



UKIP support in local elections: which factors play a role in determining electoral fortunes?

Dan Ziebarth¹

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Abstract

This paper attempts to provide better understanding of which factors shaped UKIP electoral support in local elections using borough-level data from London, as well as individual-level survey data from respondents residing in London. Results from this study display rising crime, falling turnout, and falling Conservative party vote share led to rises in UKIP vote share. These findings show that while perceptions of immigration and the economy may affect voter choice for Eurosceptic, nationalist, and populist parties, actual change in migration and economic conditions had no effect on voter support for UKIP in local elections. Additionally, there is substantial evidence that rising rates of local crime, and perceptions of rising local crime rates, lead voters to seek out parties, such as UKIP, with a policy platform supporting strengthened criminal justice measures. Finally, UKIP support in local elections is shown to have drawn heavily from former Conservative voters, as opposed to disenchanted Labour supporters.

Keywords UKIP · UK elections · Local elections · Crime and voting

Introduction

While no longer an electorally viable party, the role of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in shaping 21st-century UK politics has been important for the trajectory of the country in recent years. UKIP was central to the campaign for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union and the Brexit referendum in 2016, with recent research findings reflecting that UKIP may have been a driving force behind the materialization of the referendum (Evans and Mellon 2019). The question of support for UKIP as an organized political party fits under the larger question of what drives support for populist, nationalist, and, increasingly, Eurosceptic

✉ Dan Ziebarth
dziebarth@email.gwu.edu

¹ Department of Political Science, George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052, USA



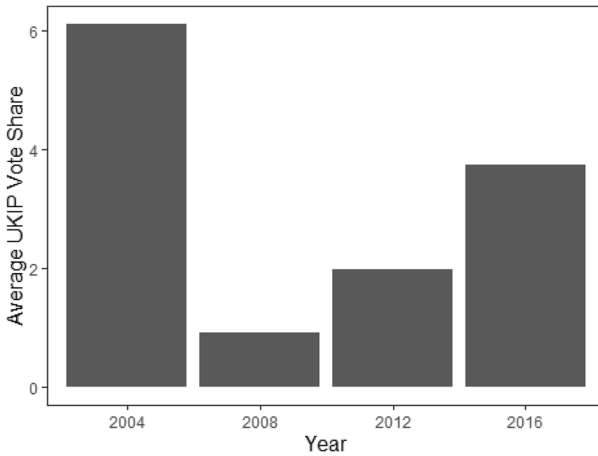


Fig. 1 UKIP average mayoral vote share

parties. This paper seeks to answer *which factors drove support for UKIP in local elections*.

Despite numerous studies providing a range of insights into the dynamics of UKIP organization and electoral support, analysis of UKIP at the local level remains understudied. In the wake of Brexit, some work did provide insights into the rise of UKIP using local constituency data (Becker et al. 2017). This study suggested that exposure to the European Union played a driving role in rising UKIP support and the outcome of the Brexit referendum, with trade and anti-immigrant sentiment, largely tied to Britain's EU membership, being a major concern of UK voters at the time. Work using district-level data to assess rising support for UKIP has also suggested that welfare reforms focused on austerity also played an integral role in UKIP's rise and influence in British politics (Feltzer 2019).

Recent research also shows that UKIP originally drew votes from the Conservatives, but later took a significant amount of Labour's constituency, and that UKIP has failed to draw a significant base at the local level (Thrasher et al. 2019). These findings reflect that UKIP's success in local elections declined over time and their vote share became widely drawn from former Labour supporters. However, as this article shows, across London mayoral, London-wide assembly, and constituent assembly elections, UKIP expanded its vote share from 2008 to 2016, and this vote share was drawn significantly from the Conservative Party (Figs. 1, 2, and 3).

Drawing on election data from the Greater London Intelligence Unit (GLA Intelligence Unit 2016), London borough profile statistics from the Greater London Authority (Greater London Authority 2018), and economic, demographic, and migration data from the Office of National Statistics (Office of National Statistics 2019a, b, c), a series of fixed-effect panel models are designed to assess the effect of local changes pertaining to these factors on UKIP support in local elections. Results show that changes in crime rates, turnout, and Conservative Party vote share affect UKIP vote share; however, changes in migration inflow, economic conditions and



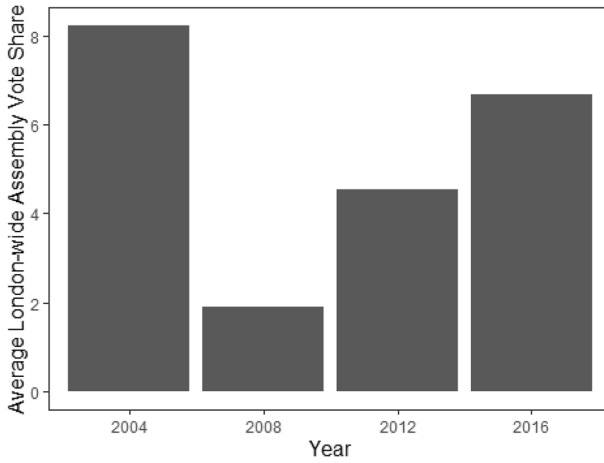


Fig. 2 UKIP average London-wide assembly vote share

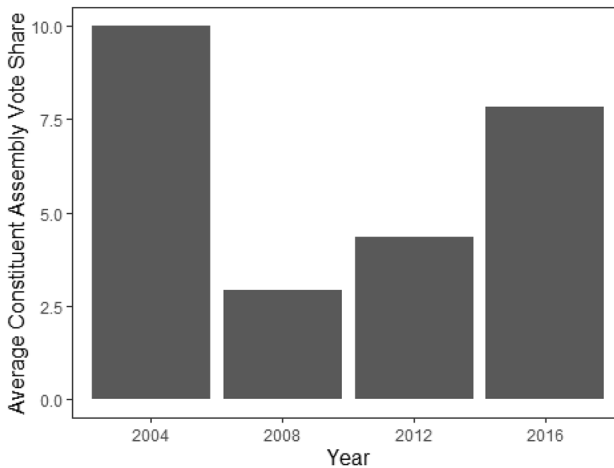


Fig. 3 UKIP average constituent assembly vote share

population levels of white British residents, and Labour vote share have no effect on UKIP electoral support.

These findings suggest that support for UKIP on issues of immigration and the economy are about national perception, as opposed to actual changes at the local level. However, actual changes in crime at the local level do matter in relation to UKIP support. This may be a result of citizens more acutely feeling the effects of rising or dropping crime rates. The results also suggest that UKIP had done particularly well in elections where voter turnout is lower than average. This displays that UKIP supporters, despite representing a smaller portion of the overall electorate, are typically more motivated than supporters of the two mainstream parties in Britain.



Finally, results show that UKIP support was heavily drawn from former Conservative Party supporters as opposed to Labour supporters. Findings provide insight into UKIP party support in local elections, a largely unexamined area, showing novel information on distinction in perception versus local changes in effecting voter choice across various issue areas and demographic changes.

Populism, nationalism, and euroscepticism in the United Kingdom

UKIP rose as a political party around the principles of populism, nationalism, and Euroscepticism. As the name of the party suggests, a centerpiece of the party platform was to position the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. Euroscepticism, broadly, is a term used in reference to opposition toward the European Union and European integration on the part of certain actors, such as political parties (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008). Political parties regularly utilize opposition to, or support for, the EU and European integration to garner partisan support among segments of voters and push preferred policy positions. In the decades following the formation of the EU, Euroscepticism has become the defining characteristic of many political parties in Europe who gain prominence by voicing their opposition to European integration (Topaloff 2012).

Domestic contexts also play a significant role in shaping dynamics of Euroscepticism among political parties and create an additional dimension through which parties are able to differentiate their policy platform (Taggart 1998). Euroscepticism has also been described as “contagious,” allowing hardline stances against European integration to impact even the discourse and policy platforms of mainstream European political parties (Meijers 2017). Euroscepticism in UK politics has been widely researched and theorized, with scholars tending to tie this phenomenon to three specific subjects; identity, sovereignty, and power.

In theories of Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom, one strand of the literature has focused on Euroscepticism as an assertion of national identity. Gifford (2006, 2014) conceives of Euroscepticism in the British case as a widespread movement asserting national exceptionalism. Support for Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom, in Gifford’s explanation, is also tied to populist sentiment, with mainstream parties, such as Labour and the Conservatives, struggling to protect themselves against the powerful symbolic cultural causes championed by the rise of UKIP-style party politics. Mycock and Gifford (2015) build upon this by contending that British Euroscepticism cannot be considered strictly a variant of English identity or attitudes, but a multi-layered system of policies and beliefs stemming from the pluri-national make-up of the United Kingdom.

Hayton (2016) also focuses on Euroscepticism primarily as a form of identity politics, yet perceives Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom as an issue of Englishness, with Scottish nationalism as a particular threat to national identity. Others have suggested that British Euroscepticism is based around a history of racism during the era of British colonialism (Kumar 2003; Virdee and McGeever 2017). As a result, these scholars believe that modern Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom has grown out of the roots of empire sowed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,



and conceptions of race and nationality tied to imperialism. While theories tying together identity and Euroscepticism differ in what are perceived to serve as the roots and layers of contemporary national identity in the United Kingdom, all see this base of identity as a driving force behind the British form of Euroscepticism.

In another branch of the literature exploring the role of Euroscepticism, populism, and nationalism in UK politics, Euroscepticism is characterized by an attempt to affirm national sovereignty in the face of rising European integration. Wellings (2012) contends, narrowly, that Euroscepticism has informed nationalism in England, through the United Kingdom's attempt to defend their sovereignty from the EU. This position has been supported, in part, through the outcome of the Brexit referendum and growing distance between EU policy goals and UK domestic policy. Tournier-Sol (2014) leverages this conception of Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom as a vehicle of national sovereignty, arguing that UKIP's conception of Euroscepticism is based on a populist model opposed to the perceived loss of national freedoms under European integration. This, as Tournier-Sol argues, stands in contrast to the more elitist-driven Euroscepticism of the Conservative Party.

Hobolt (2016) identifies sovereignty as a central issue mentioned by British citizens concerning arguments during the Brexit campaign, defined by UK separation from the EU. Under the perspective, opposition to increasing immigration and institutionalism from "the establishment" drove EU opposition in Britain and reinforced conceptions of reaffirming national sovereignty. McConalogue (2020) discussed the impact that membership of the EU had on the sovereignty of the national parliament in the United Kingdom. This loss, real and perceived, of national sovereignty in the UK surrounding policies and programs is primarily driven by developments in British history and constitutionalism and shapes the national conception of European integration. Taken together, these theories view sovereignty, particularly through the two-way relationship between institutions and citizen opinion, as a primary component for British Euroscepticism.

Finally, power has been shown to play a major role in theoretical depictions of Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom, and its relationship to populism and nationalism. George (2000) finds that Euroscepticism and threats to national power affected civil mobilization against European integration. Henderson et al. (2016) use reducing the power of the EU as a central aspect to defining Euroscepticism, assessing survey questions comparing respondent opinion on reducing the power of the EU versus increasing the power of the EU. Carrying out an analysis in such a way, the authors make a significant choice by leveraging power as the underlying aspect of citizen perception concerning Britain's ties to the EU.

Hix (2007) ties power to a rational choice model of Euroscepticism, observing the role of institutional design. Under this model, Euroscepticism is not an issue directly tied to identity or sovereignty, but instead is based around individual and group preferences which seek to maximize their utility. These individuals and groups have a designed set of preferences which lie at a theoretical point. As European integration either increases or decreases, policy outcomes will move further or closer to an individual or groups' ideal point, dependent on what will maximize their utility. Power is then significant, as the centralization and decentralization of European institutions affect national power dynamics. Euroscepticism will then occur among



a greater proportion of individuals and groups, such as political parties, as European integration increases, since this increasing level of integration is further from those whose utility preferences are set to a greater extent toward more decentralized institutions and policy control. This decentralization may also be associated with conceptions of nationalism and populism, as those supporting more nationalist and populist positions would be expected to want more national control and decentralized institutional design.

While theoretical accounts of what constitutes the term Euroscepticism clearly vary to a large degree, we also observe three broad dimensions, identity, sovereignty, and power, which are recurrent across the literature. These three features arise within national contexts, tethering them to conceptions of nationalism, and in many cases populism. Across these theories, nationalism and populism are additional belief systems typically attributed to opposition toward the EU and European integration. As certain individuals and groups within a given nation perceive their own beliefs and institutions as distinct from a European framework, reactions visible through rising nationalist sentiment occur. Likewise, as certain individuals and groups see growing centralization of beliefs and institutions in a European framework, a view of domestic institutions as those which will “serve the people” may result in rising populist attitudes. These theoretical perspectives, and the three underlying principles consistent across the literature as noted earlier, inform much of the public and scholarly understanding of UKIP as an organized political party in the United Kingdom.

UKIP and British Politics

UKIP, in its contemporary state, has primarily been labeled as a far-right political party built around a Eurosceptic, nationalist, and populist platform (Corbett 2016; Ford et al. 2012; Gifford 2015; Wellings 2010). The party was formed in 1991, referred to as the Anti-Federalist League at the time, and renamed the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in 1993. The original aim of the party was shifting the Conservative Party further toward support for British exit from the European Union (Tournier-Sol 2015). This has led to UKIP continuing to adopt a hardline stance on Euroscepticism, as opposed to the traditionally softer stance traditionally employed by the Conservatives prior to the 2016 Brexit referendum (Lynch and Whitaker 2013). UKIP rose in power primarily through its gains, and subsequent publicity, in European elections.

UKIP garnered a growing vote share in European elections over the course of the party’s history, receiving 6.5% of the vote in 1999, 16.2% in 2004, and 16.5% in 2009, and a relatively sizable 27.5% of votes in 2014. While the UK has since exited the European Union and electoral support for UKIP has precipitously declines, it is important to note how the party’s particular rise in vote share in the 2014 European elections was drawn through the phenomenon of growing Eurosceptic sentiment in the United Kingdom tied to concerted party effort to grow their voting bloc, with greater investment in local and parliamentary by-elections assisting party messaging (Ford and Goodwin 2014). The themes discussed earlier of nationalism, populism, and Euroscepticism have all been attributed to



UKIP in much of the public and scholarly discourse, particularly since the identity of the party itself revolved, from the early stages, around UK independence from the EU. UKIP's relative strength in European elections was drawn from a veritable protest vote, as the force of Euroscepticism and anti-EU sentiment rose nationally, serving as an internationally showcase of disapproval of the EU and nationalist support of Britain (Whitaker and Lynch 2011; Ford et al. 2012; Treib 2014).

Understanding group support for UKIP by social class, employment sector, education level, ethnic identification, and political ideology has been central to research surrounding the party as well. Particularly after the party's rising support in both European and domestic elections in the twenty-first century, the scholarly study of UKIP and the party's voting became central to discerning the state of British politics. Public polling has typically shown that UKIP supporters perceive immigration and European relations to be the greatest issues facing the United Kingdom (Ford et al. 2012; Evans and Mellon 2019). In the face of what many perceived to be rapidly increasing powers of the European Union, UKIP was able to make major national electoral gains in 2015, which has been attributed in large part to campaign rhetoric and policy platforms focusing on immigration as the central issues (Mellon and Evans 2016). This also came at a cost to other political parties in the United Kingdom, with UKIP drawing votes for segments of the population who previously had supported more mainstream parties.

At a national level, there also remains a debate over whether UKIP has affected electoral outcomes by drawing voters from the Conservative Party, essentially drawing center-right voters further right on issues of immigration and economic protectionism, or the Labour Party, bringing in disenchanted working-class voters who traditionally support Labour, but began to shift toward UKIP as a result of changing national and global economic structure. Ford and Goodwin (2016) argue that UKIP support comes primarily from the middle class and the Labour Party, as opposed to the Conservative Party, benefits from the presence of UKIP. Evans and Mellon (2016), instead, contend that UKIP support is derived largely from working-class voters, which threatens Labour in districts where they have traditionally held working-class support, particularly in northern England.

This debate over which voters throughout the United Kingdom tend to be drawn to UKIP, increasingly so over the past two decades, has largely been discussed at the national level, but previous research has generally argued that local elections have mirrored domestic and European Parliament elections (Clarke et al. 2016; Goodwin 2015). As the party matured in the 2010s, having grown under the leadership of Nigel Farage who took over near the end of 2006, UKIP also began a more targeted strategy in its attempt to win support not only in European Parliament elections, but in elections for British Parliament. In the 2015 general elections, however, UKIP was left with only a single seat. The same debate in the general elections was brought to local levels, concerning the appeal of UKIP to former voting blocs from Labour or the Conservatives (Lynch and Whitaker 2012; Goodwin 2015). In spite of these insights, the analysis of local elections and UKIP support remain substantively limited and do not address larger questions of local shifts toward and away from the UKIP party platform and UKIP candidates.



Although we have seen some previous discussion on UKIP support in local elections, which has generally lumped together national election results and priorities to the local level, these studies only minimally separate discussion of UKIP support nationally to UKIP support in local elections. As findings from this study will show, changes from 2004 to 2016 and electoral support for UKIP across local elections actually reflect a distinct pattern of support for UKIP at the local level. As opposed to issues of immigration and economic change, shifts in crime at the local level show substantive effect on UKIP electoral vote share across local elections displaying greater importance of security and policy, which is one of UKIP core policy platform issues. These findings also show that UKIP garners support primarily from former Conservative voters, as opposed to Labour.

Theoretical expectations

Based upon previous scholarship on Eurosceptic, nationalist, and populist political parties, as well as UKIP's place in British politics, there are a number of theoretical expectations for UKIP electoral support in local elections. I will lay out these theoretical expectations as seven hypotheses. Each hypothesis will be accompanied by short discussion of previous literature leading to the hypothesis. These hypotheses will be tested, with the results and findings section discussing the outcomes of the tests, and the data and methodological approach section elaborating on the sources from which data were drawn and the construction of statistical models used to assess the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 Rising immigration levels will lead to greater UKIP vote share

UKIP was formed around the opposition to EU membership, and European integration broadly. Unsurprisingly, a long list of research has shown that UKIP support comes largely from voters who hold anti-immigrant attitudes and support increased immigration restrictions (Carey and Geddes 2010; Dennison and Goodwin 2015; Ford and Goodwin 2014; Ford et al. 2012; Geddes 2014; Hayton 2016). Previous research has also shown intergroup attitudes are affected by population changes in outgroups (Enos 2014, 2016; Hopkins 2010; Newman 2012). With this in mind, we would theoretically expect that increased levels of inward migration may prime white British voters' attitudes toward migration, sparking rising anti-immigrant policy and party support. This leads to the hypothetical expectation that rising levels of inward migration would lead to increasing levels of UKIP vote share.

Hypothesis 2 Rising economic distress among the White British population will lead to greater UKIP vote share.

Many previous studies have found that UKIP began gaining support among voters who were increasingly economically distressed (Clark et al. 2016; Ford and Goodwin 2014; Jennings and Stoker 2017). These voters, over time, were expected



to have formed increasingly anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic attitudes (Carreras et al. 2019). Based on this evidence, the hypothesis tested in this article will be that rising economic distress, specifically among the white British population, will lead to rising UKIP vote share.

Hypothesis 3 Rising levels of crime will lead to greater UKIP vote share.

One, often overlooked, aspect of UKIP's party platform is increasing police force numbers and returning prosecutorial powers to police forces and their own lawyers (Police and Criminal Justice, 2020). UKIP supporters have also been shown to largely agree that strict criminal enforcement policies will strengthen the United Kingdom (Lynch and Whitaker 2013).

Based upon this, we would expect that in boroughs with rising crime levels, UKIP will receive an increased vote share as voters sympathetic to UKIP's criminal justice policies turn out in greater numbers for the party.

Hypothesis 4 Rising White British population will lead to greater UKIP vote share.

While there is reason to believe that rising levels of inward migration will lead to UKIP receiving greater electoral support, there is also evidence to support the hypothesis that rising white British population in an area may lead to UKIP gaining vote share as well. Since UKIP supporters tend to identify as white British, it is anticipated that rising levels of white British population in a borough may lead to a larger population of potential voters based on demographic voting pattern expectations (Dennison and Goodwin 2015; Ford and Goodwin 2014).

Hypothesis 5 Rising Turnout Will Lead to Greater UKIP Vote Share.

There have been inconsistent findings to this point on the effect of non-mainstream political parties on electoral turnout. Some studies have found that voter turnout increases with the presence of non-mainstream parties, with researchers concluding that the presence of these parties brings voters to the polls who otherwise would not be likely to otherwise vote (Hirschmann 1970; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Other studies, however, find mixed results, with the presence of non-mainstream parties showing motivation for some and lack of motivation for others (Franklin 2004; Immerzeel and Pickup 2015). Since previous studies have tended to expect, theoretically, that non-mainstream party presence will increase turnout, while empirical findings remain inconclusive about this rise, I will use the hypothesis that rising turnout levels will lead to greater UKIP vote share to test this theory.

Hypothesis 6 Rising Conservative Party vote share will lead to lower UKIP vote share.

Hypothesis 7 A significant portion of the literature on UKIP has centered around a debate over whether UKIP vote share increases are drawn primarily from former



Conservatives or disenchanted former Labour supporters (Evans and Mellon 2016; Ford and Goodwin 2014; Mellon et al. 2018). This debate leaves a large amount of uncertainty concerning which mainstream party UKIP would be more likely to draw voters from in local elections. As such, two hypotheses will be tested, with one hypothesis stating that rising Conservative Party vote share will lead to falling UKIP vote share, while the other states that rising Labour Party vote share will cause UKIP vote share to fall.

Data and methodological approach

The data for this article include longitudinal time series cross-sections of electoral, economic, migration, and demographic data collected from every London borough in 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016.¹ The unit of analysis is the borough level in London. Boroughs are used as the unit of analysis because it is the lowest level at which electoral, economic, social, and demographic information is available over the observed time period. Election data for this study were collected from the Greater London Intelligence Unit (GLA Intelligence Unit 2016). Election returns for UKIP, Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Greens for three local positions voted upon in each of the observed years. The three positions are mayoral, London-wide assembly, and constituent assembly. London-wide assembly differs from constituent assembly as voters do not cast a vote for a specific candidate, but instead for a party, while constituent assembly votes are cast for an elected official to represent the constituents' borough.

Economic data are drawn from calculations provided by the Office of National Statistics (Office of National Statistics 2019a). Two economic measures are leveraged to assess economic changes at the borough level. These two economic measures are as follows: (1) employment rates and (2) economic inactivity rates. Employment rate accounts for the proportion of residents aged 16 or over who are actively employed. Economic inactivity rates are the proportion of residents consisting of people aged 16 and over without a job who have not sought work in the last four weeks and/or are not available to start work in the next two weeks.

Immigration and nationality data come from two sources. Numbers on migration inflow comes from the Office of National Statistics Long-term International Migration, UK and London dataset (Office of National Statistics 2019b). Numbers on demographics come from the Office of National Statistics dataset on Population by Nationality using data collected from the Annual Population Survey (Office of National Statistics 2019c). Crime statistics are drawn from the Greater London Authority's London Borough Profiles and Atlas dataset (Greater London Authority 2018).

¹ The only part of the city excluded from this study was the City of London. This area is excluded because consistent data for all fields necessary for this study was not available through government data repositories. Additionally, the City of London does not have borough status, making it slightly different from the other 32 local authorities in London in municipal administration as well.



The methodological design for empirical analysis is based on panel model regressions using borough-level fixed effects. Since we are interested in observing which factors affect UKIP electoral support, the dependent variable for all panel model regressions is change in UKIP vote share. The panel models observe effects across time using longitudinal observation of the measurements described previously. Leveraging panel data allow models to control for individual heterogeneity which may occur across different units of analysis. Borough-level fixed effects to address endogeneity issues which may occur from measuring effects across multiple boroughs.

In addition to aggregate-level data, findings presented on crime and change in party support are supplemented with individual-level survey data from wave 8 of the British Election Study Internet Panel (Evans et al. 2016). Wave 8 included collected responses from 33,502 individuals online, conducted by YouGov between May 6, 2016, and June 22, 2016. Of these 33,502 individuals, 3,034 resided within one of the London boroughs. Of these 3,034 individuals, 1,757 filled out each of the necessary questions for this analysis, leaving the survey data with an *n* of 1757. Responses were collected on which borough the respondent resided within, which party they voted for in the 2010 general elections, which party candidate they supported in the 2016 London constituency elections, which party candidate they supported in the 2016 London mayoral election, and whether they thought that crime in their local area was getting better, getting worse, or staying about the same, and then coded.

Binary variables were created for each of the three elections, the 2010 general elections, 2016 London assembly constituency elections, and 2016 London mayoral elections, coding for each respondent whether they supported a given party in a given election. The parties observed are UKIP, Conservative, and Labour. Having voted for a party in a given election was coded with a “1,” and if the respondent had not voted for the party in a given election it was coded as “0.” The change in local crime perception variable used a 5-point scale, with a “1” representing a response that crime is getting a lot lower, a “2” representing a response that crime is getting a little lower, a “3” representing that crime is staying about the same, a “4” representing a response that crime is getting a little higher, and a “5” representing a response that crime is getting much higher. A response of “Don’t Know” was coded as a “3,” equal to crime staying about the same, as it is expected that this response means that the survey respondent has generally not noticed enough of a change in crime in their local area to perceive it to be getting either lower or higher. The models using data from wave 8 of the British Elections Study Internet Panel use borough-level fixed effects, similar to the aggregate-level models.

Using fixed effects at the borough-level accounts for confounders that are time-invariant at the unit of analysis and control for omitted variable bias that may occur as a result of a characteristic singular to a given borough (Fowler and Hall, 2018). By observing differences between values from an observed election and a previously observed election across time, many of the borough-specific endogeneity present in across-unit vote share, economic well-being, inward migration, demographics, and crime are factored out by design (Burden and Wichowsky 2014). This ensures that models do not use changes over time in one borough to inaccurately measure changes over time in another borough, which would lead to incorrect empirical outcomes.



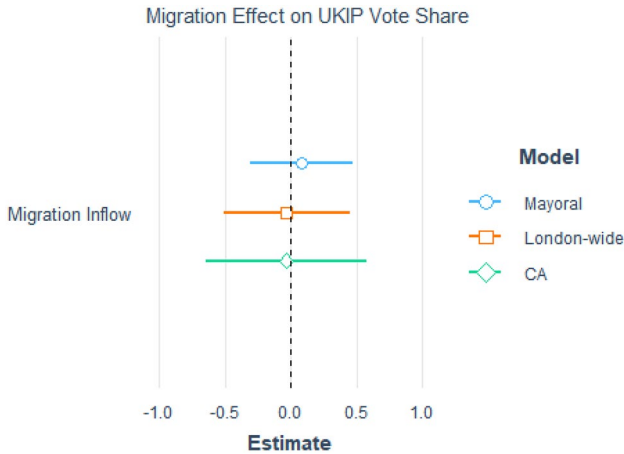


Fig. 4 Migration effect on UKIP vote share

Results and findings

Results and findings are discussed in this section across seven subsections. These subsections report empirical results from the methodological design described in the previous section and examine the findings as they relate to the hypotheses presented earlier in the article.

Immigration

Interestingly, increases in immigration levels had no significant effect on UKIP vote share. Figure 4 shows that changes in migration inflow are insignificant and holds not substantial effect across all three elections for local office. We observe that the estimated effects are essentially zero and do not near significance at the 0.05 level. There are also mixed effect outcomes, with mayoral effects shown to be slightly positive, while London-wide and constituent assembly effects are both slightly negative.

These results may reflect UKIP supporters, and potential supporters, not responding to localized changes in *immigration*. While studies have consistently found that UKIP voters tend to have higher rates of anti-immigrant beliefs and support increasing immigration restrictions in relation to the average citizen (Carey and Geddes 2010; Dennison and Goodwin 2015; Ford and Goodwin 2014; Ford et al. 2012; Geddes 2014; Hayton 2016), these effects may be coming from *perceptions* as opposed to actual *rates of change* in relation to inward migration flows. It should be noted, however, that since these boroughs will include both immigrant and non-immigrant residents and voters, the aggregate-level data presented cannot specifically tell us about individual-level perceptions of immigration, and should be understood as



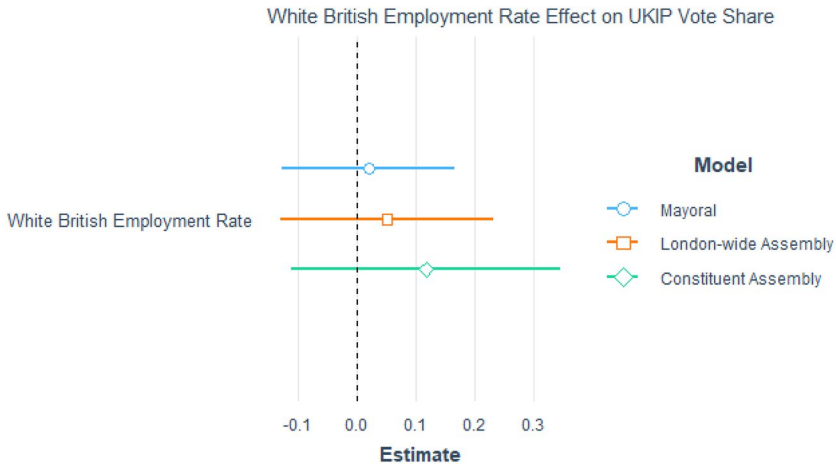


Fig. 5 White UK-born economic inactivity effect on UKIP vote share

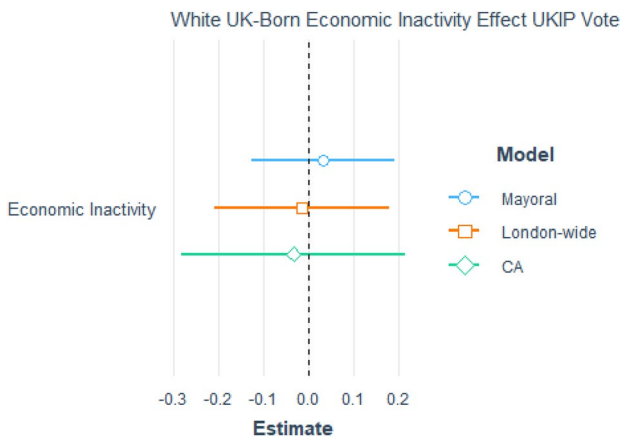


Fig. 6 UKIP average mayoral vote share

holding this limitation, while also providing a different perspective on how immigration flow does appear to affect UKIP vote share in local elections.

Economy

For economic effects on UKIP vote share, we see null effects similar to those for migration inflow. In Figs. 5 and 6, we observe small, insignificant effects for white British employment rate and economic inactivity rate on UKIP support across all three local election categories. These findings may reflect a similar situation as that of immigration. UKIP support is largely seen as being derived



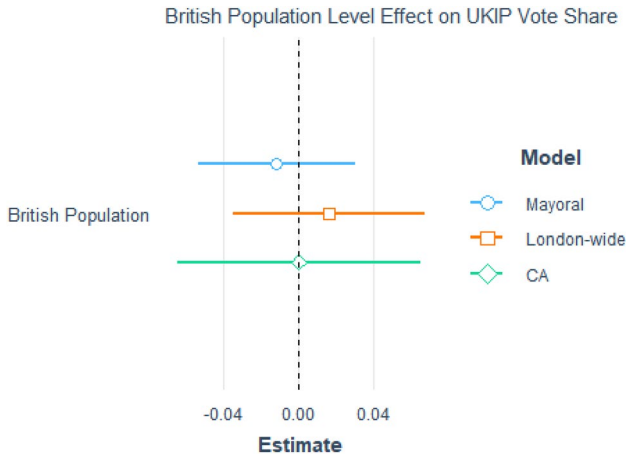


Fig. 7 British population level effect UKIP average mayoral vote share

heavily from white British citizens who are pessimistic about changing economic conditions (Carreras, Carreras, and Bowler 2019; Clarke et al. 2016). While economic issues may be a central concern of UKIP supporters, the effects on voter choice may be driven by perception of national economic changes as opposed to local economic changes. Local economic changes may matter to a greater extent, however, in smaller towns or cities which depend on a single industry. Since London has a diversified economy and residents of London may be more likely to work outside of their own borough, it is possible that we may find greater local economic change effects on UKIP electoral support in different towns and cities. Regardless, these findings are intriguing, and provide a novel finding concerning a lack of clear relationship between local economic change among white British residents and electoral support for UKIP.

British population

Figure 7 displays a lack of substantive or significant relationship between changing levels of UK-born residents and UKIP vote share. We may expect, based upon UKIP's anti-immigration and nationalist policies, that areas with rising levels of UK-born residents would increasingly support UKIP. Since anti-immigrant and nationalist attitudes would tend to be found more frequently among UK residents born in Britain, rising levels of UK-born residents may affect UKIP vote share. However, empirical findings reflect that there appears to be no effect for changing levels of British residents on UKIP electoral support in local elections.



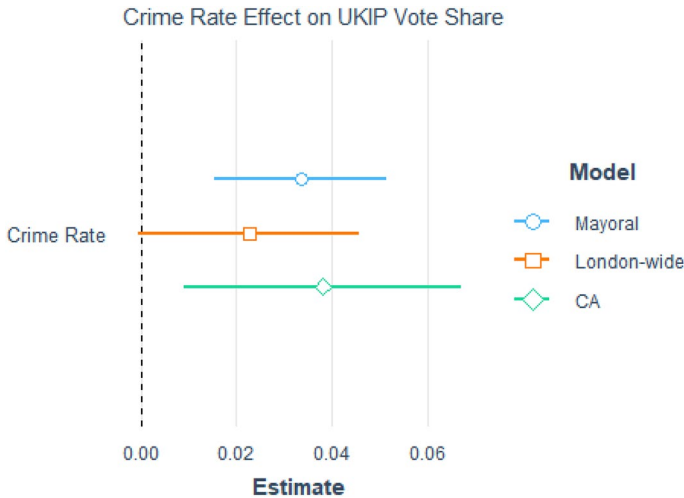


Fig. 8 Crime rate effect on UKIP vote share

Crime

Figure 8 shows a substantive and significant relationship between changes in crime rate and UKIP electoral support for mayoral and constituent assembly elections. While the crime rate effect is not significant at the 0.05 level for London-wide assembly elections, we can see in Fig. 8 that the effect is nearly significant.² These results suggest that changes in crime rate are meaningful in shaping UKIP electoral fortunes in local elections. The crime rate is calculated at one crime per thousand residents, meaning the effect for a 0.1% increase in crime rate corresponds with approximately a 2.3%-3.8% increase in UKIP vote share. This displays a strong effect, showing that voters are highly attuned to and responsive to local crime.

This also shows a different pattern than seen in immigration and economic effects previously, despite previous research showing that UKIP supporters tend to hold anti-immigrant attitudes and identify as white British who are pessimistic about the economy relative to other voters. As a result, voters appear to be responsive in local elections to changes in local crime rate in ways that they are not responsive to changes in local inward migration and economic distress. While perceptions of immigration and the economy are more important in influencing voter choice, substantive local changes in crime levels are important in shaping voter party support. This draws an interesting distinction between how perceptions and numerical changes have different effects depending on issue area.

These findings are further supported by the individual-level models using the survey data from wave 8 of the British Election Study Internet Panel. We see in Fig. 9 that perception of rising crime in the respondent's local area was

² The p-value is 0.053, making it just above the threshold for significance at the 0.05 level.



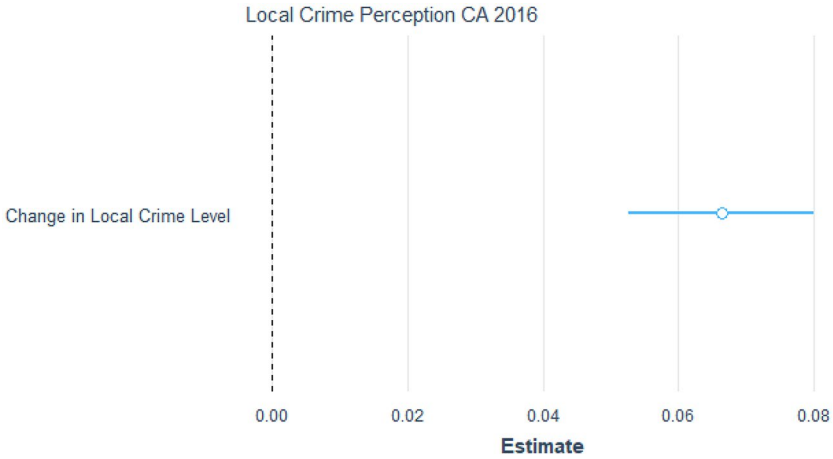


Fig. 9 Local crime perception CA 2016

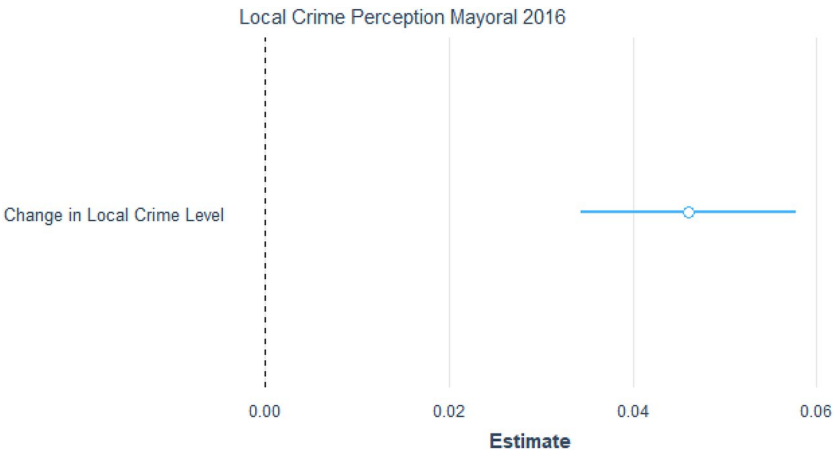


Fig. 10 Local crime perception mayoral 2016

significantly, and positively, associated with casting a vote for the UKIP candidate in the 2016 London Constituency Assembly election. Further, we see that this pattern repeats itself in the London mayoral election in 2016, with perception of rising crime also significantly, and positively, associated with casting a vote for the UKIP mayoral candidate. This strengthens the conclusion that UKIP voters in local elections were in large part driven by changes in perception and conditions of local crime, aligning with the “law and order” position on which UKIP was strongly based at the local level (Fig. 10).



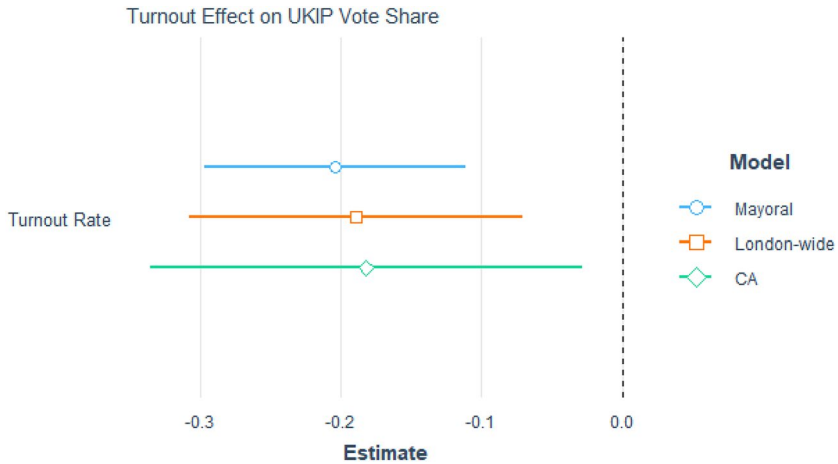


Fig. 11 Turnout effect on UKIP vote share

Turnout

Findings from previous research on non-mainstream parties and voter turnout have provided mixed results (Franklin 2004; Hirschmann 1970; Immerzeel and Pickup 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Figure 11 shows the effect of turnout rate on UKIP vote share. We can see from the figure that as turnout rate increases in local elections, UKIP vote share drops significantly across all elections. The findings from this section reflect that UKIP does particularly well in elections where turnout is relatively lower. This appears to signal that UKIP voters may be more motivated to turnout than supporters for the two major parties, the Conservatives and Labour, despite being smaller in overall proportion. If former Conservative and Labour are not motivated to turnout in local elections in a given year, UKIP voters are shown to turnout more consistently to vote for the party. Further, these findings show that UKIP supporters may be more uniformly consolidated around supporting all, or most, policy positions taken by the party, and may see turnout in elections as more imperative to party strength in comparison to the Conservative and Labour electorate.

Conservative vote share

Whether UKIP gains in electoral support have more adversely affected the Conservatives or Labour has been a continuing question in the study of British party politics (Ford and Goodwin 2016; Mellon and Evans 2016). Figure 12 shows the effect of Conservative vote share on UKIP electoral support. The results show that increases in Conservative vote share significantly diminishes vote share for UKIP across all local elections. The results concerning Conservative vote share



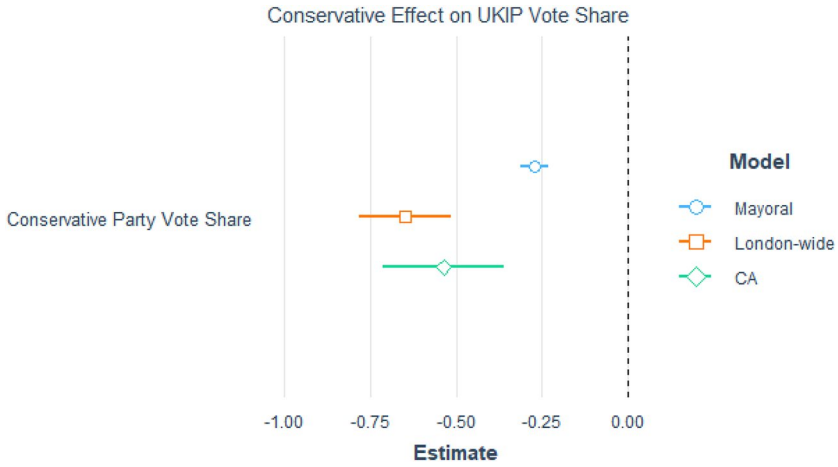


Fig. 12 Conservative effect on UKIP vote share

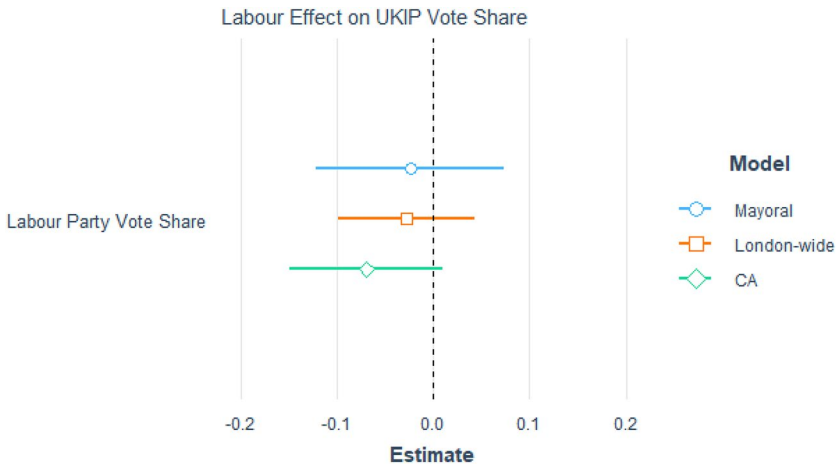


Fig. 13 Labour effect on UKIP vote share

effect on UKIP support shows that UKIP vote share across all local elections observed is largely drawn from former Conservative voters. This supports the theoretical expectation, as well as previous research showing that UKIP electoral gains are taken primarily from the fortunes of the Conservatives. Since London is a large, metropolitan area, results may possibly differ in northern cities; however, these findings strongly suggest that in local elections, UKIP support is gained from voters who would otherwise support Conservatives.



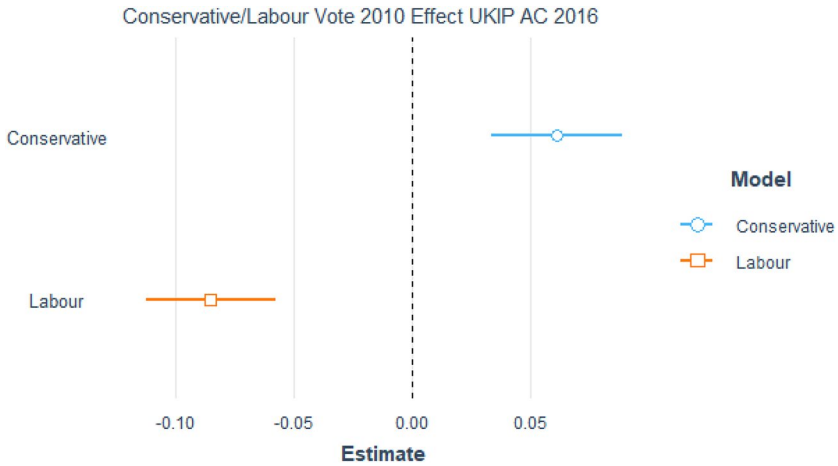


Fig. 14 Conservative/Labour vote 2010 effect AC 2016

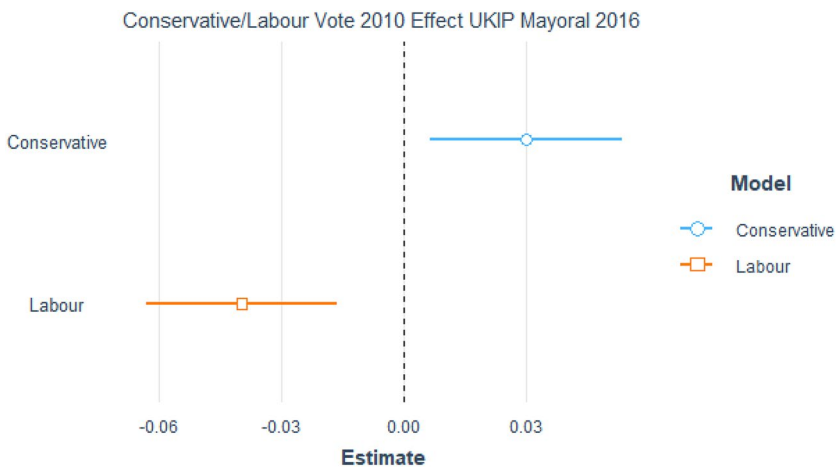


Fig. 15 Conservative/Labour vote 2010 effect Mayoral 2016

Labour vote share

Similar to UKIP vote share in relation to Conservative fortunes, previous research has sought to understand whether UKIP gains are drawn increasingly from disenchanted, working-class former Labour voters (Ford and Goodwin 2014). Figure 13 shows that Labour vote share has a minimal and insignificant effect on UKIP vote share. In contrast to findings from Conservative Party effect on UKIP electoral support, Labour support is shown to have no effect on UKIP electoral fortunes. This reflects that across local elections there is no evidence that UKIP has drawn substantial support from disaffected former Labour voters.



Since aggregate changes cannot adequately tell us specific changes in vote flows among individuals, I supplement the findings as presented in Fig. 11 with analysis of data from wave 8 of the British Election Study Internet Panel. Figure 14 presents the relationship between casting a vote for the Conservative Party in the 2010 general elections and UKIP in the 2016 London Constituency Assembly election, as well as the relationship between casting a vote for the Labour Party in the 2010 general elections and UKIP in the 2016 London Constituency Assembly election. Figure 15 presents the same relationships for the 2016 mayoral election.

We see that in both models, having voted for the Conservatives in the 2010 general elections is positively, and significantly, associated with casting a vote for the UKIP candidate in the 2016 London local elections. By contrast, having voted for Labour in 2010 is negatively associated with casting a vote for the UKIP candidate in the 2016 London local elections. This supports the conclusion that UKIP had drawn the bulk of its voters in local elections from those who had previously voted for the Conservatives, as opposed to Labour. As discussed earlier, this study observes elections across all boroughs in London; however, results may differ in northern cities, where previous research has argued that former Labour voters are more inclined to switch support to UKIP as a result of socioeconomic changes (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). Findings from this study strongly support that Labour voters are not substantially shifting their support to UKIP in local elections.

Conclusions

Understanding which factors have affected UKIP's electoral support in Britain is substantively important. UKIP's position in British party politics as a Eurosceptic, nationalist, and populist political party has brought it to the forefront as a result of Brexit, and growing tensions between the United Kingdom and the European Union. Rising Euroscepticism, both in Britain and across other nations, has been theoretically tied to identity, sovereignty, and power in previous literature, with scholars typically pointing to nationalism and populism as responses among voters stemming from these concepts of identity, sovereignty, and power. Research on British party politics has also sought to understand UKIP electoral support, with scholars largely agreeing that immigration and the economy of substantial factors influencing shifting support toward UKIP (Clark, Whitely, Borges, Sanders, and Stewart, 2016; Geddes 2014; Hayton 2016; Jennings and Stoker 2017); however, there remains ongoing debate as to whether UKIP's electoral gain pose a more considerable threat to Conservative or Labour support (Ford and Goodwin 2014, 2016; Mellon and Evans 2016).

This article has shown that changes in local crime rate, as well as turnout and Conservative vote share, significantly affected UKIP electoral support; however, changes in migration inflow levels, economic conditions among white British residents, UK-born population, and Labour vote share have no effect on UKIP vote share. It is notable that changes in migration inflow and economic well-being had no significant effect on UKIP vote share. One explanation could be that anxiety over immigration was not a driving factor for voting, in spite of changes in actual



migration inflow. Immigration as a voting issue may then be driven by perception, as opposed to actual local migration changes. Another explanation may come down to location. Although the boroughs of London are quite diverse in terms of demographic and economic characteristics, different localities may display different trends. Since London in general tends to be a comparatively cosmopolitan area in which residents may be more comfortable with migratory activity, the results may be reflective of this local identity. Future studies on dynamics of UKIP electoral support in local elections should explore municipalities in areas outside of London.

The significant results shown by changes in crime level tied to UKIP vote share may reflect an interesting dimension of support for UKIP in elections at the local level. While issues of crime and criminal justice in relation to electoral support for UKIP are not discussed to the extent with which issues Euroscepticism and immigration are discussed nationally, UKIP's criminal justice policies may be important at the local level. As crime rises locally, voters may be more drawn to policies designed to increase police numbers and prosecution authority for crime, which is part of the UKIP party platform (Police and Criminal Justice 2020). With the United Kingdom having left the European Union, these findings may signal that the future of nationalist and populist party ideology at the local level may be particularly focused on issues of policing and criminal justice.

Previous research has found that niche parties, such as UKIP, do not respond to median voter positions, while traditional parties, such as Labour and the Conservatives, do respond to changes in voter ideology (Adams et al. 2008). However, with Britain's exit from the European Union, UKIP may begin to shift their focus toward new substantive domestic goals. Based on the findings from this study, it is expected that UKIP will target messaging toward crime reduction and policing, particularly in local election messaging.

These findings also suggest that, at the local level, UKIP support may be less suggestive of pure populism, reflected in significant support for UKIP drawn from the traditionally "elite conservative" of the Conservative Party, and instead the outgrown of voter support for more domestic control and national identity. At the national level, this may be more widely tied to issues of immigration and populism in more rural areas or areas with industrial decline, however, in more urbanized areas and local election issues of security, policing, and nationalism have been shown to be the most powerful determinants of UKIP electoral support.

This article has provided insights into UKIP support in local elections, a largely unexplored area of research to this point. Previous studies have provided a number of findings concerning UKIP nationally, largely showing that UKIP supporters tend to prefer Eurosceptic, nationalist, and populist positions, with mixed findings on which mainstream party UKIP success has hurt to a greater extent. The findings from this study provide novel information surrounding how voters' perceptions may be driving forces in voter behavior, as opposed to actual local changes concerning issues such as immigration and the economy, particularly in local elections.

Changes in local crime rate, however, do substantively affect support for UKIP, with a 0.1% increase in local crime rate shown to increase UKIP vote share by approximately 2.3–3.8%. Theoretically, this crime effect on UKIP support makes sense, with voters shown to actively shift support toward parties whose party



platform is centered around strengthening criminal justice powers. This also plays on the “law and order” platform employed by UKIP, appearing to draw in voters who are particularly concerned about crime and may see UKIP as a party which will focus on this issue, which is important to them. It is also shown that UKIP supporters were more motivated than Labour and Conservative supporters in local elections, with UKIP gaining greater support as turnout declined, and UKIP’s rise in the polls largely hurting Conservatives, as opposed to the Labour Party. These findings shown significantly untilled territory for non-mainstream party support in the United Kingdom in local elections, and future research should study non-mainstream party support in local elections for other parties, such as the Liberal Democrats, Greens, Plaid Cymru, and Scottish National Party, as well as in municipalities outside of London.

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