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Riding the Eurosceptic tiger vs taming it by technocracy: the UK and France as two ideal types of how to manage hard Euroscepticism

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a Weberian ideal-type framework to capture elite strategies for managing hard Euroscepticism and their consequences for EU disintegration. It does so by drawing on policy evolution theory to conceptualise two ideal types representing contrasting strategies: taming Euroscepticism by technocratic adaptation or embracing it. This framework is used to analyse empirical examples that match these two ideal-type approaches respectively: France and the UK between 2004 and 17. The use of this framework is a novel way of explaining the evolution and differences between elite French and UK responses to hard Euroscepticism by showing how and why French EU policy remained intra-paradigmatic as compared to the paradigm shift of Brexit. This approach allows for a better understanding of the process and probability of EU disintegration by linking the latter to strategic policy choices. In a UK context, it also offers a way to anticipate the signals leading to a reversal of disintegration.

KEYWORDS

EU disintegration; Euroscepticism; Brexit; technocracy; hard euroscepticism

Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore the theory and practice of EU disintegration by contrasting the trajectories taken by France and the United Kingdom (UK) in the face of Eurosceptic electoral pressure in the period 2004–17. These two countries are close allies and share many socio-economic similarities yet they differed markedly in their strategy for dealing with Euroscepticism in this period. The article argues that, in the period in question, each country represents a different Weberian ideal type (Weber 1949) for managing EU policy in the face of Eurosceptic electoral constraints. Whereas French policy-makers sought to tame hard Euroscepticism by technocratic adaptation to or pushback of EU rules, their UK counterparts chose to embrace Eurosceptic contestation. By highlighting these opposing elite strategies to manage Eurosceptic demands, the article seeks to link the highly divergent policy outcomes – the UK government chose to leave the EU, France did not – precisely to the choice of strategy. The puzzle at the heart of this paper is thus simple: what can contrasting government strategies of responding to hard Euroscepticism teach us about the risk of EU disintegration and how can this be

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managed? The answer matters to many EU governments who equally have to navigate between taming the (hard) Eurosceptic tiger, by making technocratic adjustments to EU policies and rules, or riding it by embracing confrontation with Brussels and ultimately letting the people decide.

Existing explanations for the divergence in the trajectories of the UK and France within the EU from 2004 to 17 that use standard theories of European integration are relatively poor guides to resolving the puzzle posed in this article. This is because of the tendency integration has to be biased towards explaining the strengthening of EU competences, which is linked to the incrementalist development of the EU itself (Jones 2018). Consequently, it has been noted that this body of work has considerable difficulty in explaining the reverse of that process i.e. disintegration (Vollaard 2014; Webber 2014, 2018). In addition, existing empirical work on explaining EU disintegration assigns a relatively limited role to the way government strategies seek to manage this threat directly or indirectly (de Vries et al. 2020; Gastinger 2021). Hence the present analysis seeks to engage theoretically and empirically with how certain governments in the EU have responded strategically to Eurosceptic contestation of the basic principles of European integration and with what consequences.

To that end, the article draws on the policy evolution literature (Hall 1993), as well as on the use of ideal types to conceptualise populist parties (Zaslave 2008), to understand French and British strategic choices. The overall argument pursued here is that a policy evolution model allows for the construction of two Weberian ideal types representing two contrasting strategies for managing strong Eurosceptic pressure, which can be applied to two real-world cases. By defining these ideal types it is then possible to compare differences in type i.e. the differences in the approach to managing EU policy in a shared context of strong electoral hostility to the EU. Ultimately, this model, adapted from Hall (1993), allows for a nuanced understanding not just of the policy dilemmas confronted by all EU governments subjected to strong Eurosceptic electoral sentiment, but also the consequences of riding the tiger of Euroscepticism as opposed to seeking to manage it through technocratic tweaks.

As articulated in section one, hard Euroscepticism – focused on contesting core EU legal principles in favour of national policy autonomy (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004), notably in the field of immigration – created an EU policy headache for British and French politicians. This in turn created a dilemma of how to respond at the highest level of government, which can be captured on the basis of two ideal types: managing the EU status quo by tweaking the legal-institutional framework in the hope of deflating the Eurosceptic bubble, or engaging with Euroscepticism by making more radical demands in the hope of winning over those hostile to the EU. Amongst the advantages of this approach, as explained in section two, is the ability to provide a way to identify the sequence of events that can lead to a paradigm shift in EU policy, as happened in the UK by 2017. This is possible by virtue of being able to offer a theoretical framework that can distinguish, in a way that can be verified empirically, between second-order change, i.e. within the status quo, and third-order change, which constitutes a paradigm shift.

This empirical demonstration is the subject of sections three and four, which respectively examine in detail the French and British governments' strategies for managing Eurosceptic contestation. The former corresponds with a technocratic approach that relies on second-order change via policy experimentation, the second involves embracing

Eurosceptic contestation in the aftermath of repeated policy failures in a way that can lead to a loss of control over EU policy and a consequent paradigm shift. The concluding discussion then examines the generalisability of these two examples for managing the risk of EU disintegration by suggesting the policy evolution theoretical framework offers the potential to incorporate better the role played by government decision-making into the analysis of EU disintegration. Not only does this model provide a way to distinguish between two ideal types of government response, it also offers a way to anticipate the signals that presage a paradigm shift in EU policy, including potentially a reversal of disintegration in the case of post-Brexit Britain.

Eurosceptic pressures and the headache of EU policy in UK and France

Although these two countries experienced the constraints of EU integration differently as a result of UK opt-outs, after the millennium leaders in both faced a similar challenge of mounting Euroscepticism. For reasons of increasing competence allocation and the development of multi-level decision-making practices, European integration has had a transformative impact on all its member states (Bickerton 2012). These transformations have increased the saliency of EU politics at the national level, thereby providing a wedge issue that Eurosceptic parties and political entrepreneurs have used against mainstream parties supportive of the EU status quo (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Indeed, the 1992 Treaty on European Union marked a turning point in both the UK and France as opposition to European integration came to the fore, establishing itself as a fixture in their domestic politics (Usherwood and Startin 2013). Since these developments entailed principled opposition to the current and expected future shape of European integration – notably the increase in EU competences to cover monetary integration and home affairs – they fit Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2004) definition of 'hard Euroscepticism'.

In France, the cracks in the mainstream pro-EU stance that first appeared in the narrowly won 1992 referendum – voters were split 51% to 49% – on the Maastricht Treaty widened considerably, resulting in the dramatic rejection of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE) by the electorate in a 2005 referendum (Taggart 2006). The French Socialist Party split over whether to support this EU treaty, which was the product of a 'constitutional convention' aimed at making the EU more democratic and more efficient in light of the 2004 enlargement that saw ten countries join the club. The splinter faction of the Socialist Party, led by former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, that came out against the TCE helped tip the scales of a campaign in which the radical left and radical right also opposed ratification (Ivaldi 2006).

The reason French voters got to vote on the TCE had a lot to do with Prime Minister Tony Blair's decision to promise to hold a referendum on the TCE in the UK (Closa 2007). This move, which created pressure for President Chirac to do likewise, was in keeping with Blair's approach, at least after the 2001 Nice Treaty, of depoliticizing EU issues by offering a referendum when considered expedient (Oppermann 2008). The blueprint for this tactic was the offer to hold a referendum on joining the Euro if certain economic criteria of convergence were satisfied beforehand. Blair's TCE referendum tactic was thus not so much a bargaining tool as a way to manage internal party tension, dispel accusations of Europhilia and acknowledge the legitimacy of Eurosceptic criticism by letting the people decide (Closa 2007). It also seemed to assume, at least in the case of the TCE, that the

official government position would win the day as there was very little consideration of the risk that rejection of the TCE would place the UK in a very awkward position vis-à-vis other member states.

The years following the demise of the TCE saw marked convergence in Eurosceptic opposition to the EU in France and the UK, with shared bones of contention: immigration and the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty without a referendum. The Front National (FN) in France and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) successfully politicized immigration from poorer Eastern Europe and the perceived associated pressures on wages and public services (Ford and Goodwin 2014; Ivaldi 2018). They equally shared a desire to see governments subject their EU policy to the test of public opinion by advocating referendums on EU membership (UKIP) or participation in Schengen and the Eurozone (FN). In particular, Eurosceptic forces in both countries made hay with their respective government's unwillingness to subject the successor to the TCE, the Lisbon Treaty, to a referendum.

David Cameron's approach to the EU was clouded from the outset of his premiership by an unfulfilled promise made during his time as leader of the opposition to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty (Copsey and Haughton 2014). Upon entering Downing Street, Cameron changed his tune and argued that it was impossible to hold a vote on a treaty already ratified by all EU countries, including the UK. François Hollande, president from 2012 to 2017, equally sought to avoid a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty because, as Secretary-General of the Socialist Party in 2005, he had been scarred by the TCE experience. Thus he excluded the idea of resorting to direct democracy on issues of EU policy (Lequesne 2014, 5). The absence of referendums on the Lisbon Treaty was successfully politicized in both France and the UK, as Eurosceptic parties sought to impugn the EU for its lack of democratic legitimacy, an arrangement they claimed was sustained by a mainstream elite consensus. In the UK, this hostility was captured by UKIP, which built on the anti-TCE mobilisation that emerged after Blair's promise of a popular vote (Alexandre-Collier and Tournier-Sol 2009) and also espoused by hard Eurosceptics in Conservative-leaning newspapers that sought to exploit Cameron's broken promise on the Lisbon Treaty (Bale 2018, 270). In France, Marine Le Pen's FN confronted Hollande in 2012–13 with demands for a referendum on the so-called Fiscal Compact and on EU membership itself (Berthelet 2013).

The similar rhetoric of anti-EU opposition in France and the UK – which centred on elites' supposed fear of public opinion – was matched by a similarity in the profile of Eurosceptic voters. Political geographers have drawn parallels between the concentration of Eurosceptic voters in the peripheral areas of both countries, which stands in contrast with the more ethnically diverse and prosperous large urban conurbations that favour pro-EU parties (Guilluy 2019). The socio-economic structure behind hard Euroscepticism, as measured by how voters in France and the UK differed according to income or education in supporting the TCE or membership of the EU is also rather similar as demonstrated by Piketty's findings that show pro-EU attitudes in both countries are linked to high income and education achievement (Piketty 2019). In the 2010s France and the UK thus proved very fertile ground for hard Eurosceptic messaging. In the 2014 elections for the European Parliament UKIP came ahead in the UK with 27%, while the FN polled top in France with 25%. In the 2013 UK local elections UKIP received 20% of the

votes, while in the 2015 regional elections in France the Front National won 28% of the vote in the first round.

It is precisely this shared headache of a high concentration of hard Eurosceptic voters and repeated calls for letting the people decide on EU issues that made policy-makers in France and the UK question the status quo in their approach to European integration. Their contrasting attempts to manage hard Euroscepticism can be captured by constructing two Weberian ideal types in the sense of abstract concepts that draw on real-life case studies for evidence. The common element between French and British leaders, particularly Hollande and Cameron, was the desire to manage Eurosceptic demands in a way that would avoid electoral punishment. Yet each embarked on a separate course, which eventually led to two very different outcomes: the French approach was to stay within the status quo and seek technocratic changes, the UK policy was to challenge the EU status quo, eventually leading to the paradigm shift of Brexit. To make sense of the reasons behind this choice of strategy and the logic of the process of each ideal type for managing Euroscepticism it is necessary to adopt a framework that allows for the appreciation of the evolution of policy ideas over how to deal with Eurosceptic contestation of EU legitimacy in both countries.

Applying a policy evolution framework to construct ideal types of the French and UK strategies for managing Euroscepticism

To construct ideal types of the French and UK strategies for managing Euroscepticism – a similar task to the construction of the ideal type of a populist party (Zaslave 2008) – it is fundamental to start with conceptual definitions. This move is in keeping with a Weberian logic that understands ideal types to be analytical models resting on abstract simplifications (Weber 1949) that nevertheless are ‘productive in interpreting or reconstructing the logic of social interaction in a certain context’ (Bengtsson and Hertting 2014, 717). The most important definitional task is to specify what delimits a strategy towards the EU that seeks to work within the status quo from one that seeks to challenge it. It is in this regard that Peter Hall’s policy paradigms framework is so vital, thereby allowing the UK and French approaches to be considered as different types of strategy for managing Euroscepticism.

According to Hall (1993, 291), it is necessary to distinguish, based on the ‘magnitude of the changes involved’, between third-order policy change – in which the ‘hierarchy of goals behind policy’ are radically altered – and second-order change limited to rethinking the institutions and instruments used to achieve policy objectives. Whereas third-order change is inherently political and politicized, second-order change is much more likely to be the preserve of technocratic decision-making, as is first-order change relating to the setting of targets to be obtained for specific policy instruments (ibid.). On this basis it is possible to capture a government’s strategy towards the EU in terms of a ‘policy paradigm’ constituting a set of cognitive and normative beliefs about policy challenges and how to solve them (Surel 2000). That is, to reprise the language of Hall, the UK ideal typical strategy for managing Euroscepticism culminated in third-order or disjunctive change in the shape of the Brexit referendum, which had no equivalent in France. In the latter, the strategy was confined to second-order change related to a reconfiguration of the institutional arrangements and instruments used to achieve its EU-related policy objectives.

However, the two ideal types proposed here for managing Euroscepticism, riding the tiger or taming it by technocracy, are not simple one-off policy choices. Rather it is essential to capture their nature as a process that takes account of a number of decisions and outcomes influencing the choice of policy paradigm. In this context, Hall's theoretical framework again offers hugely important insights. That is because his model identifies a number of important features that characterize the period leading up to third-order policy change, one in which the 'hierarchy of goals behind policy' (Hall 1993) are radically altered. This type of change is precisely what occurred in the case of the UK's EU policy, but not France's. The features preceding a paradigm shift such as Brexit are: the accumulation of anomalies, in the sense of developments that are not fully comprehensible within the dominant policy paradigm; experimentation with new types of policy; and policy failures 'that precipitate a shift in the locus of authority over policy and initiate a wider contest over competing paradigms' (ibid. 280).

Hence it is a combination of these elements, rather than a straightforward sequence of first-, second- and, finally, third-order policy change, that Hall argues precedes dramatic policy evolution (cf. Baker 2015). In addition, a shift in policy paradigm takes place not as the result of autonomous action by national policy-makers 'but in response to an evolving societal debate . . . bound up with electoral competition' (Hall 1993, 288). This competition can eventually take the form of a shift in the locus of authority over the policy area as the electorate may demand a strategy at odds with the prevailing elite consensus. From this overview, it is possible to discern the dividing lines between the two proposed ideal types for managing Euroscepticism, as represented in Table 1.

Having laid out the ideal-type characteristics of these two opposing strategies for managing the electoral challenge of Euroscepticism, it is necessary now to turn to how these strategies can be linked to empirical practices. To undertake this analysis of the French and UK cases, the article relies on process tracing by performing so-called 'hoop tests' to identify the potential presence and meaning of features Hall predicts are associated with third-order policy change (Mahoney 2012). In addition, the analysis seeks to determine the existence of a shift in the locus of authority over EU policy, which is treated here as a smoking-gun test for observing third-order policy change (ibid.). Critics of Hall's explanatory framework point out the difficulty of operationalizing the features associated with third-order policy change, including a paradigm shift itself (Daigneault 2015). Notwithstanding the UK's evident break with decades of EU policy, the methodological challenge for present purposes consists of how to proceed with deductively identifying anomalies, experimentation, and a shift in the locus of authority in France and the UK in the period 2004–2017. To this end, the process-tracing analysis aims to find evidence that policy makers themselves understood particular situations as anomalous and sought in response to experiment with alternative instruments. The value

Table 1. Two ideal-types for managing Euroscepticism.

Ideal-type strategy for managing Euroscepticism	Technocracy	Riding the Tiger
Magnitude of policy evolution	Second-order change	Third-order change (paradigm shift)
Policy paradigm	Work within EU system (intra-paradigmatic)	Contemplate leaving and/or leave EU
Locus of authority over policy	Policy elite	The people directly

of the ideal types lies, therefore, in showing how policy-makers may shift from one strategy for managing Euroscepticism to another. Hence anomalies are treated here as informational signals produced by unexpected outcomes and which are understood as such by certain policymakers, triggering in turn particular policy responses about how to manage the Eurosceptic threat. It is also important to remember that first- and second-order changes will occur intra-paradigmatically; applied to UK and French approaches to the EU, this means anomalies and experimentation should occur prior to a change in the status quo i.e. EU membership.

Nonetheless, there are 'hoops' that have to be passed through prior to a radical shift in policy. A change in the locus of authority over policy is a rarer phenomenon because it has the closest association – temporally and in terms of causation – with a policy paradigm shift, which is why it is treated as a smoking-gun test for third-order change. This article operationalizes a shift in the locus of authority in relation to political institutions' ability to retain control over policy debates and their outcomes. Party democracy is included in this context precisely because populism is an explicit challenge to this 'specific political form' based on 'the mediation of political conflicts through the institution of political parties; and the democratic procedures of parliamentary deliberation and electoral competition' (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2017, 188). Thus the ability of mainstream parties and the representative institutions they control to set the terms of the debate over EU policy is a crucial factor for understanding the magnitude of policy change in response to Eurosceptic pressure. A loss of such control, provoked by policy failures and coming on the back of anomalies and experimentation is precisely what would be expected in the context of a paradigm shift *à la* Hall.

The French case 2004–17: securing second-order change via technocratic tweaks to EU policy

The most glaring policy failure encountered in the course of post-Maastricht French EU policy was the 2005 TCE referendum in which voters rejected a treaty approved by the French government. The failure of the political class to succeed in its 'persuasive struggle' (Blyth 2002) to win popular acceptance for EU treaty change was compounded by the split that occurred within the Socialist Party. The referendum itself was a voluntary policy experiment – prior to the vote the government had no problem amending the French constitution to accommodate proposed changes in EU competences – preceded by another form of innovation within the Socialist Party. The latter organized an internal referendum on whether to support the TCE in order to give voice to doubts surrounding potential free-market aspects of the treaty and, it was hoped, generate positive momentum for the referendum campaign by securing strong majority backing. Although there was close to 60% support among party members, this did not stop the party from splintering over the issue because former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius refused to toe the party line and campaigned vigorously for socialist-minded voters to reject the TCE (Ivaldi 2006). In other words, the failure of the TCE was an anomaly directly related to France's system of party democracy that was unable to contain opposition to the treaty. Mainstream parties, which had overwhelmingly supported amending the French constitution in a joint session of both legislative chambers (730 votes for, 66 against and with 96), were internally divided – especially the Socialists – and thus ill-equipped to

counteract Eurosceptic opposition that claimed the TCE was a joint threat to sovereignty and France's social model. Consequently, the TCE referendum must go down as a significant policy failure in Hall's terms since it threatened not just the policy consensus surrounding EU integration but also raised the possibility of a shift in the locus of political authority over such matters away from mainstream party and policy elites

However, this episode remains the exception in French EU policy during the period under examination, 2000–2017. The two other rounds of EU treaty-making that followed the TCE did not result in anomalies or failed experimentation of this magnitude. The Lisbon Treaty was a huge potential banana skin because it reprised much of the content of the TCE, which was considered necessary by French and other EU policy makers for adjusting to an enlargement membership (Liberti 2010). Yet newly-elected President Nicholas Sarkozy, who had earlier campaigned in support of the TCE, proposed from the outset of his election in 2007 to conclude a new EU treaty and ratify it via parliamentary procedure not a popular vote (Dimitrakopoulos et al. 2009). This gambit was part of a strategy of continuing the longstanding foreign policy objective of promoting French leadership in Europe, which the 2005 referendum had jeopardised. French legislators made light work of ratifying the Lisbon treaty with large majorities in the National Assembly (336 against 52, with 22 abstentions) and the Senate (265 against 42, with 13 abstentions), which came on the back of a preparatory constitutional amendment that passed the threshold of 3/5ths majority of both chambers combined. An attempt to have the *Conseil Constitutionnel* (Constitutional Council) rule on whether this treaty ought to be put to a referendum failed as fewer than 60 parliamentarians (the threshold for a case to be heard) supported the move. Thus the passage of the Lisbon Treaty demonstrated that French EU policy was back to normal again in the sense that the locus of authority remained anchored in mainstream party democracy and representative institutions.

The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG) had the potential to be a bigger political headache for French policymakers. This 2012 treaty (technically an inter-governmental treaty under public international law, not an EU treaty) sought to provide guarantees over member states' fiscal prudence as a counterpart to providing emergency loan assistance to Eurozone countries facing sovereign debt crises in the aftermath of the financial crisis (Schild 2013). The details were politically extremely sensitive as they paved the way for potential fiscal transfers and sought to enshrine even stricter budgetary rules than the SGP, which was already unpopular among French voters. The Front National had advocated withdrawal from the Euro since 2002 and the prospect of bailouts to Greece or other countries gave oxygen to the party's traditional economic Euroscepticism (Ivaldi 2018). Eurosceptics on the left also inveighed against what was seen as German-imposed austerity measures (Clift and McDaniel 2017). Consequently, incoming President Francois Hollande was in a much tougher bind than his predecessor with Lisbon.

Hollande's response was to politicize during the 2012 presidential election campaign the TSCG, a deal negotiated in effect by Sarkozy in tandem with German Chancellor Merkel (Schild 2013). This approach meant addressing criticism of the TSCG head-on by promising to renegotiate the as yet unratified treaty by ensuring it was counterbalanced by a Eurozone-wide stimulus plan. Hollande's proposal for a 'growth pact' was part of a more ambitious scheme to push economic and monetary integration closer towards a fiscal union. This proposal included specific provisions for coordinated deficit spending

in recessions allied with the creation of Eurobonds, i.e. common Eurozone debt, to create a financial instrument for counter-cyclical spending that would free governments from having to worry about market reaction to increased borrowing. This move was in keeping with long-standing French aspirations for regaining economic sovereignty via European integration (Jabko 2006) – a clear second-order type of policy innovation given that the hierarchy of objectives remained unchanged. In making these policy pledges, Hollande was conscious of the precarious fiscal position bequeathed by Sarkozy, who had deliberately postponed budgetary consolidation until after the 2012 electoral cycle (Bezes and Le Lidec 2015).

From a policy evolution perspective, the maximalist expectations that a Socialist president could reengineer the TSCG as a stepping stone towards fiscal union associated with Eurozone-wide stimulus measures ended in clear failure. Hollande rather publicly lost the confrontation with Germany over the establishment of Eurobonds and less stringent rules for the Fiscal Compact at his first European Council summit in June 2012 (Clift and Ryner 2014). He did emerge from that summit with a minor victory in the form of a ‘compact for growth and jobs’ that promised €120 billion of immediate spending, drawing on the European Investment Bank, unused structural funds, and a small allocation of newly created project bonds for infrastructure. However, the net result of this failed bid to end Eurozone austerity was that French EU policy for the five years of Hollande’s term of office was mired in an overarching anomaly as domestic budgetary plans conflicted with supranational rules governing the Eurozone. European monetary integration, for decades sold to French voters as a means of shielding public spending from the vagaries of the financial markets, was not delivering the expected results (Clift 2006). The credibility of French pretensions of EU leadership was equally at stake because of the perceived need to demonstrate to Germany respect for supranational governance and the ability to pursue domestic economic reforms (Schild 2013). This discrepancy between policy ideas and realities led to notable bouts of experimentation in the period following 2012. However, these measures remained firmly intra-paradigmatically anchored.

Hollande’s experimentation thus essentially represented an ideal-typical strategy of technocratic changes to the institutions and instruments used to achieve French EU policy objectives. Scarred by the TCE debacle and the lack of success in renegotiating the TSCG, the French President sought to limit the fallout from Commission enforcement of the Eurozone rules. Starting in 2009, France had been subject to an excessive deficit procedure (EDP) under the SGP, which was designed to bring the French deficit under 3% of GDP by 2012, albeit with an extension until 2013 granted under Sarkozy in 2011. Hollande’s budgetary plans thus needed to factor in both the EDP – which could lead to financial sanctions if the original terms were not met – and the strictures of the TSCG. The government line, as set out in April 2013, was that these ‘efforts should be acknowledged and that the return to a nominal deficit of less than 3% of GDP should be deferred until 2014’ (Government 2017). This strategy of accepting Eurozone rules in theory while lobbying heavily behind the scenes for flexibility in practice paid off as in May 2013 the Commission recommended extending the EDP deadline by another 2 years. Yet French tax and spending plans came under tight supranational scrutiny as the Commission issued an autonomous recommendation in March 2014 that France was heading towards non-compliance with its EDP and thus at risk of being sanctioned, a message repeated in November 2014.

Hollande refused to embrace a strategy of direct confrontation by adopting a Eurosceptic position and calling into question France's existing EU policy. Rather, than threatening a showdown over the SGP, he pleaded once again for flexibility to gain time for implementing structural reforms. Politically, this was an extremely difficult choice to make as his Socialist Party had suffered serious losses in the 2014 midterm regional elections, a result explained by voter hostility towards EU-mandated austerity (Kuhn 2014). In the language of Hall's framework, this was a moment in which France could have chosen to reassess the hierarchy of its policy objectives by privileging domestic budgetary authority over following Eurozone rules, a move that would sorely test the Franco-German relationship so important to post-war French presidents since de Gaulle. Instead, Hollande favoured a form of experimentation, appointing a new governing team including, from August 2014, Emmanuel Macron as Minister of the Economy, as a statement of intent for pursuing structural reforms in the hope of obtaining concessions from the Commission. The centrepiece of these growth-oriented reforms was Macron's liberalizing labour law, which was so contested in the ranks of the government's parliamentary majority that it was forced through the National Assembly using a constitutional procedure associated with a governmental motion of confidence.

The immense difficulties faced by Hollande in governing while complying with Eurozone rules point to the anomalous consequences of France's EU policy in terms of party democracy. For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic a first-term president did not seek re-election, which prepared the ground for Macron to create a political party *de novo* and fight a campaign that explicitly rejected the Front National's Eurosceptic policy proposals for abandoning the Euro and Schengen. The fact that Macron faced Marine Le Pen, who went on to obtain 34% of votes in the second round run-off, demonstrates the depth of French anti-EU feeling. Nevertheless, the 2017 presidential election result was very much a confirmation of sticking with the existing paradigm regarding the benefits of French participation and leadership in the process of European integration. The magnitude of the policy failure experienced by Hollande in his dealings with the EU, notably the inability to proceed with fiscal union or avoid imposing austerity domestically, was thus containable, albeit at the cost of intraparadigmatic policy choices that brought the curtain down on his own political career.

The UK approach: policy failures as prelude to riding the tiger of anti-EU hostility

The first EU-related anomaly that manifested itself in UK political life after 2004 was the sudden influx of migration from the new accession countries. Alone among the largest member states, the UK did not impose temporary restrictions on free movement of citizens from the eight Eastern and Central European countries (A8) that joined in 2004. Tony Blair's government dramatically under-estimated the resulting migratory flows to the extent that the original prediction of a yearly net total of up to 13,000 extra migrants per annum was wrong by a factor of nearly 10 as in 2007 112,000 A8 citizens moved to the UK, combined with 77,000 from other EU countries (Christian et al. 2003; Salt 2015). The diplomatic and economic benefits of this liberal immigration policy were offset by its political costs – former Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw, whose ministry commissioned the estimates on A8 migration later described the failure to impose labour restrictions as

a ‘spectacular mistake’ (BBC News 2013). Seven-year quantitative restrictions (the maximum permissible under EU law) on citizens from Romania and Bulgaria were adopted once these countries became EU members in 2007. The political costs of free movement rose again following an upsurge in EU migration after 2012, when the UK economy proved more robust than that of the Eurozone and functioned, alongside Germany, but not France, as an employment market of last resort (Thompson 2017).

The Eurozone sovereign debt crisis that began with the Greek bailout negotiations of 2010 resulted in another anomaly for UK EU policy. EU policymakers not only focused on the specific need to shore up economic and monetary union, they also took a more aggressive stance on financialization, which put the UK on the defensive and at a loss for allies (*ibid.*). The sentiment in Brussels and Frankfurt was that ‘the City of London and unregulated Anglo-American finance must be tamed if the single currency is to survive’ (Whyte 2012, 7); Sarkozy launched a tirade on the subject of Anglo-Saxon capitalism during a crucial 2011 meeting of the European Council (Cameron 2019, 336). Tellingly, the UK was the only non-Eurozone country both to reject the Fiscal Compact and not to participate in the EU banking union legislation (which is compulsory for Eurozone countries) devised contemporaneously. It was also at this time that the ECB sought to use its new supervisory powers to forcibly relocate eurodenominated clearing business to the Eurozone in order to offset systematic risks that could occur in the event of one party in a Euro-denominated transaction defaulting (Schammo 2016). The UK successfully pursued judicial action against this move, with the CJEU agreeing with the argument that such a policy was antithetical to single market rules. However, attempts by London to use the Court to thwart EU legislation to cap bankers’ bonuses, restrict short selling, and create a financial transactions tax amongst a core group of EU states, were unsuccessful (*ibid.*).

This rear-guard pursuit of legal remedies was part of a broader strategy of policy experimentation by Prime Minister David Cameron. Having abandoned his pledge to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, he introduced a ‘referendum lock’: legislation passed in the first half of 2011 stating that any EU treaty conferring new powers to Brussels would automatically be the subject of a referendum. The pro-EU Liberal Democrats had pledged in their 2010 election manifesto to hold an EU membership referendum in the event that a new EU treaty needed to be ratified and thus had few qualms about accepting the referendum lock as part of the coalition programme for running the country in tandem with the Conservatives. This legislation proved insufficient to prevent a backbench parliamentary rebellion among Eurosceptic Conservative MPs, 81 of whom opposed the whip in October 2011 to vote for a backbench motion in favour of holding a referendum on EU membership. Therefore, even before Cameron’s 2013 speech committing himself to an In/Out vote, EU-related referendums were – unlike in France following the 2005 TCE debacle – part of mainstream British party political debate (*ibid.*)

The Commons rebellion was the prelude to a significant policy failure. Cameron was in the midst of European Council negotiations over a possible new EU treaty – what would become the TSCG – to stabilize the Eurozone. The British Prime Minister saw this as an opportunity to protect UK interests in return for giving his blessing to the new treaty. In particular, the plan was to shield the financial services industry from EU regulation (including the short-selling restrictions and caps on bankers’ bonuses) and prevent the UK from participating in future Eurozone bailouts (Cameron 2019: 320–340). This was to

be achieved by threatening to veto the new treaty, a document which Germany saw as necessary to give legal and political cover for an adequate Eurozone rescue package. Yet no formal UK-specific safeguards were forthcoming when EU leaders met in December 2011. Cameron thus felt obliged to launch what he described in his memoirs as an Exocet missile against the German-led consensus. This was a huge diplomatic failure as the 27 other EU leaders agreed to plough ahead with the TSCG as a treaty under international law thereby nullifying the practical effect of the UK's opposition. Although the UK came away with nothing, rather anomalously the mere act of vetoing an EU decision to defend British interests proved a domestic political success as far as the Conservative Party and the Eurosceptic press were concerned (*ibid.*).

These anomalies and experiments occurred intra-paradigmatically as the underlying assumption remained that the UK benefited enormously from the single market and the ability to harness EU support on the international stage. This approach was fully in line with the 2010 Conservative manifesto, which stated that 'Britain's interests are best served by membership of a European Union that is an association of its Member States' (Conservative Party 2010). However, the defensiveness and disappointments arising from EU policy prompted questioning of the UK's EU engagement strategy at the highest level. Cameron notes in his memoirs that 'the biggest moment on the journey [towards offering a referendum on EU membership] was the veto and its aftermath . . . : clear evidence for the proposition that Britain's place in the EU needed fixing' (Cameron 2019, 405). His senior civil servant adviser on Europe at the time later reflected that 'it was the domestic and cross-Channel political tensions unleashed by the Eurozone crisis which put us on the tramlines to Brexit' (Rogers 2017). Nonetheless, when Cameron announced in January 2013 that, if his party won the next general election, he would negotiate a new deal for the UK and put it to a referendum he was embarking on what was still essentially second-order policy change. The hierarchy of goals – staying in the EU to reap its benefits – had not changed because this was, in the Prime Minister's words 'a strategy for keeping Britain in Europe' (Cameron 2019, 400). However, the use of a new instrument to achieve this objective, which recalled what Harold Wilson had successfully done in 1974–75 (Saunders 2018), did place a question mark over whether that objective could be sustained. It was another hoop on the path to a potential paradigm shift, but fell far short of being a smoking gun indicating such change had occurred.

The proposal to renegotiate the terms of the UK's EU membership prior to letting the people decide whether to accept this arrangement was obviously a high-risk form of policy experimentation, especially at a time when the UK's political weakness in the EU had been so clearly exposed (Thompson 2017). However, opinion polls clearly showed a preference among British voters for staying in the EU on the basis of an improved deal (Clarke 2017). Cameron has subsequently rejected the accusation that he was an appeaser of populist criticism of the EU, arguing instead that he was 'confronting it head-on' (Cameron 2019, 408). Yet by politicizing the EU status quo and inveighing against it on so many occasions, Cameron evidently sought to harness Eurosceptic frustration directly, hoping for diplomatic concessions from Brussels that could be turned to domestic political advantage (*ibid.*; Thompson 2017). In exactly the way Hall's framework states is a precondition for third-order policy change, the UK strategy for winning technical changes to avoid liability for Eurozone bailouts, phasing in eligibility for welfare benefits accessible to new EU migrants, and a potential emergency brake on immigration to

restrict new arrivals, was intimately bound up with electoral competition. The UK government thus sought to ride the tiger of discontent with the EU in order to retain membership with fewer economic and political drawbacks.

Cameron's final EU policy experiment was a spectacular, career-ending failure. Counter-factually, it has been argued that third-order change could have been avoided if the Prime Minister had taken a more confrontational line with fellow EU leaders and thereby obtained sufficient concessions to mollify hard Eurosceptic voters (Thompson 2017). The lacklustre results of the renegotiation were cited as reasons to campaign against staying in the EU by those Cabinet members who opposed the government line in the referendum as well as by Boris Johnson, whose heavyweight support galvanized the anti-EU side (Clarke 2017). However, legally speaking, the referendum was advisory to the degree that parliament was sovereign to interpret the decision as it pleased. Hence the key moment, or smoking gun, that enshrined third-order policy change towards EU integration was when the House of Commons voted on 1 February 2017 to get Brexit negotiations underway by empowering the Prime Minister to inform Brussels of the UK's intention to leave the EU. The required legislation passed by 498 votes to 114 at a time when the legislature contained only an estimated 159 MPs who declared themselves in favour of leaving the EU before the 2016 referendum. What had occurred, therefore, was a shift in the locus of authority over policy whereby parliamentarians felt compelled to follow the will of the people, a principle that superseded conventional parliamentary sovereignty in this instance (Bogdanor 2016). This policy shift was confirmed by the 2017 General Election result in which Labour and the Conservatives won 80% of the total vote on manifestos committed to leaving the EU. Put simply, the hierarchy of policy objectives changed: the priority was to accept the principle of the sovereignty of the people as expressed in the referendum, even at the cost of overhauling decades of diplomatic engagement and economic integration.

Concluding discussion: what ideal types tell us about elite strategies for managing hard Euroscepticism after Brexit

The way the French and UK cases from 2004 to 17 fit the two ideal types for managing hard Euroscepticism as an EU member state is represented in Table 2. What this demonstrates is the pattern of policy anomalies, experiments and failures in each country as their respective governments tried to adapt their EU policy in the wake of Eurosceptic electoral sentiment. It also highlights the magnitude of policy change, with French policy experimentation remaining intra-paradigmatic, while UK policy-makers adopted a paradigm shift. The process tracing of the evolution of French EU policy in the period 2004–17 performed in section 3 thus revealed that some hoops on the path to paradigmatic change were passed, but there was no shift in the locus of authority, especially because there was no repeat of the TCE referendum. The French political system thus managed to contain the clash between domestic budgetary decisions and Eurozone rules – as it had done the fallout from the TCE referendum – helped by successfully persuading Brussels to apply the EDP procedure flexibly. By contrast, the UK experienced a continued sequence of anomalies – mismatches between expectations and reality – that were the prelude to a series of policy experiments and failures. Such was the context for a high stakes experiment of renegotiating EU membership by leveraging domestic discontent with

Table 2. How France and the UK fit the two ideal types of managing Euroscepticism.

Country	Anomalies	Policy experiments	policy failures	magnitude of policy evolution
France	Socialist party split over TCE referendum; clash with Brussels over French budget; Hollande unable to stand for re-election	TCE referendum; avoiding referendum on Lisbon treaty; linking TSCG to growth compact and Eurobonds; mollifying EU by implementing economic reforms	TCE referendum; very limited growth pact and no Eurobonds	Low: Hollande and Macron remained within the existing EU policy paradigm
UK	Post-2004 EU migration; post-financial crisis clash over financial services; popular domestic support for redundant 2011 veto	Referendum lock; veto threat against TSCG to obtain concessions on financial services; renegotiating terms of UK membership	2011 veto yielded no gains; Cameron renegotiation insufficient to persuade voters or his own cabinet	High: Labour and Conservatives adopt a new paradigm prioritizing respecting referendum over staying in EU

Europe as a form of diplomatic advantage. Riding the tiger of Euroscepticism in this way proved a disaster for Prime Minister David Cameron, who had hoped this strategy would keep the UK in the EU. Instead, the UK's EU policy underwent a sea change as the UK parliament prioritised respecting the referendum result over the economic and diplomatic advantages of membership that a majority of MPs acknowledged in 2016.

Hence the application of an ideal-typical framework, inspired by the policy evolution literature, to understand the evolution and differences between French and UK policies for managing hard Euroscepticism yields important lessons for managing the risk of EU disintegration. By adapting Hall's policy evolution model, it is possible to capture the role played by governments in responding to Eurosceptic electoral pressure in a context of policy anomalies that create incentives for experimentation in relations with the EU. Disintegration cannot be understood, therefore, as a mechanistic or purely path-dependent process in that policy-makers in France and the UK had a range of options available to them in response to hard Eurosceptic criticism about the costs or constraints of EU membership. In each country, governments resorted to a catalogue of policy experiments, with varying degrees of success between 2004 and 17.

The ability to distinguish, in this context, between second- and third-order policy change as captured by the two ideal types presented in this article, thus opens up possibilities for better understanding the process and probability of EU disintegration. In particular, this approach provides a model for anticipating the signals foreshadowing possible disintegration in the wake of hard Eurosceptic pressures. As seen in the case of the UK, an EU government experiencing, as it adapts to Eurosceptic electoral contestation to change the status quo, a pattern of anomalies and failed policy experiments in its EU policy is most at risk to undergo a paradigm shift. This framework, therefore, provides a way to complement the benchmarking approach to disintegration, which suggests support for EU exit, the most extreme version of hard Euroscepticism, reflects how voters think their country would fare outside the club – a perspective that depends on their benchmark of how they rate national economic or political strength (de Vries 2018). However, as the case of Italy shows, exit scepticism is not confined to prosperous countries with positive benchmarks (ibid. 178). In this context, the riding the tiger and the taming by technocracy ideal types can be applied to capture how exactly

a government is managing hard Euroscepticism or whether there is a palpable risk of a paradigm shift in EU policy. Various recent Italian governments of different stripes have sought a flexible interpretation of Eurozone rules by the Commission (Mérand 2021, 169–197). Hence the ideal-type framework could reveal the extent to which there is an accumulation of policy anomalies and failures, accompanied by experiments to embrace hard Euroscepticism that presage a paradigm shift.

Another benefit of this framework is that it illustrates the risks – also pertinent when looking at Italy – of sticking to intra-paradigmatic policy experimentation given that in the French case it is evident how far the party system has come under strain from such a strategy. Yet the difference for EU countries after 2017 is precisely that voters now have a real-world EU exit benchmark as a consequence of Brexit. The perceived negative experience of the UK's attempt to create a new relationship to the EU as a third country (Walter 2021) helps explain why French Euroscepticism, for instance, has become less exit-inclined since the 2016 UK referendum (Mayer and Rozenberg 2021). In these circumstances, the ideal-type framework for understanding the management of hard Euroscepticism across the EU 27 can be applied to determine whether exit scepticism has indeed lost ground in favour of an intra-paradigmatic approach.

Consequently, it is possible that this ideal-typical framework can also be modified to apply to make sense of EU policy *after* disintegration. That is, the issue confronting UK policy-makers after Brexit is whether to manage the new EU-UK relationship in an intra-paradigmatic fashion by technocratic tweaks to the 2020 Trade and Cooperation Agreement. The risk – as encountered by UK governments since that trade treaty was concluded – is that Brexit itself is accompanied by anomalies and failed policy experimentation in areas such as fishing and regulatory autonomy where great benefits were promised. If Brexit was the product of a paradigm shift in policy, therefore, the more a pattern of policy anomalies and failures becomes apparent to parliamentarians and the public, the greater the potential momentum for another such shift. From this perspective, a policy evolution model may also offer a way to anticipate the signals leading to a reversal of disintegration.

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