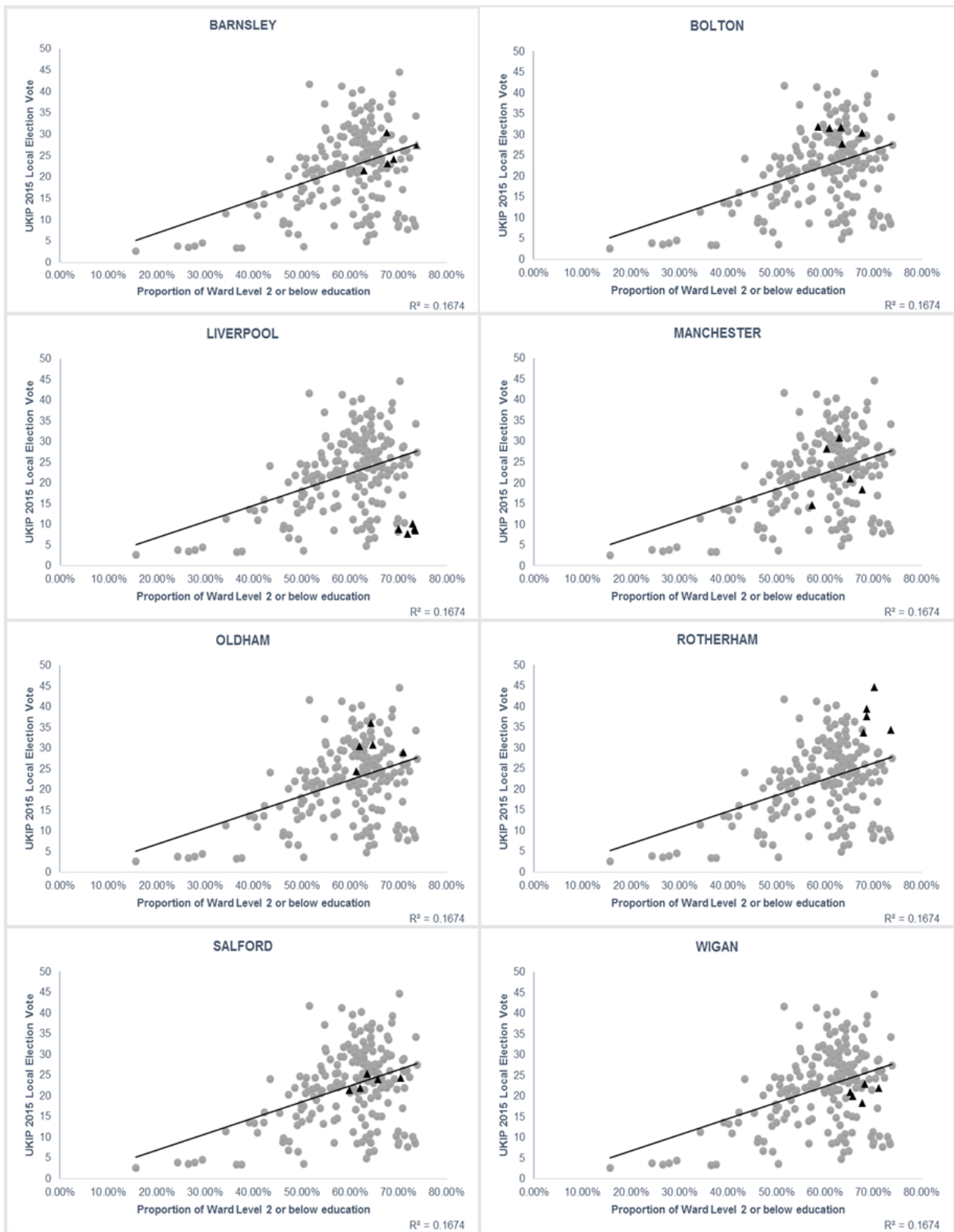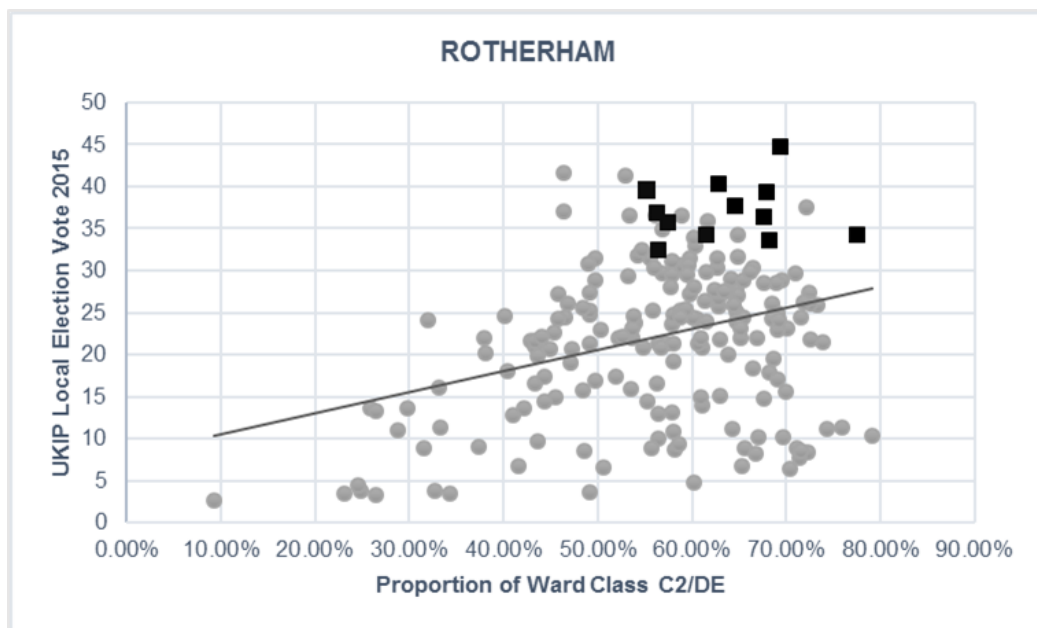
Figure 5 *UKIP vote share in 2015 Local Elections against proportion of ward with Level 2 or below qualifications with the five highest proportion wards in selected councils highlighted*
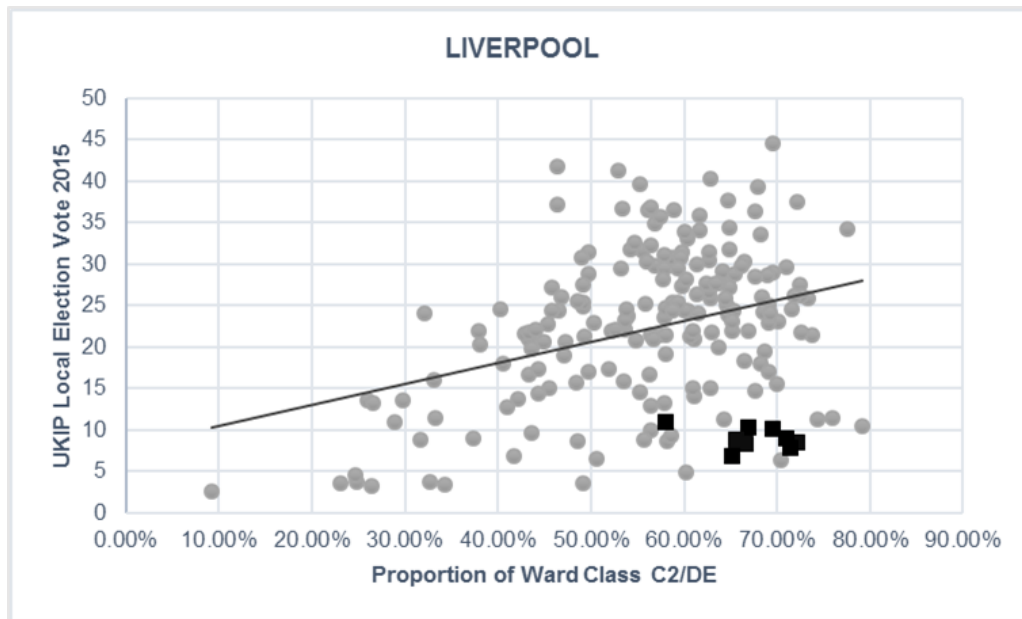Source: Local Election Archive Project; UK Census (2011)

6. Case Studies

Following from this validation of the need to consider geographical contexts to understand the Labour-UKIP competition in the North West and South Yorkshire, case studies were selected to begin to explore what exactly these "particular characteristics" of each town or city are. The section which follows is an analysis of the results of a series of interviews in the councils of Liverpool, Rotherham and Manchester. Using the "off-the-line" selection process discussed earlier, these were chosen as their results were significantly different than the expected pattern in the regression, with Liverpool falling appreciably below the line and Rotherham showing levels of UKIP support far higher than anticipated as shown in *Figures 6 and 7*.

Manchester was selected as the final case, in part, because it represented a council whose wards were relatively near the line of regression and, as such, could be used as a comparison between the other two more extreme examples. However, it was also selected because, as shown in *Figure 8*, it was one of the few areas whose wards spread significantly more notably across the y-axis. Closer consideration showed that those wards that were above the line were those situated in the North of the city and those below the line were in the South. As such, Manchester represented a potentially valuable case suggesting an even more focused distinction between geographies which was not just inter-council but also intra-council.
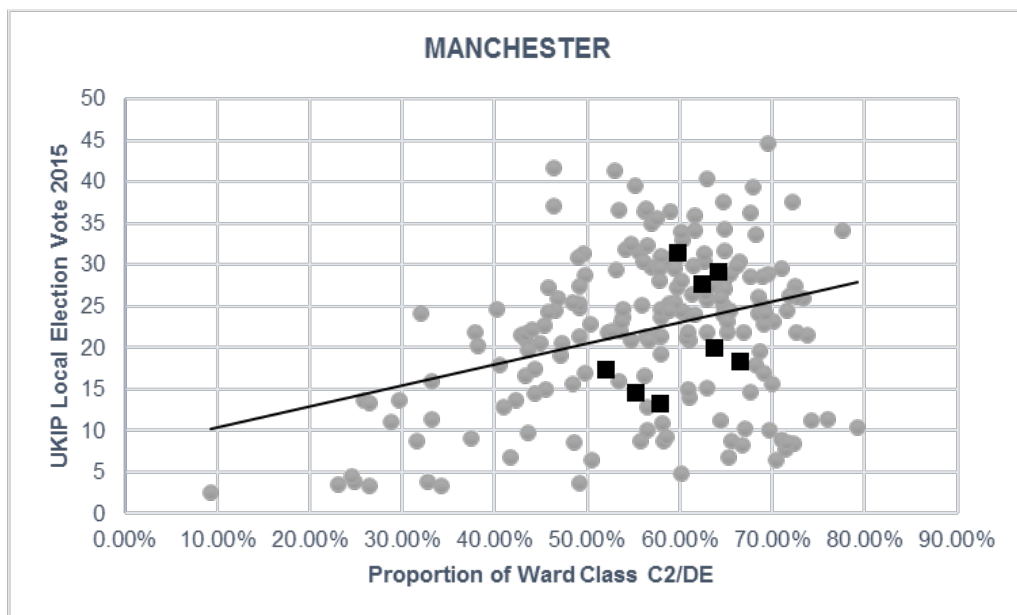

Figure 6 UKIP vote share in 2015 Local Elections against proportion of ward with C2/DE class and the wards of Rotherham highlighted
Source: Local Election Archive Project; UK Census (2011)

Figure 7 *UKIP vote share in 2015 Local Elections against proportion of ward with C2/DE class and the wards of Liverpool highlighted*
Source: Local Election Archive Project; UK Census (2011)

Figure 8 *UKIP vote share in 2015 Local Elections against proportion of ward with C2/DE class and the wards of Manchester highlighted*
Source: Local Election Archive Project; UK Census (2011)

6.1 Rotherham

Seen to be at the vanguard of the UKIP revolution, Rotherham is one of the party's best success stories not only in the region but in the country as a whole (Helm 2016). *Figure 9* shows how, locally, UKIP have been recording double-digit results in council

elections for nearly a decade. In 2014, not only did they gain the most votes across the council, but the party also managed to break the majoritarian threshold and to enjoy winning its first seats. Three years on, UKIP are represented by 18 councillors: the most in any metropolitan council in the country.
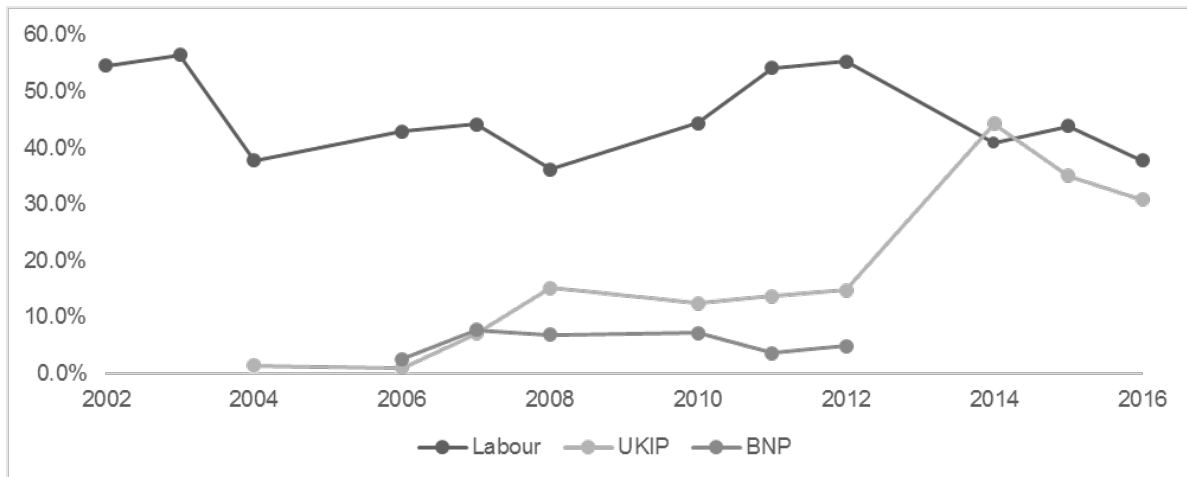
Figure 9 *Vote share of Labour, UKIP and BNP in Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council elections, 2002-2016*
Source: Local Election Archive Project

The first thing to note when discussing why Rotherham has witnessed an explosion in votes for UKIP in comparison to its surrounding towns is, of course, the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) attacks which devastated the town from at least 1997 to 2013. The scale of the abuse, which was first made public in The Times in 2012 (Norfolk 2012), had profound impacts on the town and evidently impacted residents' views of the Labour-dominated council (Jay 2014). Increased xenophobic tensions, while not directly exploited by the party, and an anti-establishment sentiment engendered by the scandal provoked large numbers of defections away from Labour to UKIP according to nearly all respondents. While this in and of itself is an example of the importance of local context, it can also be seen to challenge any argument that there existed a "natural" strength of the "left-behind" vote in Rotherham.

Nevertheless, it should be seen that we should not dismiss Rotherham as a case for this study. Firstly, as we can see in *Figure 9*, UKIP showed potential to enter the political mainstream in Rotherham long before the scandal emerged – their strength in 2009 and 2010 was significantly higher than elsewhere in the study – demonstrating the need to understand the situation prior to the scandal. Moreover, while they naturally

attracted votes from xenophobia, there is nothing to suggest that UKIP was destined to benefit from the CSE case; what caused them to be able to take advantage of the situation needs to be studied. In this way, therefore, it should be seen that a study of local factors other than the CSE scandal is required.

Beyond the CSE case, then, what emerged from interviews with local political figures from both Labour and UKIP were two main strands of arguments explaining why the radical right party have managed to occupy a significant part of the political space in Rotherham: the lack of political competition in the town in the 2000s and the particularities of local branch of UKIP.

6.2   Political Monopolisation

Labour officials, when interviewed, were quick to mention the impact their previous dominance in Rotherham had had on contemporary politics in the town. As shown in *Table 3*, prior to UKIP's ascent, Labour had held huge majorities in local elections ever since the turn of the century, meaning that there was little space for viable opposition and, in turn, competition. One councillor described the situation of the mid-2000s as being a "*one-party state*" while another admitted that, at the time, Labour could have "*put a red rosette on a donkey* [and still win]". The impact of this monopolisation of the political arena was neglect by the party to interact as much with the electorate as previously required; one experienced interviewee confessed how the Labour Party had started to "[take] *support for granted*", increasing the prospects for a frustrated and disenchanted electorate to succumb to populism.

Boston Castle*	40.4	Rother Vale	38.4
Brinsworth and Catcliffe	35.3	Rotherham East*	40.8
Dinnington	35.0	Rotherham West	36.4
Hellaby	6.4	Silverwood	8.3
Holderness	30.5	Swinton	44.8
Hoober	35.3	Valley	46.1
Keppel*	49.2	Wath	29.1
Maltby	22.8	Wingfield	33.5
Rawmarsh	45.3	* Seats contested by the Liberal Democrats	

Figure 9 *Majorities, in percentages, held after the Labour Party in the 2012 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council elections*
Source: Local Election Archive Project

When UKIP did begin to emerge then, if a voter wanted to use their vote to protest against Labour and demand change, they became the only viable option to vote for as there was no effective opposition from the traditional parties. As shown in the *Table 3*, the Liberal Democrats only contested three seats won by Labour in 2012, and there still existed a strong stigma among working class communities to vote Conservative. Such a problem was emphasised when the CSE scandal erupted as voters no longer trusted Labour but had nowhere else to turn but UKIP. The possibilities for UKIP were then exacerbated as they came in competition against a stale Labour party. Having taken victories for granted for years, the party's local membership had become completely inactive leaving candidates unable to use the strongest campaign weapon of social democratic parties. UKIP successfully filled the vacuum left by Labour's previous supremacy and were then able to use this space to become effective competition when voters were looking to move away from the incumbents.

6.3   Effectiveness of Local UKIP Branch

It became apparent through the interviews that the agency of UKIP in Rotherham is a vital element in this narrative which must be stressed. Decisions made by the local branch have made a significant difference to their prospects in recent years. A member of the branch's board stressed how they sought to "*buck the trend of UKIP*" and felt it necessary to defy many directives from the party's central organisation. Given that UKIP are fighting on two very different grounds – one in working class industrial towns and another in Conservative leaning suburbs in the South – UKIP officials said that they felt that much of the manifesto pledges in recent years had been irrelevant for Rotherham, if not outright damaging to their chances in the town. For example, one UKIP member recalled how he had criticised former leader, Nigel Farage, on three separate occasions insisting that he "*stop talking about* [Margaret] *Thatcher in the North*!" As such, and despite consistent berating by the centre, UKIP Rotherham chose to dramatically alter the UKIP message to cater for their audience, removing damaging aspects of the party's policy preferences. This agency by the branch has clearly been successful and demonstrates that local party actions are significant – we cannot attribute electoral outcomes solely to the actions of those at the centre. Those which

translate the party's message, and how effective they are at doing this, play a principal yet often-overlooked role in a party's successes.

One huge barrier which is endemic to UKIP and which it needs to overcome to be successful are the stigmas which are often affiliated with them. Indeed, their stances on Europe and immigration are often slanted as being racist, which is exacerbated by unhelpful comparisons to the more overtly racially-orientated BNP, as well as controversial statements spread through the media (Mason 2013). One of the most important reasons behind UKIP's success in Rotherham – and their ability to gain votes following the CSE scandal – has been the local branch's abilities to ameliorate their image among voters as well as candidates.

One prominent local activist said that this has been achieved mainly from getting into office, which allowed them to prove that they are a much more credible outfit than the rest of their radical right counterparts. Such improvements were also noted by Labour representatives who acknowledged that the party, who had previously had to be asked to leave meetings, had become much less aggressive both in their campaigns and also in council work. This improvement in image was equally as necessary to being able to get candidates to stand for UKIP. While admitting that they still had great difficulties – something which will be highlighted in greater detail in the discussions on Liverpool – UKIP officials felt that they were much better at finding enough quality candidates than their counterparts elsewhere in the region. This ability to stand decent candidates is obviously imperative for electoral success but is certainly not a given for UKIP. As such, this cleaning up of the image of UKIP in Rotherham has been an extremely important factor behind their recent successes locally.

All in all, therefore, we can see that the extreme support for UKIP in Rotherham compared to many of its neighbouring towns can be attributed to a very unique set of factors which have led the town down their own independent path. The interviews conducted created a narrative of a town with a status quo which had created a very stale brand of politics. Monopolisation was, however, blown apart by a major local scandal and then taken advantage of by an effective local branch of the opposition party.

6.4 Liverpool

If Rotherham has been a bastion of UKIP successes, Liverpool can easily be seen as the villain of the piece, with the party failing to make any real inroads in any stratum of elections. The city was one of the few formerly industrial areas in the North West to vote Remain in the EU Referendum. In the 2015 local elections, UKIP only received 6.7 percent of the popular vote despite contesting all but three of the seats. Equally noteworthy, the wards in the city have as high if not higher levels of the original variables on education, class and occupation as their counterparts in Rotherham yet record 25-30 percentage points fewer votes for UKIP. Clearly, Liverpool is a very strong counterexample to the class-based "left-behind" thesis, which demonstrates that how local contexts interplay with these more structural explanations are key. Following from the interviews with local candidates, several elements of the context of Liverpool emerge which demonstrate why they defy the trend projected by many of their neighbouring towns: greater levels of political participation and an integrationist culture generating stigmas attributed to UKIP.
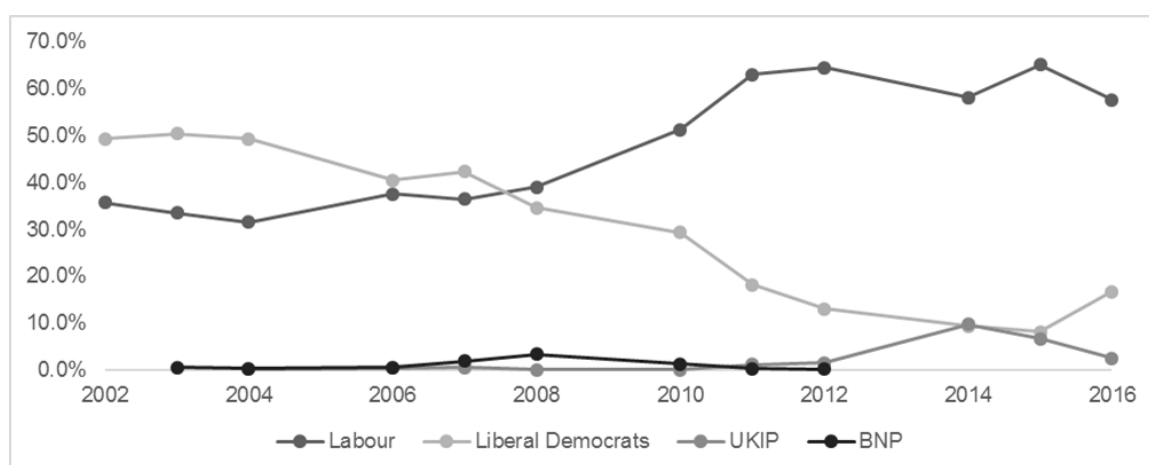
Figure 10 Vote share of Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP and BNP in Liverpool Metropolitan Borough Council elections, 2002-2016
Source: Local Election Archive Project

6.5 Political Competition

One key difference between Liverpool and Rotherham is that while Labour have, in the long-run, enjoyed great popular support, as shown in *Figure 10,* they have also been forced to compete alongside another effective traditional party – the Liberal Democrats. In this way, therefore, voters have more easily been able to transfer their votes if they

wanted to protest the actions of an incumbent party without the need of reverting to a more extreme party to do so as in Rotherham. Indeed, such a situation occurred in the late 1990s, when Labour lost control of the council as participants accepted that the party had become "*cocky*" in their campaigns. This forced the local party machinery to overhaul their approach and spend a lot more time in close connection with their electorate, with respondents indicating heavily that this time period made the party much more effectual not only in winning future elections, but also in hearing the demands of the people of Liverpool. UKIP can be seen to have struggled in Liverpool because of the greater degree of competition which was already in place when they tried to enter the fray. Such competition gave them much less space in which to compete and also forced their opponents to become more responsive to their electorate than in Rotherham.

6.6   Importance of Culture

When asked why they felt that Liverpool had managed to resist UKIP, the first response of the majority of those interviewed was that the answer lay in the culture of the city. That is to say that the history of the city as a major international port means it is characterised as being a "*city of immigrants*" where migrant communities had settled for generations and have, in turn, established themselves much more effectively into local society than elsewhere. This diversity has institutionalised a more inclusive and welcoming attitude to migrants. Though they make it clear that they are not heralding the city as a utopia of multiculturalism (racism, they accepted, is still present in the town's poorer areas) Labour councillors repeatedly expressed sentiments similar to this example: "*I think our tolerance for strangers, being a port city, is much higher than other parts of the U.K*". This tolerance can be perceived through the lack of progress made by the BNP prior to UKIP's attempts, as shown in *Figure 10*. It can be seen that people in Liverpool are much less responsive to the anti-immigration, anti-EU rhetoric of the radical right parties because of their history and the attitudes it has entrenched, which should be seen as crucial reason behind UKIP's lack of progress in the city.

This culture of tolerance can also be seen in the city's ongoing boycott of the Sun newspaper, which has recently re-entered the news cycle following a ban on the paper's sales at the Everton football stadium, Goodison Park. In this way,

Liverpudlians have a proud tradition of defying unabashedly hostile rhetoric making progress in the city even more unlikely for UKIP.

6.7   Stigmas attached to UKIP

As discussed earlier in the case of Rotherham, the stereotypes attributed to UKIP are a major stumbling block for the party and while the Yorkshire town has been successful in overcoming these problems, in Liverpool, such stigmas have proven very stubborn. Such image-related problems were also exacerbated by the Labour Party – one campaigner for the party indicated that they had successfully associated UKIP with the Conservatives giving them very little appeal among voters. While it was initially hoped that new leader, Paul Nuttall, a native of the city, would ameliorate the party's image, false statements on his relations with the Hillsborough disaster were taken with great disdain in the city. provoking the Chair of the party's Liverpool branch, Adam Heatherington, to resign (Parveen, Mason and Cobain 2017). The result of all of this has not just been damaging for their prospects with the electorate. Party membership dwindles in the area as people are reluctant to join what is seen as a corrosive party and the quality and quantity of candidates they can stand is extremely low as, according to one respondent, they fear "*character assassinations*" from being associated with UKIP. Indeed, when asked whether they perceived UKIP as a future threat in the city, many Labour representatives responded negatively believing that, currently, the party does not have the grassroots base from which to launch a significant platform because of its damaging image.

While representing the two very extremes of the variations, comparisons of Liverpool and Rotherham can be seen to be highly informative on the importance of local factors in determining how what is all too often seen as a standardised trend in electoral behaviour occur in each individual town. In Liverpool, Labour is buoyed by greater competition from traditional parties making them more robust to the whims of UKIP a party who, while viewed in a good light in Rotherham, must fight against a culture of tolerance, negating much of their rhetoric as well as a public profile which makes them somewhat toxic to voters and potential candidates.
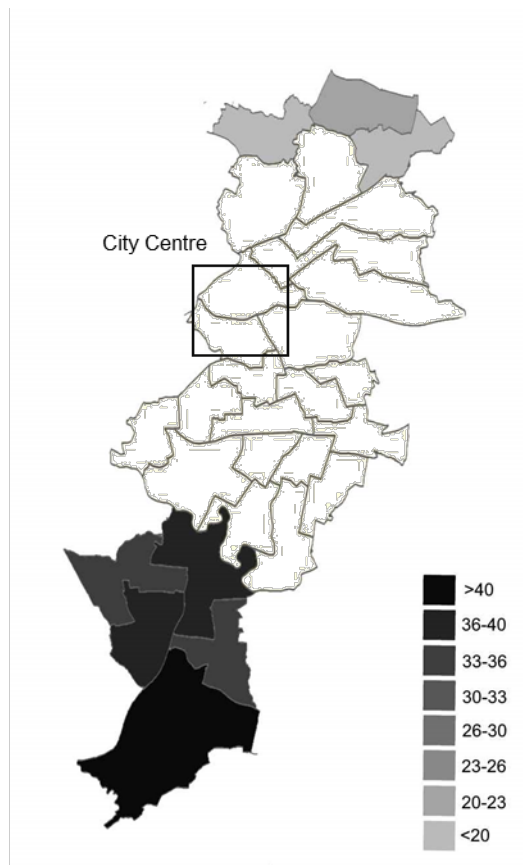
6.8 Manchester

Manchester was selected as a case study to be considered for two reasons. Firstly, it exhibits much greater levels of support for UKIP than Liverpool despite having similar degrees of competition with Liberal Democrats. Indeed, while its vote share across the city is very similar to that of Liverpool as shown in *Figure 11*, such city-wide statistics mask their true support as it is concentrated only in poor white wards where they poll at around 20%. In comparison, UKIP's most successful ward in Liverpool saw them win just 11%. Respondents in both cities attributed this difference primarily to the increased degree of a culture of inclusion in Liverpool, as discussed earlier.
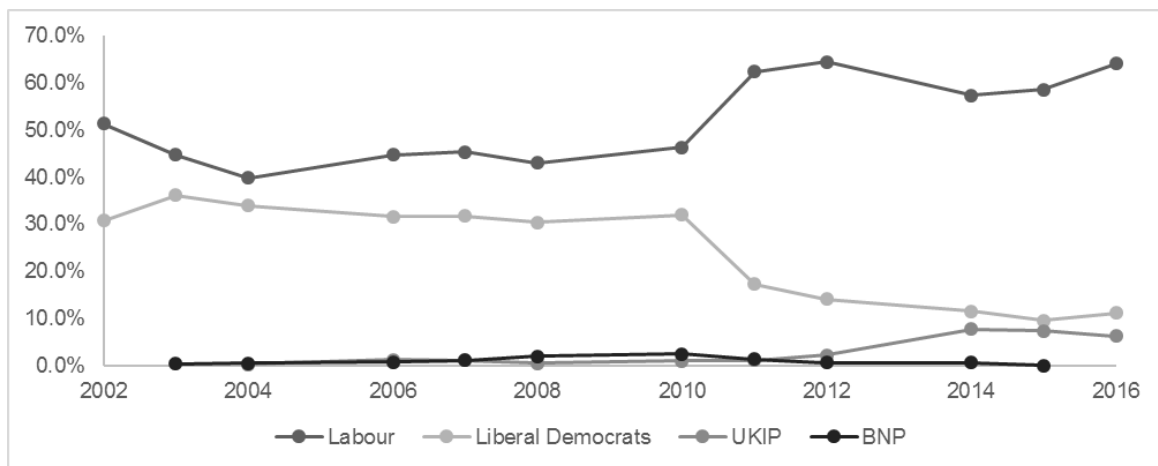
Figure 11 Vote share of Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP and BNP in Manchester Metropolitan Borough Council elections, 2002-2016
Source: Local Election Archive Project

More interestingly, however, support for UKIP appears to be geographically split across the city. As shown in *Figure 12*, among the wards which exhibit strong levels of the "left-behind" variables, support for UKIP is considerably stronger in the North of the city than in the South. Such a split gives great evidence to the importance of the local milieu in determining how the "left-behind" thesis works in any given place. It is clear that support for UKIP in Manchester lay not in local factors attributed to the city but to an even more concentrated context of their area of the city, a concentration which could only be noted through the use of ward-level data. During interviews, two key factors were drawn out: the geographic spread of the most recent

waves of immigration into the city and the imbalance of economic development in the areas in recent years.

Figure 13 *Majorities, in percentages, held by Labour over UKIP in each ward after the 2015 Manchester Metropolitan Borough Council elections*
Source: Local Election Archive Project
Note: Wards left white either did not have a UKIP candidate standing for them or did not exhibit high enough levels of the "left-behind" characteristics.

6.9 Immigration Patterns

While both wards in the North and South have similar levels of ethnic minority communities of around 10% of the population, the rate of change in areas such as Moston in the North of the city have been substantially higher in recent years. It was suggested in the interviews that the more rooted ethnic minority communities meant that the white working-class communities in the South felt much less threatened with regards to competition for public resources such as social housing, as well as producing a *"greater sense of "cosmopolitanism", as it were"*. On the other hand, a noticeable influx of migrants into the North of the city raised tensions in increasing competition. It also provided a scapegoat who white working class residents who are not gaining access to these resources could blame raising conspiratorial tensions that the local

council is biased against the established community. While there is absolutely no evidence available to prove a bias towards housing migrants, the perception of one is enough for people to move towards the anti-migrant, populist rhetoric of UKIP. Such a strong belief of a rigged system towards migrants was noted in Barking, East London resulting in a similar surge to UKIP (Smith 2010). It can be said that the disparities in recent waves of immigration between the two ends of the city can help to explain the varying responses to UKIP in Manchester.

6.10 Economic Development

Equally, an imbalance in new development projects between the two areas of the city was highlighted as being a potential area of explanation in the divergent prospects of UKIP. The majority of major projects outside of the city centre have occurred in the South in particular the creation of Airport City Manchester, a Chinese-funded business development, and Medipark, an expansion of Wythenshawe Hospital, both of which are thought to create over 25000 jobs for South Manchester (Bell 2014; Daily Mail 2013). Equally, the expansion of the city's major tram system, Manchester Metrolink, ventured South before North - only having connected Moston in the last 5 years - meaning that job creation prospects in the centre have been much more accessible for Wythenshawe constituents than those in Blackley, for instance (Pidd 2014). This massive imbalance in development was argued to have had great consequences for the UKIP/Labour competition. In the South, while deprivation is still very high, competition for jobs is much lower, while large physical projects in the vicinity gave a sense that they are part of a prosperous economic situation, boosting attitudes towards the Labour incumbents. Meanwhile, competition for jobs, combined with the increased levels of migrant communities in recent years, increases a sense of a rigged system pushing white working class voters towards UKIP. In this way, therefore, the imbalance in economic development in Manchester can be seen to have created somewhat politically polarised working class communities in the North and South of the city; while the latter enjoy the fruits of investment the latter is pushed into competition with ethnic minorities increasing racial tensions and xenophobic attitudes.

In this way, therefore, the two most prominent factors raised to explain varying levels of UKIP support in Manchester, namely economic development and immigration

levels, can both be seen to be intrinsically geographic in nature. Both explain how divergent changes to the environments of voters in the North and South, whether economically or socially, have had profound impacts on their attitudes to Labour and UKIP. Thus, it can be said that Manchester as a case study provides a great deal of evidence for the importance of local contexts to explain voting behaviours and, by extension, the importance of the integration of local geography as a factor in modelling such behaviours.

Overall, therefore, these case studies have successfully exposed some of the local factors in these three councils which have meant that while structurally very similar have had very divergent responses to the new Labour/UKIP competition line. Patterns of economic development or the attitudes of the local community – in this case the degree of stigma associated with UKIP – for instance, can be seen as factors which are very much dependant on the local situation, demonstrating the importance of considering these geographies when studying the rise of UKIP but also other competition dimensions in the UK. It is important to stress once again that these findings do not represent local factors which can then be extrapolated from these three areas and tested elsewhere. Rather, the point is that these qualitative methods can be replicated in other areas of the region and the factors which define their locality would be lifted out. While there may be some degree of crossover, it is the unique nature of each place, and hence the unique environment in which to compete politically, which ought to be stressed. All in all, though, it can be seen that by pointing to such uniqueness, this paper has found evidence of variation within structural characteristics in the North-West and South Yorkshire and then gone on to demonstrate the importance of integrating *local* geographies into analyses to explain such variations.

However, this suggestion of the necessity of electoral geographies has broader implications. Indeed, these findings provide evidence to suggest that we are witnessing a very distinct localisation of British politics. While the industrial towns of the North West were viewed thirty years ago as the bedrock of Labour support and constituency victories, it hardly seems appropriate, looking at *Figures 5-9*, to describe the region as a single political geography. Trying to conflate the actions of the people of Bolton, for instance, with those of Manchester appears completely jarring. As we can see, these towns and cities now react to political phenomena – as in this case, the rise of UKIP –

in much more unique fashions. As such attributing one single label and assuming a uniform voting behaviour across these towns is outdated. We need to begin to focus the geographies we use to discuss the electoral map of the UK. Voting patterns have now gone way beyond the North/South divide or other very broad geographical frameworks, meaning that if voters are becoming more influenced by the very local, then so must our studies on such behaviours.

If regions no longer vote dependably across the region according to certain sociological consistencies, as shown to be the case here in the example of the Labour/UKIP battle in the North of England, then it would appear that voters have increasingly de-aligned from traditional structural cleavages. Such a de-alignment appears to have been replaced, to a certain degree, by a growing influence from the place in which the voter finds themselves not because of the structural characteristics which define it, but because of the particularities and contexts of the town which make it unique compared to its neighbours. In this way, therefore, the major finding of this paper, following from observations indicating a greater role for electoral geographies, is that in the North-West and South Yorkshire regions there is substantial evidence to suggest a localisation of political competition in the UK. Such a finding, as discussed in the concluding chapter, has profound implications academically, as well as for the nature of political competition during elections should further study suggest a nationwide shift towards the local.

7. Conclusions

The findings of the research undertaken for this paper have provided evidence to suggest the integration of electoral geography when modelling voting behaviours within competition between Labour and UKIP. Structural characteristics, while clearly important, are insufficient variables to portray a true depiction of the changes which have resulted in the radical right party's arrival in the North of England. Ford and Goodwin's "left-behind" thesis is an extremely important narrative not only in this but also in explaining much of the British political landscape. However, its arguments should not be taken as a given nor should it be seen that its impacts occur homogenously across place.

Improvements in these current sociological models lie in the conflation of their ideas with those of political geography. Discovered in initial regression data and then supported by case study evidence, this paper has found that place – and its idiosyncrasies – have vastly altered how the "left-behind" thesis evolves in each town or city within the region. Within the three case studies, a wide array of contextual factors are found to help explain each unique place including economic development patterns, local attitudes (and conversely stigmas) and historically institutionalised patterns of political competition. There was also evidence to suggest that there is a space for the agency of local party activists in helping in these explanations. All such factors cannot merely be explained away by structural factors but are wholly defined by their place and its histories. This paper was preliminary and exploratory by nature, meaning that further investigation is encouraged in order to truly ascertain the degree of involvement of such contextual factors within the regions in question here, but also to investigate whether such a phenomenon has rooted itself in other areas of the country and along other lines of party competition.

However, it should be said that broader conclusions can be made from these findings. The need to consider such local electoral geographies can be seen to indicate that we are witnessing the localisation of political competition in the UK. The nation does not vote unvaryingly according to meta-structures such as class, but, as shown in these findings, neither do regions. The devolvement of de-alignment now means that political competition is defined by the local, meaning we can no longer look to "safe" regions such as North-West for Labour. It seems absurd, for instance, to try and conflate areas such as Bolton and Oldham with Manchester as one singular bloc of seats which can be fought for with one singular line of policy stances.

Perhaps, it could be observed that such localisations are, currently, more prominent in Labour-supporting areas than in Conservative ones. The *Paper Stones* electoral dilemma of the social democratic left would mean that Labour are more susceptible to such a de-alignment and localisation of their former strongholds as they spread themselves too thinly and fail to find the point of maximum utility in their trade-offs. However, further investigation is required to substantiate this point.
The findings of such a localisation of political competition – should further study provide evidence of a similar shift to the microcosmic in areas outside of the bounds of

this research – are significant not only academically, altering how we approach modelling voting behaviour in this country, but also for the future of political campaigning. If there are no longer such things as regional strongholds as each constituent town of the area now votes along unique, personalised lines, then competition in elections cannot focus down to marginal regions, such as the infamous "Middle England" in the 2010 General Election. Equally, such localisation spells impending difficulties to Labour as they must now direct funds to protect their own (former) bases before trying to reach out enough to obtain a majority. Such difficulties are an even worse version of the doom forecast by Przeworski and Sprague nearly thirty years ago.

In short, therefore, the findings of this paper suggest that researchers ought to further explore the extent to which we are witnessing the regional de-alignment of voting behaviours. While sociologies will continue to represent a crucial element of electoral studies it is vital that we find a valued position for geography in our research if we are to truly understand the confused political landscape which Britain finds itself in today.

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